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**Feeble Flutterings and Creaturely Collaborations:**

**Developing Interanimality in the Anthropocene through a Feminist Care Ethic of Honey Bees**

**Tamar Law| December 20th, 2015**

**Professor Craig Campbell**

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“People have forgotten this truth," the fox said. "But you mustn’t forget it. You become responsible forever for what you’ve tamed. You’re responsible for your rose.”

“I am looking for friends. What does that mean -- tame?"

"It is an act too often neglected," said the fox. "It means to establish ties." 

"To establish ties?"

"Just that," said the fox. "To me, you are still nothing more than a little boy who is just like a hundred thousand other little boys. And I have no need of you. And you, on your part, have no need of me. To you I am nothing more than a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But if you tame me, then we shall need each other. To me, you will be unique in all the world. To you, I shall be unique in all the world....” 

― [Antoine de Saint-Exupéry](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/1020792.Antoine_de_Saint_Exup_ry), [The Little Prince](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/2180358)

**Part 1: The Man Who Planted Trees**

As I sat at a cold, plastic desk, arranged in rigid rows in a flickeringly fluorescent classroom I struggled with finding the willpower to learn the French words for the different species of trees that lay in front of me. *Beech, hêtre. Willow, saule. Birch, bouleau. Maple, érable*. The words felt sour and limp in my mouth. This was not just because of the foreignness of the language itself, but because I felt distanced from what the words actually meant. What use was being able to name a tree if I couldn’t identify it by standing underneath it? I wasn’t bothered with learning them in English, why should I in French? The vocabulary was from a short story by Jean Giono titled, “The man who planted seeds.” A French Johnny Appleseed, the piece chronicles the story of a soldier who meets a hermit in the Alps strolling along with his flock of sheep, earnestly planting one hundred acorns a day. Hunched over his rod, the man crouches close to the soil and carefully tucks each kernel away. In time, a thick copse will grow, shading the land, allowing other species to flourish.

When probed by the narrator, the old man told him that he planted trees for no purpose, no aim. There was no underlying ambition that surrounded this small act. Yet, it undeniably had a lasting effect. When asked if he knew who owned the land he was planting on, he said no, and he did not, in fact, care. The narrator remarks that in thirty years the 10,000 trees he’ll have planted would be remarkable, the hermit simply replies, “*if God gave him life, in thirty years he would have planted so many other trees that these ten thousand would be like a drop of water in the ocean.”*

In the moment, as a far too busy junior in high school, more concerned with the bustle of college applications and a boyfriend who wasn’t quite living up to the title, the story missed its mark on me. I memorized the vocabulary. I knew how to say acorn and hermit in French knew how to conjugate obscure verbs related to herding, but I did not grasp the small, yet fierce, message of the story. However, in a way, the story planted its own seed. I began to think about it from time to time. I tried to understand why this one man would do such a thing. I imagined a landscape now dotted with swishing trees, willows draping their heavy limbs after years of growth, and maples being tap tap tapped for their sweet source energy.

As the species that surrounded me became identifiable as a result of taking courses that gave them names, a genus + species stamped on them in approval like letters in a post office, my world became a little more magical. Unknown faces became familiar in the thickets I traversed. As I learned the chemical interactions and intricate relations occurring beneath their rough exteriors, I continued to think of this man. In a world that seemed to be crumbling around me, and the future becoming bleaker the more I learned, this story was a form of nourishment. In a way, I clung to it. If one man out there did something like that, others may too. Curiously, I started to look into this story. I wanted to find a face to place on my mental alter. I was met with a cold flash of reality. “Sorry to disappoint you,” wrote Giono, “but Elzéard Bouffier is a fictional person. The goal was to make trees likeable, or more specifically, make planting trees likeable.”

