

Wolf Rainer Wendt

Doing care and doing economy

On the ecology of social and
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Preface

Doing care and doing economy interpenetrate. It does not take a pandemic to recognize this. In the complex world of today and tomorrow and in the dynamics of its change, social intercourse and the circulation of goods, market activity and personal relationships, production, and consumption and their own ratios cannot remain independent. What is worrying are the contexts in which it is necessary to act and the consequences associated with our choices.

How doing care and doing economy interpenetrate in an ecological frame of reference is the subject of this treatise. Caring action is described in its economic potency. Economically and socially, we are concerned about nature and society – and therein about ourselves. World-care takes hold of self-care. Ecologically, the course and extent of the crisis is ahead of us. It results from human behaviour in the way we do business, in general, and in the way we live, individually. In relation to this, it is not worry as the mental state of people that is the topic, it is not our personal worries in the crisis that are to be dealt with, but the caring that happens – and in a narrower and broader sense is mediated in doing economy.

Concern for health determined economics during the Covid-19 pandemic. The carers adapted themselves and their economic actions. In the world as life has evolved in it, we are full of care everywhere. Increasingly, the climate crisis, the loss of biodiversity and, most recently, the pandemic demand shifts in doing economy. In our political, economic and social actions, we must care about the preservation of our common existence. In the large contexts of concern and economic activity, each individual has to manage their own life on a daily basis. Caring is existential. In their caring actions, people participate in the processes to which they simultaneously feel themselves exposed. How to exist in them and how to master them?

The author has a practical and theoretical background in the social and human service processing of difficult life situations and advances argumentatively against this background of individual and public welfare to its and care's economy. It takes place in the home, in the state and in business. What is undertaken in a caring manner has its frame of reference in the welfare of the community, both individually and globally. The recent pandemic taught us how business economy has to submit to concerns about health. The climate crisis demands even more. The adaptation of the economy affects social life, which in turn needs an economy in which it can hold its own in the challenges and crises of the present and the future.

What can economic action be based on if it is to be ecologically compatible – compatible for people and nature? This book advocates for an ecologically framed economy in the social, which is filled with caring action. Contradicted thereby is the view, usual in sociology and social professions, that economics is a functional system of society, which is market-driven and with its own logic, and that social care belongs to another functional system according to its logic. Undoubtedly, business differs here and there. But in purpose and aim, care in life and care for life are prior and superior to any business. He who does business in the service of life and welfare also cares. And the caring person thinks ahead in their economic activity about what is being done. We are *ethically* moved by how we live and how we want to live – and can live in the future. After all, in ecological terms, *Daseinsvorsorge* in the sense of securing existence is without alternative. Sustainability is another word for it. In the continuum of care and in the continuum of doing economy, it requires a careful use of resources. Only together are the three pillars of sustainability – *ecological, economic* and *social* – viable. Care includes an economy and it includes caring for the endurance of common existence. In the Anthropocene, we cannot remain unconcerned anywhere, and economic activity is necessary everywhere and in every situation. For a long time, however, caring has not been perceived uniformly in the various fields of action and as a task affecting all actors. Neither is doing economy.

The sphere of caring extends from an individual's self-reference to the institutions of general interest and social security. Social care and healthcare, as they are set up, engage many people, and the whole population uses them in one form or another. The economy, where money and goods are the object, is usually spoken of in a different and divorced sphere from care supply. Both spheres, the structures of institutional provision and “the economy” as the world of work and business, are external to personal life. One seeks them out in order to get along in life and in the world. This needs to be taken care of. In this endeavour, caring thought and action reach into economic processes and beyond into the condition of the world of common life.

Doing care and doing economy are determinants of human existence and a basic requirement of ecological action. The aim of this book is to bring together the essence of caring and the essence of doing economy within an ecological frame of reference, and to link doing economy to the caring of individuals and communities. It is argued on the basis of the ecosocial theoretical discourse in which the household of living together and caring economic activity in it are put in the centre of consideration. With it, responsibility. Economy is what *Wirte*, hosts, undertake as household actors. From ecological concerns, one must look at economic activity in general and at the private households that are predisposed to it. On the levels of its organization and order, the transition is made from caring action in the personal sphere of life to globally sustainable economic activity, and thus both are linked across their extensions in the ecological frame of reference.

