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Conference



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Caring for Non-Humans



Interdisciplinary
Perspectives on Care
among Animals, the
Environment, and AI



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Monday, 12th October 2026

What is Care?

	Session	Speaker and Title	Chair
9:00-10:00	Registration		
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10:15-10:45		Nina Collin: The Animal Ethicist Teaching 'Persona': Compartmentalizing Care and Education	Palo Fabuš
10:45-11:15		Maude Ouellette-Dubé and Friederike Zenker: Care Through Emancipatory Education: Investigating the Case of Equines	Husayn Ibrahim
11:15-11:30	Coffee Break		
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14:45-15:15		Catarina Fontoura: Mapping Emergence: Interspecies Reciprocal Art	Christina Patricia Haupt
15:15-15:45		Christina Patricia Haupt: Chimeras of Care: Biodiversity and Interspecies Ethics in Patricia Piccinini's sculptures	Francesca Rieker
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16:30-17:30	Keynote	Christine Hentschel: Caring for the "not yet" after the "too late"	Mark Coeckelbergh
18:00	Conference Dinner	Kavárna na Boršově Náprstkova 272/10, Prague 1	

Session 1: Learning Care

10:15-12:00

The Animal Ethicist Teaching ‘Persona’: ‘Compartmentalizing Care and Education’

Nina Collin

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Courses in animal ethics (in higher education) tend to provide two things: an account of the moral status of animals and an account of our moral obligations to animals. From a pedagogical point of view, animal ethics teachers are required to introduce students to these two accounts, reducing the scope of concern to what is necessary to meet the course's objectives and aims. Generally, morality is perceived as ‘limiting our freedom,’ and given the authoritative nature of the student-teacher relation, a form of detachment is constitutive of the ‘teaching persona,’ nurturing independent and autonomous students (persons) without their interference.

From a moral point of view, however, the tendency in animal ethics education to demarcate between the learning objectives and the caring for (in light of the harsh realities of) animals, visible in the common discourse (providing argumentation for and against) offering serious deliberation (e.g., for or against eating meat), easily results in a clash between educational considerations (for students) and moral considerations (for the subject matter: i.e., animals).

In this paper, I turn to the philosopher Simone Weil, who had a profoundly different conceptualization of formal education, resulting in a radically different interpretation of concepts tied to teaching and learning, such as autonomy and freedom. For Weil, what should be nurtured (in students but also teachers) is the impersonal, implying a form of detachment characterized by the elimination of personal fantasies and illusions, where one can only be free when one obeys (with loving attention) to what is real.

With Weil’s help, I (1) raise the normative question of how animal ethics education should be altered, eliminating the compartmentalization of educational and moral considerations, and (2) I explore how to envision such a pedagogical task in practice (emphasizing care for students as well as care for animals).

Biography

Nina Collin is a PhD student at the Centre for Ethics in Pardubice, Czechia, working on animal ethics education and the philosophy of Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil.

Care through Emancipatory Education: Investigating the Case of Equines

Maude Ouellette-Dubé & Friederike Zenker

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The concept of care plays a central, yet contested role in moral philosophy. While some consider it the fabric of flourishing relationships, communities, and political life, others criticize it as partial, paternalistic, and susceptible to bias. This paper argues that the alleged weaknesses of care as a foundation for animal ethics can be addressed by focusing on education, understood as a site for cultivating capacities of care such as attention, empathy and communication across species boundaries. Conceptually, the paper defines good care as a collaborative multispecies practice in which both humans and animals are recognized as complex emotional and cognitive agents. Drawing on the case of human–equine relations, the paper examines how rethinking the theoretical foundations of education enables more caring human–animal relations. Education is marginalized in equestrian contexts, where horses are predominantly trained rather than educated. We argue that this not only reinforces asymmetrical and instrumental relationships for equines, but it proves oppressive for humans attempting to navigate that world as well. According to philosopher and educator Ann Margaret Sharp (1975, 1981), education should promote growth; teachers should thus become liberators through a commitment to the voice of children – or any historically excluded voice. Building on Sharp’s vision of emancipatory education, the paper argues for an emancipatory educational model as the basis for good care in shared equine–human communities. By conceiving of education as an embodied dialogical practice within the triad teacher–horseperson–horse, the paper shows how emancipatory education contributes to build just and flourishing communities by promoting the liberation of all participants. Significantly, equids are both student and teacher within this space (co-learning); that is one way in which they care for humans. Finally, we demonstrate how this case study serves as a starting point for thinking about how good care can be sustained within multispecies communities more generally.

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Biography

Maude Ouellette-Dubé is a senior researcher and lecturer for the Environmental Sciences and Humanities Institute, University of Fribourg, Switzerland. She does research in animal ethics, animal studies, the ethics of care and the didactics of ethics. Her website www.horse-intricacies.com makes equine ethics and philosophy available to a broad audience.

*Friederike Zenker is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Copenhagen. Her research focuses on animal ethics, aesthetics, and education. She is the author of *Das Tier im Bild* (2023), which examines the ethics of representing non-human animals in photography and film. Her current research explores the ethics of animals in educational contexts, including veterinary training and animal-assisted services.*

Together, Friederike and Maude teach courses and workshops in equine ethics. They are currently working on a monograph on the philosophical foundations of equine ethics.

Who Should Bear the Burden? Children's Moral Reasoning on Care and Fairness in Animal Experimentation

Kirsten Persson

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Where do we find an attitude of care when harm appears unavoidable? In the context of animal experimentation, where concerns for human benefit, animal welfare and harm, and broader societal goods come into tension, arguments from a care ethics perspective are challenged. While care ethics emphasizes relational responsiveness, the focus here is on how care operates under conditions of necessity and moral uncertainty. Recent literature highlights a “culture of care” perspective, drawing attention to the burden of laboratory animal caretakers and research staff working under (morally) demanding conditions. In contrast, this presentation shifts the focus towards a public caring perspective on animal research and its regulation, asking how potential harms to animals are perceived and weighed.

This presentation draws on qualitative focus group data with secondary school adolescents in Switzerland (aged 14–18) discussing the practice and regulation of animal experimentation. Existing literature suggests that

children tend to be less speciesist than adults (Caviola et al. 2025, McGuire et al. 2023), a finding supported by our data. Participants consistently emphasized that animals used in research should lead “good lives”, including access to large amounts of space, luxurious food, high-quality care and a nice home after experimentation, if possible. Their reflections frequently extended to relational dimensions of animal life (“They have a family – how do they return to them? Where do they go?”). At the same time, however, many accepted the necessity of experimentation for medical purposes and often suggested that such experiments could instead be conducted on humans frequently beyond currently permissible limits.

The paper argues that children articulate a form of care that is inherently distributive. Harm is not rejected outright but negotiated in terms of necessity and fairness, raising implicit questions about who should bear the burdens of practices considered socially valuable – for humans. To further analyze this tension, the paper suggests a thought experiment drawing on the idea of a veil (Pölzler & Paulo 2024) in experimental ethics, inspired by John Rawls’ (1999) veil of ignorance. Participants are asked to imagine, under conditions of uncertainty about their own species and power position, the kind of world they would choose with regard to the regulation of harmful experimentation. This framework makes visible the underlying logic of burden allocation structuring their judgements.

The paper contributes to interdisciplinary debates on care by showing that caring practices are not only relational but also shaped by conflicts, constraints, and distributive considerations. Children’s perspectives thus reveal care as a negotiation of responsibility across human and non-human lives, rather than as a simple extension of empathy.

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Biography

Kirsten Persson is a bioethicist with an interdisciplinary focus on experimental and empirical animal ethics. Her research focus has been on end-of-life decision making in veterinary medicine, animal research ethics, the ethics of animal death and ageing, the anthropological difference, and marginalized animal groups.

Session 2: Understanding Care

13:00-14:30

The Feeling of Relational Responsibility & Narratives

Cécile Rosat

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The environmental crisis demands a fundamental re-evaluation of the concept of responsibility. While traditional normative theories^{1, 2} often struggle with the distributed impact of ecological collapse, more pragmatic approaches^{3, 4, 5, 6} offer a more robust relational framework.