**Part 2: Held Hostage by the Anthropocene**

Does it matter that this man wasn’t real, but merely conjured up by the mere imaginings of a writer; alive through the scratching’s of a pen? To me, at first, yes, it did matter. I was startled that my own fantasy had been stripped of its credibility. Then I was angry at my own foolish naïveté. The world seemed sadder with the loss of this acorn burying man. As before, at night I crouched over my computer screen, watching video after video of the world in ruin. This may seem melodramatic, and in a way it was. Bearing witness to the suffering seemed to be an act of kindness. It was what I knew how to do. Images swirled in my head, bombarding my consciousness. The ease of surrounding yourself with the atrophication of the world is alarming in its own right. The tendrils of the anthropocene are everywhere, ubiquitous with human life. Endless lines of cattle marching to their meticulously planned, sterile slaughter. Stretches of barren land, plundered of its biotic riches, turned into hostile deserts. City limits inching forward, eating the surrounding green in the new construction of homogenous steel cells. Exhaust spewing from machines, the unkind BEEP BEEP BEEP of development, the land ripped open for its promise of the continuation of this new narrative of growth.

**Welcome to the Anthropocene**-- a feeling of slipping, an incessant vertigo, a bubbling helplessness. Except now, I couldn’t even begin to imagine the soulful man planting acorns, representing some form of hope. I felt defenseless and turned away from these images. For a stretch of time I ignored them and this fact of existence. Yet, this reality is inescapable. The anthropocene is a hall of mirrors. It subsumes and then consumes you. I tried to do my part, yet no matter how many times I remembered to turn off the faucet while brushing my teeth, no matter the absence of dairy and meat from my life, no matter how many times I composted my food scraps or recycled my waste, I still felt silly. The agency that had been attributed to me felt false. These small acts felt trivial and I felt like a hypocrite. It all felt so much bigger than me, bigger than what I could do, bigger than I could possibly imagine. Turning off one light wasn’t going to save the world.

My experience elucidates how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a single story. A single narrative robs people of their own dignity. The narrative of the anthropocene, a geological era created by the ramifications of human hubris falls into this trap. It behooves us to care, but then tortures us when we do. It suffocates nascent gurgles of hope. In this way, many turn away from the harsh reality of the time we live in. They continue their lives, with their blinders on. But not caring isn’t part of my genetic makeup. I didn’t know how to care in a meaningful way. How do I express my care without tokenizing it? How can my actions fortify my feelings without being a meager simulacrum of hope? How can one person actually make a difference?

In this essay I examine my own exploration with caring in this time of powerlessness, through my experience and my imaginings with honeybees[[1]](#footnote-1). I re-examine my own agency within this era. In tandem, my own care for the world has nurtured a care for myself. These, as I have come to learn, are not mutually exclusive. It is not necessary to be a martyr. To care for yourself is to care for the world.

**Part 3: The Girl Who Makes *(is making)* Beehives *(a beehive)***

I am constructing a beehive. I have constructed a bee garden. A bee-sanctuary, filled with yummy bee things. Bulbs with names as beautiful as their flowers. *Hyacinth, fritillaria, crocosmia.* In creating a small home for bees, deliberately wo-man made, I aim to understand the historic interspecies exchange that has spanned history. I try to engage with an eco-feminist care ethic that insists on an opening of the self and a receiving of the other.

I started this project with a vague, popularized notion of the importance of the bee- as a pollinator, a provider of sweet sweet honey, of the many Halloween costumes worn, the ecosystems they enable through their tiny, buzzing engineering’s. What I hadn’t realized when I started this intellectual probing was the reflection of the bee on our society. Yes, I realized that with the loss of the bee we would lose an unimaginable amount of agriculture and botanical diversity—but I didn’t truly understand the ethical issues that predominated this loss. Matthews asks, "Does the loss of the honeybee—if lose her we do—matter? What do we lose in losing her?"

In my small act of solidarity with the bees, in making a habitat for them in a world where this is becoming increasingly detached and systematized, I am reflecting on this question. I am reflecting on the moral considerability of individual bees, of bee colonies, of bees as a species. I am reflecting on my own personal connection to the bee, and to what the bee represents.

I began thinking about bees. Really thinking. I stoked an inner bee-reverie, a paean of bees. I became indoctrinated in a bee-ontology. I opened myself to the bee. And in really paying homage to the bee, I began to really see the bee. I started to understand the experiential world of the bee, how I myself am implicated, and used the bee as an understanding of the anthropocene.