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Introduction

1

Abstract

There is more reason in human care than in the businesses driven. Care is ahead of them and surrounds them. Before all that is done, we care, and every day we care. In the management of one's own and common life, in social arrangements of existence, and also in private and public undertakings, there is reason enough to care about our world. In the double perspective of human life on the one hand and the world of life on the other, we encounter the world of business, whose events claim life in both directions and can be claimed for it in the ecosocial transformation before us.

It introduces an ecologically oriented conception of the multifaceted and complex connection between doing care and doing economy.

It may be demanded doing economy in a caring way. There is more reason in human care than in the businesses driven. Care precedes them and surrounds them. Before all that is undertaken we care, and everyday we care about managing our own and our common lives, and have reason enough to care about our world. In the double perspective of the lives of people on the one hand and the world of life on the other, we encounter with what is undertaken the economy whose happening claims life in both directions and can be claimed for it.

Economic activity is intruding into the everyday actions of individuals and encompassing the whole world of life. With consequences of which we have currently become more aware in the global crises. Economics extends into all spaces of common existence. This does not refer to the economy as a seemingly anonymous process, but to the way in which goods are handled and resources used. Economic events are the responsibility of the actors involved in them. In their actions, they have to take care of the development which takes their existence and which affects life in the world. In the connection of caring and doing economy we can do justice to the preservation and progress of common life. It is in this assumption that the present treatise has its motivation.

In theory, discourses of care and economic discourses have their fields far from each other. In practice, it is people's concerns that determine their economic activity, and in the economy people are cared for. But how and to what extent may be asked. The study considers the internal and external, direct and indirect relationships of economic activity to care and of care to the economy. These relations are *derived in three ways*:

- *Firstly*, it assumes an original unity of caring and economic activity in pre-modern households, from which unity domestic caring and economic business have historically separated in an internal-external differentiation.
- *Secondly*, the thesis is taken up that care is economically relevant in itself and constitutes a major part of the economy as a whole. Accordingly, caring in its life-serving and welfare-serving practice is accorded primacy in the doing economy.
- *Thirdly*, ecologically the preservation and the future of common life demand a caring economy or an economic care, which is why the modern separation of economy in the logic of the market and care in a social logic and both opposite the ecology of life contexts cannot remain and a transformation to their renewed linkage must take place.

The three lines of argument are visibly interconnected. They bridge the gap between caring and doing economy and back – and further – from the economy to caring for common life in the world. An ecological agreement in a global frame of reference is conceptually linked to the notion of domestic care, which is what the bridge concept of the *household* stands for. Its broad shaping in public care can claim to take economic action into an ecologically responsible practice of social and economic shaping of existence.

Care is taken in many ways. It happens on several levels. Caring extends from the basis of common and individual existence to the securing of material and social well-being in political projects and through party and ideological disputes about what should be done and what should be left undone, to the dimension of the living conditions of the world in the climate crisis, in the loss of biodiversity and in times of a pandemic. World problems are closing in on us. What concerns us and what we care for moves us personally in our feelings and thoughts, determines our actions at every level and is the subject of social and political consultations and economic calculations.

The topos of *care*, in German *Sorge*, first designates a mental state, a basic attitude of attention. The associated transitivum *sorgen* in German designates the practice of caring. In the positive sense of the word, to be explained in more detail, in which we shall henceforth speak of *caring*, we are sensibly concerned with our own well-being and that of common life, and in so doing we are concerned with people and things and the circumstances in which they occur. Care is relational; it extends in self-care, other-care, and world-care to situational realities of life. Actors are oriented toward them, engaged in them, affected by them, and prudently urged to care. Doing economy is primarily, as will be shown, an expression of this care.

For a subject, caring can be associated with an oppressive feeling of worry – and subjective worry is often appropriate in the face of existential vulnerability and the manifold problems in our own and common lives and in the world around us. It may remain with worry as a sensation and concern; but as soon as care is to be taken and must be taken in practice, economic decisions have to be made. With or without distress, action is to be taken in consideration of available forces, means and possibilities. Care as concern may remain in a state of the subject; caring action means a devoted commitment; it has an objectively *economic* character in its execution. Care binds economy.