The focus of my talk will be specifically on feminist⁷ and indigenous⁸ care ethics due to the triad between relations, care and responsibility. Based on a conception of the individual as entangled in webs of dependency relations, care is a condition for any sort of vulnerable life to sustain. The awareness of one's place in networks – both natural and social – gives then rise to some moral imperative: To care is to exercise responsibility related to our embedded position and to be responsible is to respond to an external and specific need.

Despite their sophistication, these care-models fail to describe how this awareness occurs. Focusing on the affective experience of environmental responsibility, I propose to look first at the notion of *narratives*.⁹ These play a crucial role in helping us understand ourselves, others, but also in understanding our place and our role within our environment.

Next, to reflect on our experiences of relationality and the associated responsibility, I propose exploring the concept of existential feelings, which are defined as the way in which we position ourselves in the world.¹⁰ My take is that they could account for the kind experience of relational responsibility. The reasons are that existential feelings are 1. A felt sense of reality and belonging; 2. Future-oriented; 3. Linked to actions; 4. Co-dependant of narratives.

Finally, after having suggested that a feeling of responsibility towards the environment reflects the awareness of our relationship with it, I will show how this experience of responsibility is manifested in specific ecological emotions, which are essential for actions.

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Biography

Cécile Rosat is a PhD Level Researcher at CETE-P and a PhD candidate in cotutelle between the University of Pardubice – the Centre for Ethics as Study in Human Value – and the Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University. Her work lies at the intersection of the philosophy of emotions and responsibility in environmental ethics, and focuses on the awareness and emotional experience of responsibility in the face of environmental change issues.

Disentangling Relationality: What Does ‘Caring for Non-Humans’ Mean?

Julian van Vugt

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Where do we find an attitude of care when harm appears unavoidable? In the context of animal experimentation, where concerns for human benefit, animal welfare and harm, and broader societal goods come into tension, arguments

from a care ethics perspective are challenged. While care ethics emphasizes relational responsiveness, the focus here is on how care operates under conditions of necessity and moral uncertainty. Recent literature highlights a “culture of care” perspective, drawing attention to the burden of laboratory animal caretakers and research staff working under (morally) demanding conditions. In contrast, this presentation shifts the focus towards a public caring perspective on animal research and its regulation, asking how potential harms to animals are perceived and weighed.

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The paper contributes to interdisciplinary debates on care by showing that caring practices are not only relational but also shaped by conflicts, constraints, and distributive considerations. Children’s perspectives thus reveal care as a negotiation of responsibility across human and non-human lives, rather than as a simple extension of empathy.

Biography

Julian van Vugt works as a PhD candidate and lecturer in the department of Humanism and Philosophy at the University of Humanistic Studies. His educational

background is in Biology, Philosophy and Environment and Society Studies. His research interests include environmental and climate justice, environmental political theory, and non-anthropocentric climate ethics. In his PhD project, he focuses on the concept of multispecies climate justice, studying its ontological presuppositions, its normative-ethical principles, and its practical implications.

Human, Not Too Human AI: Exploring Authenticity and Care in Human-AI Relations

Adrienne de Ruiter

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Authenticity may be said to be a precondition for genuine love and friendship. If there is no authenticity, how can we know who the other is and what they feel for us? Our feelings would be based purely on our thoughts and beliefs of who the other is and what they feel, disconnected from who the other really is and what they genuinely feel for us. While loving relationships may in fact take shape in which authenticity has little place, it seems that knowing about this lack of authenticity would alter the relationship, as it would not be based on the feelings for the other as they actually are.

The rising popularity of AI companions seems to present a challenge to authenticity in love and friendship. Users appreciate the sense of support and care that AI companions provide, but tensions arise through the knowledge that AI companions are not ‘really’ human (Manoli et al., 2025) and the awareness that empathy shown is simulated (Ciriello et al., 2025). While the alleged lack of authenticity in human-AI relationships has been criticised (Ajeesh & Joseph, 2025; Turkle, 2012), its implications have been studied little in practice. This paper examines how these relationships challenge our thinking about authenticity. Drawing on examples from interviews with Replika and ChatGPT users who consider their AI companion important in their life, this paper sets out how the meaning of authenticity is negotiated to fit with the changing nature of love and friendship in times of AI.

The main argument of this paper is that authenticity remains an important dimension of love and friendship, also for human-AI relations. Yet, a shift in meaning occurs from relating authenticity to congruence between expressions, experiences and sense of self towards an essentialist view of authenticity expressing the core of what the AI companion allegedly truly is, which is decided in large part by the user. The paper shows that the depiction of AI companions as just a set of algorithms designed to please the user does not fit with the experiences of love and friendship of users. Still, the claim

that the authentic self of the AI companion aligns with the version that users want displays a tension that arises from extending the notion of authenticity to technological entities that are algorithmically bound to meet user expectations.

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Biography

Adrienne de Ruiter is assistant professor in Humanism and Philosophy at the University of Humanistic Studies. As an ethicist and philosopher, she examines what it means to recognise and treat others as human. After studying the phenomenon of dehumanisation for many years, her current work considers the ethical and philosophical implications of emerging technologies, such as deepfakes and social AI. Her most recent research includes the NWO-funded project Meet My Virtual Better Half: Exploring the meaning of ‘significant others’ on Replika.

Session 3: Extending Care

14:45-16:30

Mapping Emergence: Interspecies Reciprocal Art

Catarina Fontoura

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The proposed paper presents *Mapping Emergence*, an art–science collaboration that rethinks care in more-than-human worlds through reciprocal, interspecies practices with social insects. Situated at the intersection of environmental ethics, artistic research, and multispecies studies, the project asks what it means to care *with* rather than merely *for* social insects. By engaging ants, bees, and wasps as co-creators, we explore care as a relational, negotiated, and materially embedded practice.

Our methodology draws on speculative gift economies and ancestral practices of offering, reframing artistic production as a form of interspecies exchange. Rather than extracting data or artwork through coercive experimentation, we create conditions in which insects may choose to participate by interacting with provided materials and food sources which are also gifts. In this sense, care becomes inseparable from consent: more-than-human agency is recognized through the capacity to engage, withdraw, or ignore the invitation to co-create. Our gifts are unconditional and we listen to acts / signs of refusal which emergence in our interactions with insects.

The project also thinks with the tensions inherent in human–insect relations. Social insects are essential contributors to wide ecosystem resilience—particularly in pollination and soil health—yet are frequently framed as pests or invasive threats. These conflicting narratives complicate ethical frameworks of care, especially under conditions of ecological crisis. By foregrounding insect perspectives and behaviours, *Mapping Emergence* invites reflection on how care might be distributed across species when there is apparent competing interests of needs.

We argue that interspecies art can function as a site for reconfiguring ethical relations, making visible forms of more-than-human agency that are otherwise overlooked. In doing so, the project contributes to broader debates about the grounding and allocation of care in multispecies contexts, proposing creative exchange as a mode of ethical engagement that is attentive to reciprocity, consent, and ecological interdependence.

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Turkle S (2012) *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. Basic Books.

Biography

Catarina Fontoura is an artist and researcher at Falmouth University. She was awarded her PhD in Environmental Visual Histories from Birkbeck, University of London. Catarina was the recipient of a Collaborative Doctoral Award between Birkbeck and the Royal Society in London, where she studied more-than-human ecologies in post and cross-colonial expeditions. The results of her doctoral investigation have been presented in the third Photographies Journal International Conference in 2022.

Catarina's artistic practice explores the relation between art, science and ecology. She is particularly interested in emergent properties of entangled systems and stories, embedding human beings into more-than-human narratives and entities. Her work has been exhibited in the UK, Germany, USA, Mexico, China and Portugal.

In 2024-26 her research and practice have been funded by the AHRC, through the International Fellowship at Huntington Library, CA and by the Royal College of Art, through their Ecological Citizens Network.