In this project I cerebrate on my own individual agency and duty in tandem with our collective agency and duty. Through this, I develop a new ethic towards my relation with the Anthropocene. This relation is contingent on my own privilege as a white, cis- female who has the economic support and ability to spend the time considering these things.

We started this course with a critical conception of our options in the anthropocene—how do we account for what we have done? Where do we go from here? Rather than relying on technological innovation or waiting for our inevitable failure, I want to consider the merit of small acts of kindness and caring. I want to ponder the reciprocity of inter species kindness as a model for change. Perhaps I am naïve but I believe that these small acts of kindness, rather than grandiose structural change aspirations, can lead to a butterfly effect. By considering the bee, I ask those around me to consider the bee. And so on. We are not victims to the anthropocene, not simpering, docile bodies. Rather, we have the capacity to transform our own surrounding, much like the bee itself.

**Part 4: The Case of the Honey Bee**

Bees have been hit by a perfect, man-made storm of destruction. Bees are entwined with human history, tamed for their honey and beeswax. The rapid acceleration of human consumption and mechanization of our interaction with the bees has paid its price. What once was a celebrated and intimate cross species exchange has been abused. A rise of migrant bee keeping, massive pollination events, and the use of toxic chemicals has left its mark on bee populations. Bees have been taken out of their own balance with their ecosystem, monopolized for their work. Placed on trucks, hauled across state-lines and shipped from country to country, bees have been forced to specialize. With mono-crops there are now mono-bees. Bees have been controlled to ignore their own natural tendencies. Rather than nestling down for the winter, most bee populations now work for all the seasons, trucked from one crop to another. They are fed sugar syrups and corn syrups to keep them buzzing. There is no chance for rest.

In response to these extreme measures, a vanishing began. Coined as “Colony collapse disorder,” bees started to disappear. Hives were discovered empty. Abandoned. Worker bees dissipated, leaving the queen and the young. Whisperings between home beekeepers began who noticed these changes. The industrial beekeepers didn’t catch on quite as fast. Different scientific speculations give insight into the different factors that may be causing this, but it is undeniable; humans are at fault.

**Part 5: Imagining an After**

When bees cease buzzing

What will happen to this world

No longer held from pole

To pole in a network of flight

Who will tell the flowers to bloom

with the seasons, the continents

to slow their drift, and the earth to hold fast to its hot core[[2]](#footnote-2)

I am sitting in a coffee shop across from a father and a child, around 6, bent over a world map. As he points out major cities, complete with funny accents, making references to people they know across the globe, he stitches an explanation of climate change. As he describes the rising sea levels, pointing to the landmasses that will soon be covered, her eyes grow wide. She looks absolutely horrified. I look on, quietly pulsing numbers through my mind. Yes, this girl will see these places. But will her children? My children?

Recently, a book titled, “A World Without Us,” by Alan Weisman gained critical attention. It asked readers to imagine, on their own volition, how, if humans suddenly vanished, the world would look in ten, fifty, one hundred and then thousands years from. The answer? The earth would revert back, gradually, to its original state. Humans would be an evanescent, layered memory in the particles of accumulating rock. The earth would be wiped clean. Inoculated to believe that humans are uniquely unique and exceptionally exceptional[[3]](#footnote-3) this imagining struck a chord with many. It caused people to conceptualize how truly infinitesimal we are in the large temporal scale of earth’s history. The ephemeral nature of our own human presence was terrifying for many and motivating for some.

Visualization is not my forté and luckily this is something I won’t encounter in my own lifetime. I don’t really care to imagine this, in some ways I believe we have it coming for us. This thought experiment is just that—an experiment. However, I may be confronted with not just imagining but also actually living in a world without bees. What would a beeless world look like?