Certainly, there is an economic activity that is independent of care. Historically, the economy has unfolded in modernity in an interplay of individualism in self-determination and the free market. Transactions in markets – the subject matter of standard economics – take place largely without constant regard to livelihood and well-being, unless and until events are tamed in small and large, personal and public households and by its hosts. They grasp it and determine it in the extension of their concern.

1.1 Doing Care Inside: And Doing Economy Outside?

The access from care to economy needs to be justified. As a thesis, it can be formulated heuristically, detached from ordinary doctrine: *Economy is what a host creates*. In German: *Wirtschaft ist, was ein Wirt schafft*. In German, this may at first be read as a mere play on words. The thesis links economic action to the caring actions of actors who are responsible for it as *host* or *hostess*. Serving the needs of people is what a host or hostess is competent to do in a caring and economic way. Also to be a “host” in a place of shelter and encounter. The thesis assumes even more: those who act in a caring manner create and maintain economic conditions that are conducive to life and welfare. In this way, the economy can be shaped ecologically.

The assertion to be founded in the ecological framework, namely in the life contexts in which economic activity takes place, becomes clear only after all further explanations. In the sphere of action that is created and maintained economically, and from the starting points of economic action, much can be undertaken that genuinely constitutes the events of the economy. In it, the title “host” or “hostess” (see for word usage Sect. 1.2) belongs to those who care. They are the subjects who dedicate themselves to objective tasks by acting. *Doing economy* range from their own provisioning to the scenery of enterprises to strategies for the preservation of life on our planet. The fact that the disciplinary economy at both ends – at the individual self and at the world as a whole – has so far hardly been attributed any competence, that rather economy is conventionally only supposed to mean the measure of the entrepreneurial production and circulation of goods, this fact in turn gives cause for concern: it is an economy that does justice neither to the criteria of an appropriate way of life nor to the criteria of the preservation of the biosphere. Here, as there, a different kind of economy is needed, one that is careful and economical. It ranges from individual and communal provision for the common good to the care of the world of life as a whole.

Doing care and doing economy are not only conceptually related to each other in the explanations of this book. The relationship is found in the practice of life. One can observe how people care and manage individually, collectively and in an organized way. In the economic use of means and opportunities that arise, a broad horizon of tasks is open, which caring action has to fulfil with prudence in the nearer and further term. Argumentatively, however, the relationship of caring and doing economy to one another must first be established, as long as both are undefined.

Disciplinary and political discourses usually keep gainful employment and care work apart; they separate what happens in the market from what happens “in the home”, contrasting enterprises and households. In fact, people care for themselves and are active in caring for others, first and foremost within their (private) circle of life. Orthodox economics, on the other hand, allows the economy to take place in the external sphere of personal or communal living. If we do not consider the market to be preexistent, but rather the human’s living of life, it takes precedence: something is done in it and from it. With the Bremen merchant motto “binnen un buten – wagen un winnen” (inside and outside, dare and win), the busy person is at home in the world. The outside of trade and commerce is at the same time the environment and nature in which we are – ecologically speaking – included and in which our existence has its common circle of life. Doing business outside and taking care of things inside – when the boundaries fall, this is ecologically congruent. This statement is presuppositional; it cannot remain so short-circuited.

A linguistic remark might be appropriate: Already the linguistic phrase “inside and outside” is ambiguous. The choice of words, which have a special conceptual function in the argumentation of this treatise, matters insofar as they have a certain semantic horizon in the English as in German language in which they are compatible with each other. The linguistic expression carries with it secondary meanings and captures with them an extended content. The connotations of the chosen terms help to grasp ecological contexts in their versatility. In the secondary sense of thoughtful planning, *caring* entails *doing economy*, and economic management has to do with *householding* or budgeting in the disposal of resources: A budget can also be used to “make the state”, at least in an old sense. The semantic references are found more or less in many languages. In the case of *care* in English, this is particularly clear. Otherwise, however, an appropriate translation would first have to be sought in each case.