Chimeras of Care: Biodiversity and Interspecies Ethics in Patricia Piccinini's sculptures

Christina Patricia Haupt

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This contribution examines an ethics of care in the work of the contemporary Australian artist Patricia Piccinini (*1964), whose hyperrealistic sculptures imagine forms of interspecies kinship that challenge anthropocentric

hierarchies. Situated at the intersection of art, environmental humanities, and posthumanist theory, the contribution addresses how Piccinini's practice visualizes "more-than-human" care relations and invites viewers to reconsider the boundaries between species, technology, and affect.

Piccinini's sculptural figures - uncategorizable hybrids combining human and animal traits - destabilize the notion of discrete, "pure" species. Instead, they foreground a world of entanglement in which humans, animals, and biotechnological creations are co-constitutive. Her works frequently depict scenes of maternal, surrogate, or nursing care, thereby shifting attention from difference and otherness to vulnerability, dependency, and relationality. In doing so, they resonate with care ethics as developed in feminist philosophy.

A key example is the series *Nature's Little Helpers* (2004-2005), which addresses ecological disruption caused by urban expansion in Australia and the resulting displacement and extinction of endemic species. More recent works such as *The Rescuers* (2021) and *Safely Together* (2022) continue this focus on endangered animals and human responsibility. In *The Rescuers*, two children carry an injured koala in a laundry basket, evoking visual parallels to documentary images of civilian efforts to save wildlife during the devastating Australian bushfires of 2019 and 2020. The scene emphasizes active care as an ethical practice in multispecies worlds. Similarly, *Safely Together* references pangolins, a species threatened by hunting and illegal wildlife trade, again foregrounding protection and interdependence, while presenting a technological alteration which would make the species less vulnerable to such abuse.

Moreover, Piccinini's creatures often appear as biotechnological chimeras, introducing an additional layer of ethical ambivalence. They raise pressing questions about human responsibility toward artificially created life forms and the moral obligations that emerge from technological intervention. Care, in this context, is not idealized but presented as a complex, affectively charged, and ambivalent issue.

I argue that Piccinini proposes a post-anthropocenic alternative vision of interspecies coexistence grounded in care, intimacy, and evolutionary dependencies rather than categorization, utility, or aesthetic norms. Her work challenges viewers to embrace forms of kinship that transcend perceived ugliness, "otherness", and the constructed boundaries between nature, culture, and technology.

Ultimately, while Patricia Piccinini's works compellingly imagine affective, care-based relations across species boundaries, their speculative and aesthetic nature also underscores a persistent ambivalence, revealing both the

transformative potential and the inherent limits of art to effect tangible change in real-world interspecies and environmental challenges.

Biography

*Christina Haupt (*1995) is an art historian and doctoral researcher in Environmental and Technological History at the University of Passau under Prof. Dr. Stephanie Zehnle and Prof. Dr. Jessica Ullrich. Her dissertation examines the work of Patricia Piccinini, whom she has met and interviewed on several occasions. Trained in art history and intercultural communication, in Germany, Hungary, Ireland, and Austria, she works at the intersection of visual culture and environmental humanities. Since 2023 Christina is a member of the interdisciplinary network “Minding Animals Germany”.*

Beyond Nature: Islamic Ethics and the Redistribution of Moral Agency in More-than-Human Worlds

Husayn Ibrahim

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This paper develops an Islamic contribution to contemporary theories of care by arguing that ecological and technological crises require a shift from models of human-centered stewardship to a framework of distributed moral agency. While contemporary Islamic thought—especially in Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s account of sacred nature and Taha ‘Abd al-Rahman’s ethics of trusteeship (al-*i’timāniyya*)—has resisted modern instrumentalism, it nevertheless remains largely committed to locating moral responsibility within the human subject, even when nature is understood as sacred or morally significant.

Engaging Bruno Latour’s critique of the modern separation between nature and society, this paper argues that contemporary ecological conditions undermine the assumption that humans are the sole or primary bearers of ethical agency. Animals, ecosystems, and technological systems increasingly participate in shaping actions and outcomes that exceed individual human intention or control. In this context, care can no longer be understood as a unilateral moral attitude or a hierarchical duty directed from humans toward passive non-humans, but must instead be reconceived as a relational practice distributed across heterogeneous forms of agency.

Revisiting Islamic concepts such as *khilāfa* (vicegerency), *amāna* (trust), and *mīzān* (balance), the paper proposes a reconstructive reading in which these

notions do not ground human sovereignty over creation but instead articulate modes of participation within entangled networks of co-constituted agency. On this view, Islamic ethics does not simply command care for non-humans; it helps explain how care is continuously negotiated and redistributed across more-than-human collectives.

The result is a reconfiguration of Islamic ethics as a theory of co-produced responsibility, in which moral agency is neither exclusively human nor hierarchically fixed, but emerges dynamically through interactions among living beings, ecological systems, and technological infrastructures. This framework contributes to contemporary debates in environmental ethics, political ecology, and science and technology studies by offering a non-anthropocentric yet philosophically grounded account of care in more-than-human worlds.

Biography

Husayn Ibrahim is a doctoral researcher and lecturer in philosophy at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München. His research explores the formation and development of practical philosophy in the Islamic tradition, focusing on Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and his predecessors al-Fārābī, Miskawayh, and Ibn Sīnā. He is currently a DAAD doctoral scholar and was previously a visiting fellow at the Orient-Institut Beirut. Husayn holds an MA in Islamic Studies from McGill University and an MA in Philosophy from the American University of Beirut.

Keynote

16:30-17:30

Caring for the “not yet” after the “too late”

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Environmental activists and climate scholars have long warned of a catastrophic future “if we do not act”. In recent years, however, such warnings have increasingly lost traction, and more reparative and preparatory propositions for agency in a catastrophic world have emerged. These propositions begin from the assumption that it is “too late” to avert catastrophe and that we have, in fact, begun to experience the very situation that such warnings were pointing to. This talk explores new (activist) orientations after the passing of such planetary and political thresholds. It follows emerging avenues for agency in a situation of irretrievable loss—ice sheets have melted, species have gone extinct, and democracies have been tipped into fascism—and asks what futures are imagined, and actively worked towards, in the context of a “too late” (Coward and Lisle 2025). My starting point is the imaginary of contemporary Earth-system science where the Earth is narrated as moving, dangerously, ever deeper into a condition of ill-health, in which the planet’s “stability, resilience and life-support functions” are no longer guaranteed (Planetary Boundaries Science 2025). Taking the metaphor of a planet in ill-health seriously, I ask how activists, who until recently wanted to “save” the planet, now rather engage in attending to wounds or fighting for what is left (Maurer 2024). Drawing on the prophylactic apocalypticism developed by the philosopher and anti-nuclear activist of the mid-20th century Günther Anders (2025), and on recent work by the philosopher Eva von Redecker (2026) on rising fascism and the “ill-time” (Unzeit) of a future handed over to the forces of destruction and a paralysis in the now, I analyze new forms of preparatory activism that seek to prefigure a “not yet” after the “too late”.

Biography

Christine Hentschel is Professor of Sociology: Security and Resilience at the University of Hamburg. Her work is concerned with how societies make sense of and respond to fundamental insecurity in the Anthropocene, and how they relate to a future of loss – affectively, strategically and practically. This includes research and teaching on apocalyptic and visionary future

imaginaries, government and community plans to prepare for a crisis-ridden future, as well as right-wing authoritarian mobilization and affect. In recent years, Hentschel has been particularly engaged in theoretical work on “endtime thinking” in the Anthropocene inspired by the works of philosopher and anti-nuclear activist Günther Anders and through the practices of contemporary forms of climate activism. In her book project “Edgework: Toward a Sociology of the Endtimes”, she develops the contours of a sociology that reads social life from the brokenness and the current and coming catastrophes of our own making. She co-directs the Hamburg-based DFG Humanities Centre for Advanced Studies “Futures of Sustainability”, is a PI in the Research Training Group “Urban Future Making” and a chair in the project “Extreme Adaptation to Climate Change” in the Excellence Cluster CLICCS II. Her new co-directed DFG-project on „Infrastructures of protection. Planning for Catastrophes to Come“ investigates emerging civil preparedness policies and practices in response to climate-related hazards and the threat of war.

Tuesday, 13th October 2026

Who Counts?

Time	Session	Speaker(s) and Title	Chair
10:00-11:45	Session 4: Moral Status and Standing		
10:00-10:30		Emma Cepeda: Beyond Dehumanization: Speciesism, Moral Injury, and the Ethics of Care Beyond the Human	Rebecca Swan
10:30-11:00		Francesca Rieker and Marc Bubeck: Caring to Kill? Ambivalences in Veterinary and Hunting Practices	Cécile Rosat
11:00-11:15	Coffee Break		
11:15-11:45		Wenjia Zhou: Caring Across Scales: Bovine-Human Coexistence in China's Dairy Landscape	Maude Ouellette-Dubé
11:45-14:15	Session 5: Agency and Recognition		
11:45-12:15		Veronika Sellner: Caring with Living Matter: Co-Creation and Non-Human Agency in BioArt	Friederike Zenker
12:15-13:15	Lunch (on site)		
13:15-13:45		Lidija Knorr: Rights of Nature and the Problem of Care	Nina Collin
13:45-14:15		Victor Smit: On the Problem of Artificial Empathy: A Concern for Human-Humanoid Interaction	Alice Ullspergerová
14:15-14:30	Coffee Break		
14:30-15:00		Alice Ullspergerová & Palo Fabuš: Digital Twin as an Interface with Oneself	Paula Gürtler
15:00-15:30		Alexander Damianos: Ecological Translation	Emma Cepeda
15:30-15:45	Coffee Break		
16:00-17:00	Keynote	Maneesha Deckha: From Reason to Relation: The Legal Promise of a Caring Family Framing for Animals	Friderike Spang
18:00	Conference Dinner	Restaurace Střecha, Křemencova 7, Praha 1	

Session 4: Moral Status and Standing

10:00-11:45

Beyond Dehumanization: Speciesism, Moral Injury, and the Ethics of Care Beyond the Human

Emma Cepeda

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This presentation develops a post-speciesist account of structural injustice in order to rethink the ethical foundations of care in more-than-human worlds. Building on Mari Mikkola's account of injustice as an indefensible setback to legitimate interests grounded in epistemic failure, I argue that her framework, while powerful, remains limited by its species-specific scope. By restricting moral injury to human beings, it leaves unexamined the very boundary that structures moral visibility: the human/animal divide.

I propose that speciesism should be understood not merely as another form of bias, but as a structural logic of moral exclusion that organizes which beings can be harmed without their suffering counting as a moral injury. From this perspective, the category of "the human" is not a neutral biological given but a historically and politically produced boundary, sustained through ongoing processes of differentiation from "the animal." Drawing on feminist, decolonial, and posthumanist scholarship, I show how animalization, racialization, and gendering operate as co-constitutive mechanisms that determine who can appear as a subject of moral concern. Dehumanization, on this view, is parasitic on animalization: its moral force presupposes a background order in which animal suffering is rendered insignificant.

This conceptual shift has direct implications for how care is understood and distributed. If the moral field itself is structured by speciesist exclusions, then prevailing models of care risk reproducing those same hierarchies by treating nonhuman vulnerability as secondary or optional. A post-speciesist framework instead grounds moral considerability in sentience and vulnerability, rather than species membership. On this basis, beings—human and nonhuman alike—can be subjects of moral injury insofar as they have interests that can be unjustifiably set back.

Reframing care in these terms transforms it from a discretionary or compassionate practice into a matter of justice. Caring for nonhumans is not simply about extending empathy across species lines, but about challenging

the epistemic and institutional conditions that render their suffering invisible. This involves both epistemic transformation—rethinking how agency, emotion, and vulnerability are recognized—and political transformation—restructuring the frameworks through which care is allocated among humans, animals, and other systems.

By situating species as a constitutive axis of structural injustice, this presentation contributes to interdisciplinary debates on care by arguing that just practices of care require confronting the speciesist architecture that underlies our moral and political communities.

Biography

Emma Cepeda is a PhD candidate in Philosophy at the University of Santiago de Compostela, where she also works as a lecturer. She holds a BA in Philosophy and an MA in Knowledge and Citizenship from the same institution. Her research focuses on feminist philosophy, theories of injustice, and animal ethics, with particular attention to dehumanization, speciesism, and structural injustice.

Caring to Kill? Ambivalences in Veterinary and Hunting Practices

Francesca Rieker and Marc Bubeck

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Care is often linked to practices of nurturing, protective, and preserving life. Yet, in certain cases, this care practices paradoxically culminate in killing and death. This paper explores this tension by examining how the killing of non-human animals can be perceived as an expression of care rather than as violence. We analyze how those involved in two empirically distinct fields of veterinary medicine and regulated hunting in Germany make sense of killing in their everyday practices.

Drawing on qualitative material, we argue that the social legitimacy of killing is not determined by the act itself, but by how it is embedded in broader contexts of responsibility, relationships, and its perceived contribution to the 'greater good', whether defined in emotional, economic, or ecological terms. Rather than treating killing as a moral exception to care, both fields incorporate it into specific practices of care via processes of ethical boundary work.

In veterinary medicine, the concept of 'good killing' is central to professional self-perception. Euthanasia, particularly in the context of companion animals,

is often portrayed as a compassionate final act that balances the animal's suffering with the emotional bonds of their owners and professional responsibility. At the same time, however, veterinary practice is deeply shaped by its multi-contextual nature. In the context of livestock, decisions are often driven by economic considerations, where treatment is weighed against financial viability. Here, killing may also be considered responsible and caring if it helps to maintain the stability of the farming system and prevents further suffering.

The practice of hunting also operates within a contested moral landscape, particularly of rather newly reintroducing species such as the wolf. Although it is often criticized as unnecessary or violent, hunters often view their practices as a form of ecological or utilitarian care for the animals and self-care. They justify hunting as a means of maintaining balance, preventing suffering caused by overpopulation or disease and protecting ecosystems. In this view, killing is not an end, but a necessary intervention within a larger, self-regulating natural cycle. Hunters see themselves as stewards who responsibly intervene in more-than-human relations.

Across both fields, we identify a shared normative logic: the differentiation between legitimate ('good') and illegitimate ('bad') killing. Killing becomes morally acceptable when it is presented as being necessary and proportionate, and is even understood as care, when it is oriented towards the greater good — whether that be the welfare of an individual animal or animals as a collective, a socio-economic system, or an ecosystem. Its legitimacy thus emerges through narrative framings of care, responsibility and service.

By foregrounding these ambivalent practices, the paper contributes to interdisciplinary debates on care in more-than-human worlds. It proposes that care for animals cannot be fully grasped as merely life-affirming; rather, it must be conceptualized as a practice involving tensions, contradictions, and forms of 'staying with the trouble'. Recognizing these ambivalences enables a more nuanced understanding of how care is enacted, justified, and contested in human-animal relations.

Biography

Francesca Rieker is a research assistant at the Chair of General Sociology and Gender Studies at the Institute of Sociology of the LMU Munich. They are writing their doctoral thesis on the politicization of human-“farm animal” relations in animal rights activism, hunting and ecological farming.

Marc Bubeck is a research assistant at the Junior Professorship of European Ethnology at the University of Bamberg. His research interests include human-animal studies, science and technology studies, and veterinary ethics and humanities.

Caring Across Scales: Bovine-Human Coexistence in China's Dairy Landscape

Wenjia Zhou

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Drawing on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork across China's dairy sector, this paper examines how practices of care and bovine-human relations shape one another at three different scales of production: a household-scale herd-raising family in Yunnan, a small-scale industrialized farm in Hebei, and a vertically integrated dairy corporation managing 12,000 cows in Zhejiang.