Doing care is ahead of doing economy. Care comes from where and is directed towards a where. The temporal constitution of care gives the present discussion of the relationship between caring and economic activity, in temporal retrospect and foresight, the *historical* dimension in which it is possible to progress from the earlier unity of caring economic activity in a household based on the community of life, via its modern splitting and dispersion in the stream of industrial and commercial transactions, to a new linkage in global ecological responsibility.

1.2 Leading Categories

For the purposes of this book, the central terms are briefly described in the particular sense in which they are used. They are terms with different semantic connotations. The ambiguity has the advantage of being able to link up with various social, political, economic and ecological points of view in the contexts to be discussed.

- *Caring* is understood as acting and being active for the well-being of persons, a community and non-human life. A distinction is made between the practice of *caring for* and *caring* as an inner state of being concerned (*caring about*). In processes of caring, means and forces are used, the involvement and use of which must be assessed economically, socially and ecologically.
- *Livelihood* comprises the basic need of goods for the self-preservation and the continuous living of people. They work for their livelihoods and use resources, time and energy, including skills, knowledge and cultural orders. As resources, the stocks are the object of doing economy. Livelihood also means what is done for it.
- *Household* is used as a frame of reference for doing care and doing economy of persons or a community. The term is to be grasped concretely in the materially equipped living together (in a manner of domesticity) and abstractly as a framework of the (householding) disposal of means. There are personal households, business and public households, the state budget and the (global and local) natural household, in whose debt we stand.
- *The shaping of existence* (*Daseinsgestaltung* in German) is a purposeful influence on an extended process of life on the individual level as the shaping of the life of persons alone or together, socially in partnership, in the economic event through its regulation especially in the shaping of markets, on the political level through the shaping of developments according to social and ecological objectives.
- *Services of general interest* (*Daseinsvorsorge* in German) are defined as the provision of goods and services by the public authorities and their agents to meet the needs of the people which they are unable to meet themselves or which they are unable to meet adequately. Public and social services of general interest are responsible for the infrastructure of supply. Individual caring activities remain unaffected and are also necessary as a complement to those provided by the public sector.
- *Doing economy* (*wirtschaften* in German) is primarily the form of action in which the needs of a concrete household are met. The economic allocation of

means and forces and the distribution of goods provide for the continuous maintenance of life. In general, economy refers to the dispositional process in the use of means and forces for specific purposes. What is undertaken in business and unfolds in transactions on markets finds its framework in a household and in doing economy in it.

- The *overall economy* usually means the sum of all individual economies (i.e., enterprises as producers and households as consumers in the sense of economics) existing in a national territory. It appears as a statistical quantity. As an event to be controlled, the economy as a whole or “the economy” is to be drawn into the ecological frame of reference of a household.
- *Ecosystem* is the name given in biology to a complex community of life in the structurally and functionally given interrelationship of the organisms belonging to it, but it also refers here, as has become customary in economic policy debates, in the sense transferred from the framework of thinking in biology, to the dynamic set of relationships between conditions and actors which, through their interaction, are able to nourish and promote a stock or a development in the economic area.
- *Supply or care provision* (*Versorgung* in German) is understood as an organised sphere of action in which infrastructural facilities are set up, made available and carried out which cannot be provided by the individual or by certain groups of people themselves in order to cover elementary material, social and health-related needs. As a continuous process, care supply is the provision of general interest services. Institutionally, human service provision is located in the areas of social welfare and health care.
- *Care work*, as distinguished on the one hand from professional services in care and on the other hand from gainful employment, refers to the activity of caring, educating, helping and supporting as well as everyday domestic care of relatives or other people. Care work is partly paid and largely unpaid.
- *Welfare* means to get along in a satisfactory manner. It is an experience in its course form (not merely a static well-being) and results in the personal conduct of life and supra-individually in the comfort of the community, the economic activity in it and with the provided care.
- *Host* (*Wirt* and *Wirtin* in German; the English term is gender neutral) should be called a person who is in charge of and responsible for a room or task area (ideally a household). It is the field of action of her procurement. (Roles of entertaining and facilitating here may be ignored.) The host manages for the stock of value and the maintenance of life in his area of responsibility. In social networking, the person can be the “host” of concerns of connected participants.