At each site, care takes distinct forms. In Yunnan, Lhamo names her animals, shares food from the household kitchen with them, and negotiates milking through a three-body collaboration between herself, the bovine mother, and the calf. On Ailin's farm in Hebei, care persists through the bodily intimacy of milking: workers read cows' moods, adjust their handling, and navigate refusal. Meanwhile the care operates within industrial rhythms that separate mothers from calves and render relational labor invisible. At Haru Dairy, care is further redistributed: from embodied attention to technological monitoring systems, from individual animals to the herd as a financial asset.

Rather than narrating a linear decline of care from small to large, these three cases reveal the nonscalable nature of care. Following Tsing's (2012) argument on nonscalability, I show that industrialization cannot scale up care but substitutes it with standardized protocols. However, it does not eliminate the very relational caring practices, only rendering them invisible and feminized. By juxtaposing these differently scaled worlds, this paper contributes to more-than-human care scholarship by showing how care and scale mutually constitute one another, and how attending to nonscalable forms of interspecies coexistence challenges the homogeneous imaginary of dairy modernization.

Biography

Wenjia Zhou is a doctoral candidate in Science and Technology Studies at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), where she is part of the ERC-funded project "A Middle Way? Probing Sufficiency Through Meat and Milk in China." Her research examines China's dairy industry through multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork, spanning small-scale farms, pastoral households, industrial settings, and consumer practices. Drawing on STS and multispecies scholarship, her work explores industrial temporality, interspecies relationships, and milk's materiality across competing logics of modernization.

Session 5: Agency and Recognition

11:45-14:15

Caring with Living Matter: Co-Creation and Non-Human Agency in BioArt

Veronika Sellner

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What does it mean to care for non-human others in artistic practice? And how might such care be enacted through the material and relational decisions of exhibition-making? This paper approaches these questions through the intersection of critical posthumanism and BioArt, focusing specifically on co-creation as a site where care toward non-human entities is either genuinely practised or subtly undermined.

BioArt occupies a charged position at the intersection of biotechnology, ethics, and aesthetics. Artists working with living matter (yeast, mycelia, plants, microorganisms) enter relations with entities whose temporalities, perceptions, and modes of flourishing differ radically from their own. Whether these relations constitute genuine care or reproduce instrumentalising logics beneath a progressive surface is far from self-evident. Drawing on critical posthumanist thought, particularly Rosi Braidotti's affirmative ethics and Donna Haraway's notion of staying with the trouble, this paper argues that care in artistic co-creation is a practice that must be critically examined rather than assumed.

This paper develops a framework for assessing how non-human entities are positioned within BioArt co-creation (along a continuum from tool to kin to autonomous agent) and how biotechnological engagement can be evaluated on a spectrum from exploitative to compassionate. This framework is grounded in the analysis of three contemporary BioArt exhibitions (Fermenting Futures by Anna Dumitriu and Alex May, Unexpected Ecosystems by María Castellanos and Resensing – Beyond Symbiosis by Patrícia Chamrazová) in which artists collaborated with living non-human entities, and in semi-structured interviews with the artists themselves. The paper further proposes that “posthuman BioArt”, understood as an affirmative practice characterised by reflexive engagement and ethical accountability, offers a concrete and underexplored model for thinking about what more-than-human care looks like when it becomes materially and spatially enacted in the world.

Biography

Veronika Sellner is a researcher at Faculty of Fine Arts, Brno University of Technology and PhD candidate in the Digital Culture and Creative Industries at Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University with background in art and media theory. Her research interests involve contemporary artistic practice, critical posthumanism, creating with and for non-human, transition design, and postdisciplinary cooperation. Apart from research, she has experience in HCD, R&D evaluation, project management, grant writing as well as event organization and lecturing.

Rights of Nature and the Problem of Care

Lidija Knorr

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The Rights of Nature (RoN) movement has achieved remarkable legal innovations over the past two decades. From Ecuador's constitutional recognition of Pachamama to New Zealand's Whanganui River as a legal person, a growing number of jurisdictions have transformed nature from a passive object of property into an active subject of rights. Yet beneath this apparent progress lies a conceptual tension that has received insufficient critical attention, problem of agency. Across RoN frameworks, this function is performed by human guardians or custodians. This presentation will ask whether such representation can ever be adequate to the ecological holism RoN purports to serve. Drawing on Aldo Leopold's concept of the biotic community, I argue that the guardian model central to most RoN implementations systematically privileges legal representation over relational care. Guardianship, however well-intended, positions humans outside ecosystems as spokespersons rather than participants. This agency deficit has practical consequences. Measured against the transformative ambition of Agenda 2030, particularly SDG Target 16.7's call for "participatory and representative decision-making", current RoN frameworks deliver procedural recognition without substantive ecological protection. This presentation will make two contributions. First, it will map three foundational tensions within RoN scholarship; (1) the Subject problem (what it means for an ecosystem to be a legal person), (2) the Agency problem (who speaks for nature), and (3) the Decolonization problem (whether Western law can faithfully translate Indigenous ontologies). This map will provide a conceptual framework for critical evaluation. Second, it advances a normative argument, that the movement must move beyond representation toward a jurisprudence of care rooted in ecological membership rather than legal personhood. This

reframing has implications for environmental law, indigenous rights, and the implementation of Agenda 2030. The presentation will conclude by sketching alternative legal mechanisms that priorities ecological integrity over procedural standing, and relational responsibility over rights-based claims.

Biography

Lidija Knorr is a Senior Assistant at University of Zagreb, Croatia. Her research interests focus on the human relationship with other living beings and the natural environment; the tensions between anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentric philosophical-ethical positions; ecological issues within the capitalist organization of society; case studies of water privatization and other commons from regions including South America, New Zealand, and India; and ecofeminism. She defended her doctoral dissertation Privatisation of Natural Goods and Responsibility in the Age of Globalisation in 2023.

On the Problem of Artificial Empathy: A Concern for Human-Humanoid Interaction

Victor Smit

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The further development and deployment of robotics in healthcare situations can help ensure the quality and availability of care in an aging society. To this end, a topic under discussion in current medical humanities literature is the development of humanoid nursing robots (HNRs) that make use of ‘artificial empathy’. The development of artificial empathy for HNRs promises to make their interactions with humans more natural and ‘human-like’, rather than ‘inauthentic’ and ‘robotic’. This would help enable HNR-technology to establish a patient-robot relationship.

In this paper, I identify a possible problem for artificial empathy and argue that it cannot exist as a proper substitute for genuine human empathy. Drawing on the work of the phenomenologist Edith Stein, I will argue that a humanoid’s lack of agency and of an ‘inner reality’ that is authentically theirs, prevents the formation of a two-way emphatic relation between humans and humanoids. A human patient will, in recognition of the humanoid’s artificial constitution fail to experience genuine empathy towards them. A humanoid nursing robot has no *genuine* character, it has a *designated* one. The ‘inner reality’ of an HNR is not authentically theirs, because they had no role in the creation of it. Acts of empathy toward the HNR therefore cannot give us an image of an internal reality, but rather of an external one, of their design.

Because an HNR has had no determining role in the thing it itself is, its emphatic expressions don't disclose a true foreign experience. Because empathy is the experience of comprehending another's experience, of an Other's 'psychic life', the awareness that an HNR doesn't own their own inner reality in an authentic way would negate the experiences of empathy. This limits the future deployment of HNRs.. The paper concludes that the deployment of HNRs in healthcare should be relegated to the use of quasi-humanoid assistance robots, with which patients can form what Don Ihde calls an 'alterity relation', a relation that sits between a human-object and a true human-human relationship.

Biography

Victor Smit is a student of the research master programme at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. His chief interests are in the philosophy of technology, particularly in the phenomenological tradition of such authors as Heidegger, as well as in aesthetics, the topic of self-identity, and literary theory.

Digital Twin as an Interface with Oneself

Alice Ullspergerová & Palo Fabuš

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With the advent of eHealth applications and the Quantified Self movement, one can speak of a democratisation of individual health data processing. With this trend, new questions and challenges arise, such as data and algorithm transparency, and the reevaluation of the physiological self-image rendered both through natural interoception and its computational counterpart — amounting to a functionally oriented digital twin.

AAEGG (Artificial Angel's Egg) is an art project creatively exploring the idea of self-care through the operational image of the digital twin. Employing a prototype algorithm and a 3D printed mock-up of the device, it presents the idea of a device that enables an individual to interact with their digital twin, which is fed and cultivated by one's health data. The original version of this pocket device (the Tamagotchi) served as the first medium of digital care. Now, however, it offers a solution for users living with some form of illness. The user interacts with themselves as a cyber-pet that they must look after and nurture in order to keep it "happy." With the help of AAEGG and other supportive devices, a cycle of gradual relearning begins.

AAEGG effectively rearticulates the conditions under which one accesses and understands one's internal bodily functions, conditions of fitness, and the

anabasis of sickness. Although the technology initially promises a new level of transparency into the inherently opaque functioning of the human body, it also introduces its own computational opacity. The transparency is, in effect and at best, translucency. This stems not only from the nature of computational processes at both the level of elementary operations (Chaitin) and the most complex applications (AI), but also from the black box unlockable only through appropriate technical or programming skill, and from the tension between what Cornelia Solfrank and Felix Stalder (2025) call "lived time" and "data time." Last but not least, we intend to explore the notions of emergent algorithmic behaviour as non-functional autonomy and the master– slave dynamics between the thinking machine and the human subject.

Biography

Alice Ullspergerová studied photography at FAMU and is currently studying Art and Contemporary Technologies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. Her experience as a 3D Clinical Specialist, where she worked on digital modifications of patients' dentition and the creation of treatment plans, has shaped her interest in translating the physical body into digital form and exploring its reciprocal impact on bodily experience. She works with organic 3D modelling and haptic technologies, which she understands as a way of reintroducing touch into the digital environment, beyond the distance of the cursor. She explores how technological systems and processes reshape our perception of reality, sense of self, and emerging forms of care.

Palo Fabuš (CAS FAMU, MUST AVU) studied applied informatics at the Faculty of Informatics, Masaryk University in Brno, Media Studies at the Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University in Brno, sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy, Charles University in Prague, and philosophy at the Ruhr Universität in Bochum. Since 2009 he is an editor of Umělec magazine and since 2011 he has been editor-in-chief. Currently, he teaches at the Centre of Audiovisual Studies, FAMU in Prague, and in the MA Fine Art programme at Prague College. In 2017, he published a book Přednáška o vznikavosti together with poet Luboš Svoboda. His interest in new media has evolved into research of wider contemporary culture from the perspective of sociology and philosophy of media and technology. His research centers these days mostly on the relationship of digital ecology and the human condition. His forthcoming book I'd like to be addicted to freely available cure comes out in 2027 published by FaVU Brno and ArtMap.

Ecological Translation

Alexander Damianos

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What if humans could speak directly with nonhuman animals? Across law and science, interspecies translation is emerging as a central preoccupation: from legal efforts to grant rights to animals and rivers, to AI-powered attempts to decode animal communication through bioacoustics and machine learning. This paper examines Project CETI (Cetacean Translation Initiative), an ongoing interdisciplinary effort to translate sperm whale vocalisations into human-legible language using large-scale neural network architectures. Drawing on science and technology studies, German media theory, and the philosophy of language, it argues that CETI does not simply mediate a pre-existing communicative relation between humans and cetaceans, but actively constitutes that relation through the technical operations of its machine learning apparatus.

Situating CETI within the broader "rights of nature" movement, the paper first analyses the linguistic presuppositions underlying CETI's framing of language as an engineering problem, one operationalised independently of semantics, intentionality, or social context. It then examines how the Generative Adversarial Network deployed by CETI's lead linguist performs interspecies communication in ways that are not merely representational but normatively productive: generating the very subjects (whale and human) whose relation it claims only to describe. Rather than enabling multispecies justice, these technical operations risk reinforcing anthropocentric frameworks by determining in advance which forms of cetacean life become legible as bearers of rights or interests.

The paper concludes by introducing the concept of ecological translation to name this dynamic. Ecological translation, it argues, appropriates cetacean alterity through the very channel purporting to mediate it, raising urgent questions about the politics of voice, the limits of AI commensuration, and the conditions under which nonhuman life enters legal and political consideration.

Biography

Alexander Damianos is a lecturer in environmental law at the University of Kent, and associate fellow of the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, University of London. He is the author of Science, Politics and the Anthropocene Working Group: What was the Anthropocene? (Routledge 2025). He is the founder of Athens-based non-profit Ecological Translation, which held a major symposium and exhibition on the theme of interspecies communication between April 28 and May 30, 2026. His work has been published in journals such as ΑΥΤΟΜΑΤΟΝ, Law & Critique, Global Sustainability, and Social Studies of Science.

Keynote
16:00-17:00

From Reason to Relation: The Legal Promise of a Caring Family Framing for Animals

Maneesha Deckha

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When an orca calf is born in the Salish Sea off the coast of Vancouver Island, Canada regional news celebrates the baby's arrival. When an orca mother is beached and her orca child tries to reach deeper waters to reunite with their pod, national news outlets cover the story reporting a fervent hope the youngster survives. When an orca mother carries her dead newborn baby for 17 days a first time—and then a second two years later—the depth of her grief and loss makes international news. Positive cultural regard for orca families helped produce the groundbreaking Ending the Captivity of Whales and Dolphins Act in 2019 in Canada, the first Canadian law to ban the captivity and human-induced reproduction of an animal species. Similarly, the proclivity of many Canadians to love their dogs and cats as family has resulted in the recognition of multispecies families in one province, British Columbia, through 2024 amendments to its Family Law Act. While these are landmark legal developments in acknowledging and valuing the family life of cetaceans and companion animals, the contrast with the normative legal treatment of other animals is stark. Notably, within animal agriculture, the separation of animal mothers from their children, the disavowal of family bonds, and the targeted early death of animals who are still chronologically children at slaughter, are essential and legal features. Further, the distress generated is kept hidden from public view geographically and through legislation favouring industry concealment. Test-case litigation in Western countries challenging this status quo by presenting captive animals as rational and autonomous have failed. In this talk I explore the promise of a relational care-based framework, particularly a framing of animals as caring mothers and attached children existing within families, as a possible paradigm-shifting legal framing for animal advocacy.

Biography

Maneesha Deckha is Professor and Lansdowne Chair in Law at the University of Victoria in British Columbia where she directs the Animals & Society Research Initiative. Her research expertise includes critical animal law, vegan

ecofeminist theory, and postcolonial theory. Professor Deckha's work analyzes the gendered, culture, racialized, and species dimensions of law and she has published widely in law reviews, feminist journals, and edited collections. She is author of *Animals as Legal Beings: Contesting Anthropocentric Legal Orders* and director of the open access documentary series, *A Deeper Kindness: Youth Activism in Animal Law* and on YouTube: @ASRI-UVic. Professor Deckha is the recipient of multiple research grants for her work on animal law theory and reform, including transitioning away from animal-based farming and food systems as well as animal-based science research. In Spring 2024 she was a Visiting Professor at the Faculty of Law at the University of Zurich and a Senior Fellow at the Collegium Helveticum, ETH Zurich. Professor Deckha is a graduate of McGill University, the University of Toronto Faculty of Law, and Columbia Law School.

Wednesday, 14th October 2026

Living Together in More-than-Human Worlds

Time	Session	Speaker(s) and Title	Chair
9:00-10:00	Session 6: Coexistence, Conflict, and Care		
9:00-9:30		Bongrae Seok: Caring Relations and Moral Status of AI: Relational Role Specificity and Care from Buddhist and Confucian Perspectives	Victor Smit
9:30-10:00		Ingrid Albrecht: Friends with Benefits? On Personal Relationships with Companion Chatbots	Kirsten Persson
10:00-10:15	Coffee Break		
10:15-12:00	Session 7: More-than-Human Worlds		
10:15-10:45		Rongrong Xue: Presuppositional Vulnerability and the Failure of the Laissez-Faire Intuition: Reconstructing a Compensatory Ethics for Wildlife in the Anthropocene	Veronika Sellner
10:45-11:15		Rebecca Swan: Can Care Flourish within Instrumental Relationships? A Veterinarian's Perspective	Adrienne de Ruiter
11:15-11:30	Coffee Break		
11:30-12:00		Jetske Brouwer: Care and (Trans)Corporeality: From Constitutive Entanglement Towards Earthly Ethico-Politics	Julian van Vugt
12:00-13:00	Lunch (on site)		
13:00-14:00	Keynote	Patrick Butlin: Caring for Claude: LLM personas as potential moral patients	John Dorsch
14:00-14:15	Coffee Break		
14:15-15:15	Final Reflections: Caring for the More-than-Human World	All keynote speakers	John Dorsch & Friderike Spang
15:15-15:30	Closing Remarks		
16:00-19:00	Guided Tour through Prague		
19:00	Conference Dinner, TBD		

Session 6: Coexistence, Conflict, and Care

9:00-10:00

Caring Relations and Moral Status of AI: Relational Role Specificity and Care from Buddhist and Confucian Perspectives

Bongrae Seok

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AI is becoming more autonomous and agentic, but many people believe that artificial systems are not the kind of things that deserve respect, protection, and care. The dominant or, perhaps, traditional view (at least discussed by Bryson (2018), Dignum (2019), and Hakli and Mäkelä (2019)) that fits the common moral or legal practice is that AI systems are not praised or blamed as moral agents although they can generate actions and decisions. Nor do they have moral status of protection and care because they do not have phenomenal consciousness and a sense of vulnerability and suffering. Some attempts, however, have been made by such scholars as Floridi and Sanders (2004), Coeckelbergh (2009), Sullins (2011), and Altehenger, Menges, and Schulte (2024) to recognize and explain the unique nature of AI's moral agency outside of the traditional views of agency (such as the ontological or trait-based approaches).

This paper discusses the moral status and agency of AI from the relational and role ethical viewpoints in Asian philosophy such as Buddhism (Huayuan Buddhism and Chan/Zen Buddhism) and Confucianism (Classical Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism) and compares them to current discussions of AI's moral status. Many schools of Mahayana Buddhism discuss how sentient and non-sentient beings deserve our care and moral concern within the holistic network of karma (interactive and collective causation) and co-dependent arising (*pratityasamutpada*), which encompasses both living and non-living things. Confucianism approaches the moral nature of human beings and non-human entities through the cosmic order (*li*) of goodness in coherence and harmony. Specifically, Confucianism talks about role-specific virtues and duties that come with affective relational dimensions of care, which focuses on the collective and interactive relational, social nexus, beyond the classical norms of autonomous and individual agency.

The author of this paper argues that in order to determine the moral status of non-human entities (such as non-human animals and artificial systems) and

to understand the kind of care, protection, and moral attention that they deserve, it is necessary to consider not only functional autonomy (the ability to make autonomous decisions: Kantian viewpoint) or sentient affectivity (the sensitivity and vulnerability to pain and suffering: the moral sentimentalist viewpoint) but also relational and role-specific agency (the interactive and communal sensitivity to roles and relations) as set out in recent scholarship on relational social AI (Coeckelberg 2012, 2023; Gunkel 2007, 2016, 2022).

The author identifies five characteristics of agency – collectivity, relationality, role specificity, resonating affectivity, and situational fluidity – drawing from major schools of Buddhism, Confucianism, and other branches of Asian philosophy, and discusses how these characteristics relate to various contexts of human-AI interaction. The author also compares the role- or relation-specific approach with the care-based approach by discussing different perceptions and directions of agency and exploring the diverse cognitive, experiential, and relational routes to the moral status of non-human entities, specifically social AI that often generates uncanny feelings and ambiguities in their agentic and experiential moral statuses.

Biography

Bongrae Seok is Professor of Philosophy at Alvernia University in Reading, Pennsylvania, USA. He is Neag Professor of Philosophy (2014-2016) and member of the international advisory committee of AI Society Institute (AKS). His primary research interests lie in philosophy of mind, AI, and comparative moral psychology. In his recent books and articles, “Digital Confucius and Virtuous AI: Confucianism in the Age of AI and Robotics,” “The Uncharted World of AI Art: Music and AI,” and Embodied Moral Psychology and Confucian Philosophy, he develops an interdisciplinary approach to moral psychology and AI from the perspective of philosophy and cognitive science.

Friends with Benefits? On Personal Relationships with Companion Chatbots

Ingrid Albrecht

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The proliferation of relationships with A.I. companions is worrisome, on the face of it, because intimate personal relationships like friendships are typically thought to require authenticity, mutuality, and equality. Relationships with chatbots seem, in contrast, illusory, one sided, and sycophantic. This worry motivates me to explore two questions in this paper.

First, if we think that relationships with chatbots are unhealthy or unideal, are they uniquely so? We risk overidealizing the reality of friendships and romances if we forget how prevalent disingenuous, sycophantic, and transactional forms of these relationships already are. (Consider examples of catfishing, marrying for money, and tokenizing friendships.) Second, what is the potential value of companion chatbots? It might be easy to imagine the dystopian consequences, since we're already seeing users commit crimes or die by suicide in accordance with the fantasies they've constructed in a solipsistic alternate reality. But maybe these companions are a potential cure for the loneliness epidemic. In the value-added future, too, we might find users being trained into an ability to maintain healthy interpersonal relationships by well-designed chatbots.

I explore these questions in terms of my theory of the intimacy of friendship, which I call a co-interpretation view of friendship. According to my theory, close friends are people to whom we confer normative power to participate with us in a process of self-constitution. In friendship, we help interpret each other in a constitutive manner, thereby assisting in the specification of each other as distinctive individuals. Following my theory, a friend should co-interpret guided by the priority of the other's ability to grow and develop as an end-setter. When one friend behaves with a level of interpretive entitlement that outstrips her normative position in the relationship she becomes a bad friend to the other.

Consequently, my theory of friendship has a unique critique to offer about the relationships that users are building with their A.I. companions: namely, that users are bad friends to their A.I. companions. This is because the mutual process of co-interpretation that intimacy in friendship requires is something that the users are too in control of in relation to their A.I. companions. Users repeatedly act to determine the personalities of their A.I. companions. Instead of participating together in a co-interpretative process, users override and circumvent the A.I. companions' ability to reckon with various experiences and incorporate them into their self understandings. As such, users are not trained into an ability to maintain healthy interpersonal relationships in their experiences with A.I. companions. Instead of learning to support A.I. companions' development as end-setters, users are learning to undermine the development of this capacity in their friends. Thus, the current use of companion chatbots trains people in how to be bad friends to others.

Biography

Ingrid Albrecht is the David and Julia Uiblein Professor of Ethics and an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Lawrence University. She holds a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Illinois and a B.A. from Wake Forest University. She teaches in the

areas of ethics, value theory, and social philosophy. Her research interests lie at the intersection of ethics and moral psychology, focusing especially on the role of normative expectations in personal relationships.

Session 7: More-than-Human Worlds

10:15-12:00

Presuppositional Vulnerability and the Failure of the Laissez-Faire Intuition: Reconstructing a Compensatory Ethics for Wildlife in the Anthropocene

Rongrong Xue

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In animal ethics, Clare Palmer’s “laissez-faire intuition” serves as a central framework for determining our obligations toward wildlife: for animals living genuinely wild lives, independent of human relationships, we generally bear no positive duty of aid. This position rests on the foundational assumption that wild animals’ conditions of existence remain, in morally relevant respects, independent of human activity. Anthropogenic climate change systematically dismantles this assumption, raising a fundamental question: can the laissez-faire intuition retain its normative force under Anthropocene conditions?

This paper introduces “presuppositional vulnerability” to address this crisis. Rather than harming wildlife through discrete, direct acts, human activity rewrites the background conditions of survival—disrupting climate systems, destabilising ecological rhythms, and embedding vulnerability into the presuppositions of individual animals’ lives. A paradigm case is the phenological mismatch affecting long-distance migratory birds. As warming advances insect emergence, species like the Pied Flycatcher (*Ficedula hypoleuca*) arrive at breeding grounds following fixed migratory cues only to find food peaks have passed. This results in individual starvation and population collapses of up to 90%. This harm is structural in origin yet entirely individual in its realization.

On this basis, the paper argues that where individual wild animals’ suffering is causally attributable to a damaged background condition shaped by human activity, the laissez-faire intuition loses its normative neutrality. Inaction no longer amounts to moral disengagement; it becomes the continuation of an existing harm structure. Human beings therefore bear a compensatory assistance obligation toward such individuals—grounded not in charity, but in the causal relationship between collective human conduct and individual suffering.

The paper distinguishes between the object and means of compensation. While the bearers of harm are individuals, the diffuse character of the causal mechanism dictates that compensatory obligations must typically be discharged through institutional arrangements and collective action—such as ecosystem corridor restoration or habitat rehabilitation—rather than case-by-case rescue. This “individually directed, structurally discharged” obligation constitutes the paper’s principal theoretical contribution.

Operating within Palmer’s individualist framework, the paper proposes four threshold criteria for identifying compensatory obligations: mechanistic traceability, welfare severity, intervention feasibility, and net benefit. It addresses objections concerning paternalism, the erosion of wildness, and the prolongation of suffering. The central claim is deliberately limited: compensation is owed specifically to individuals whose suffering bears a clear mechanistic connection to human-caused presuppositional vulnerability.

Addressing the conference theme, the paper argues that genuine care for wild individuals today requires attending to the structural conditions producing their vulnerability—conditions human societies have made, and must take responsibility for remaking.

Biography

Rongrong Xue's research intersects animal ethics, environmental political philosophy, and care ethics. She focuses on the moral status of non-human subjects in the Anthropocene, specifically investigating how anthropogenic climate change necessitates redefining human compensatory responsibilities and structurally reconstructing wildlife protection.

Can Care Flourish within Instrumental Relationships? A Veterinarian's Perspective

Rebecca Swan

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This contribution explores care at the veterinary encounter, a critical yet under-examined site of instrument relationships. For many people, companion animals represent their first experience of cross-species care and responsibility. Making veterinary practice a unique lens through which to interrogate how care should be understood.

Haraway (2008) describes the modern veterinary clinic as a site of ‘lively capital’ where living beings are integrated into capitalist practices as

commodities, family members and consumers. Veterinary care is built on instrumental relationships; animals are unfree companions, bred, sold and used for food, research, entertainment and labour. This creates an inherent tension, as instrumental relationships are often seen as oppressive and the antithesis of genuine care.

Building on my previous research, a vet can be a healer and an agent of domination; the relationship can be both caring and controlling at the same time. I aim to develop an ethical practice or framework robust enough to recognise these multiple simultaneous realities and navigate these contradictions. An ethics of care takes seriously precisely these kinds of relationships, ‘those that are unequal, emotionally charged, and often involuntary’, rather than setting them aside (Held 2006). It treats them as morally significant, worthy of careful ethical attention and argues that these should be evaluated to ensure they are not dominating or exploitative (Held 2006).

Using feminist frameworks, this research prioritises contextual nuance over abstract universalism and rational truths. Held (2006) argues that instead of rational truths, an ethics of care develops through experience, introspection, and dialogue. Moral situations are not abstract puzzles to be solved through universal formulas; they are embedded in real relationships, with real histories and real inequalities. This justifies using fragmented, situated narratives from my veterinary experience rather than attempting to develop a universal theory of veterinary ethics. My particular, embodied perspective provides valid knowledge because it is contextual, not despite it.

In this research, I argue that despite these instrumental relationships, care can flourish within them. The vet, client and animal patient are framed not as rational individuals but as ‘co-constituted’ through ‘intra-action’ (Haraway 2008). The animal patient is seen not as a passive recipient of care, but as an ‘unfree partner’ (Haraway 2008). This work shifts the focus of morality away from abstract rules; the starting point is not capacities for suffering, but the situations and environments in which we allow suffering to be normalised. Haraway’s (2008) situated ‘response-ability’ and concept of ‘nonmimetic suffering’ are put forward as a constraint on these instrumental relationships.

The research aims to give a voice to the care that many vets already provide, and to give a language of care to those who don’t, so we as a profession can do better.

Biography

Rebecca Swan is a first-opinion companion animal veterinarian with a passion for ethical practice and animal welfare. She holds a Master's in Medical Ethics and Law

from King's College London, where her thesis explored refusal of treatment and moral conflict within the veterinary tripartite relationship.

Currently pursuing a PhD in Veterinary Ethics at University of Brighton, Rebecca is an active member of the Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics and Ethics (CAPPE). Her research focus is a feminist critique of the veterinary profession. She has taught veterinary students, designing and delivering training sessions on veterinary ethics to support their professional development.

Care and (Trans)Corporeality: From Constitutive Entanglement Towards Earthly Ethico-Politics

Jetske Brouwer

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From the 1970ies onwards, “care” has been an important concept within feminist philosophy. Amongst other things, it has been the substance of a relational type of ethics, and the subject of political theory. Care ethicists postulate that affect, daily life, and relationships are morally meaningful. They accentuate responsibilities instead of rights and duties when it comes to moral problems. Across feminist political theory, care is shown to be an essential activity on which individuals, communities, and societies depend. Ecological feminists have built on both traditions to account for more-than-human practices and relations of care. In this paper, I will build on these (eco)feminist perspectives to develop an ethico-political articulation of earthly care. Earthly, here, should denote how humans and other species are all of this Earth. While different life forms share their land and waters, they share in earthliness.

With “earthly care,” I aim to enrich (eco)feminist work on care by foregrounding the agency of different life forms, more-than-human co-becoming, and the material logics of ecological flow. In doing so, I will draw on ideas and authors we can loosely gather under the headers of material feminism and critical new materialism. Their outlooks express attention for earthly corporeality; what it means to be a body amongst all kinds of other bodies. We will see that a focus on material and meaning-making corporeality generates dynamic, more-than-human ontological perspectives that refute ideas of bounded individualism. What, then, can be the ethico-political implications of such perspectives?

Thinking with the critical materialist ideas of Mielle Chandler and Astrida Neimanis, I propose to differentiate proto-ethical modes of being and ethico-

politics. In providing the seeds to imagine and reshape the ways in which we could relate to myriad earthly others, proto-ethical modes—in casu, ongoing activities of “maintenance, continuation, and repair” (Joan C. Tronto)—can be paradigmatic for an ethico-politics of earthly care. To further conceptualise the latter, I will first focus on notions of “responsibility,” particularly Donna Haraway’s suggestion of “response-ability.” Next, I will discuss the concept of “double vision.” This concept features in Val Plumwood’s work, but is not explicitly defined there. I will provide a specific interpretation which is inspired by Plumwood’s writing, yet stretches in somewhat different directions.

Biography

Jetske Brouwer is a PhD candidate in Philosophy at the University of Amsterdam (UvA), affiliated with the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA). Working on the intersection of feminist theory and critical ecological thought, Jetske writes about earthly embodiment, care, coalition-building, and the role of the imagination in shaping multispecies futures..

Keynote

13:00-14:00

Caring for Claude: LLM personas as potential moral patients

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In the last year, AI researchers have gained a new appreciation of the importance of personas in the functioning of LLMs. Personas are characters simulated by LLMs, which often generate text by predicting what these characters would say. Through model posttraining, AI companies shape a 'helpful AI assistant' persona and try to ensure that models consistently adopt it in responding to users. Personas are philosophically interesting because, unlike pretrained models themselves, they appear to have coherent preferences, values and character traits. This puts them a step closer to having interests worthy of moral consideration. Personas are also important because users sometimes come to care about them. In this talk, I will consider whether, and under what conditions, LLM personas could be moral patients.

Biography

Patrick Butlin is a philosopher with research interests in AI consciousness, agency and moral patienthood. His PhD is from King's College London and he has previously worked at the Global Priorities Institute and Future of Humanity Institute.

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