This cataclysmic event will not erupt in some cacophony of roaring alarm. Instead, it is the sound of one less buzz, the silencing of whirring. It is the gradual waning of color, the seeping of vibrancy from landscapes. The slow forgetting of ripe fruit and crunchy vegetables. A world without bees is a less beautiful world. Before the bee, the world was in black and white. Will it return to its chthonic undertones? We don’t have to wait for humanity to steadily ruin the planet; we will be present for the beginning of our encounters at the end of the world, as we know it. Bees are not a fungible resource—humans can attempt to mimic their services, relying on technological advance and human labor to pollinate flower after flower, yet this undermines the true sadness of the loss of the bee. The loss of the bee is beyond losing more than one third of the world’s crops. It is the loss of a source of ecological prowess. But most importantly, it a loss that matters in its own right beyond the eco-system services the bee provides. Value the bee.

**Part 6: A Blessing of Bees, A Curse of Humans**

While the title of this section may seem to crease a false dichotomy, an antagonistic binary, this is not my intention. Rather, I aim to explore the complex connectivity that this *Apis* has had with *Homo sapien*s throughout history. Unfortunately, this ultimately lends itself to a vilification of the humans and a glorification of the bee. In exploring this story, one can explore the plethora of possibilities that await us in addressing this problem.

Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another but also to make it the definite story. This is the case of the bee. In an intricate and inexhaustible history, the bees and humans have co-evolved. In this mutual advancement, humans have come to command the bee. We hold the power and the future of the bee. And now, bees are dying due to our clever success of manipulation. Through selective breeding strategies, elaborate pollination schemes, development of large scale honey production, the bees have become our dutiful playthings. Humans have outstepped the balance of interspecies aid and exploited what once was a mutualistic relationship.

Bees are smart. Consider the waggledance. Consider their plant knowledge. Consider the magic by which the bee finds its way. Consider the complex social order of the bee. So, why does the bee have allegiance to anything other than its hive? Why does the bee tolerate this lackluster treatment? Some may argue they don’t, pointing to the rise of the mutinous, recalcitrant African killer bees that have emerged in the last decade. Perhaps this is their way of seeking a vindictive revenge. I don’t think this is the case—I think this is the feedback that humans had in store for them when we started playing God. I think the bees may still have faith. Bees are winged, but they can’t fly away. Just as we rely on the bees, the bees rely on us.

So let us temper our arrogance and consider the bee. What do bees represent? I would like to suggest that the bee is a literal messenger of love. She is an altruistically wired being with a sophisticated communicative capacity. The bee is a representation of hope. As bees have no borders, they are boundless. The bee is a promoter of the growth of human society, enabling the rapid adaption to varied landscapes via newfound flexible agriculture.

How does the bee allow us to reflect on the collective versus the individual, the difference of duty and agency? She is an example of cooperativity and sociality. How does the bee reflect on our current positionality in the anthropocene? She links the chains between globalization and climate change with the cinch of massive consumerism and de-synced understandings of the natural world. The bee allows watermelons in January, Papayas in March, and the presence of almonds to grace our plates. Yet, we do not appreciate the bee. How did the bee come to be taken for granted? How did she become unloved?

**Part 7: The Bee and Me: A Meditation on the Self**

Part of my internal grappling with this era is not just a loss to the world but also an intimate loss to myself. This loss is the loss of my own conception of this world, my own history with the earth. A loss of the stream I played in growing up and the monarchs I chased in endless fields. It is a loss that implicates the whole of myself (Mathews 160). This loss can begin to feel crippling, especially when one becomes permeable to all of the world’s terrors. I have become dispersed without an inside nor an outside. Images and words seep into me, I am an information sponge. Sometimes it feels like my mind is full, but that I can quite wring it out. The mind becomes floppy without regular use. It is loose. Malleable. We can shape it as we want, so we use it to excess. We fill it to the brim. It is no longer a sponge that has been wrung out—porous and open. Wanting to be filled. Rather, the brain is crushingly jam-packed. We become desensitized. We lose our ability to care. This shifts into an obsession with a world we can control and understand, a technological world.

We are caught up in a tangle of distractions, hypnotized by human made technologies (Abrams 22). We begin to forget our own carnal corporeality. In our engagement with screens, we shut ourselves off from the multiplicity of senses and experiences that relate us to our actual planet. We forget our connections, our roots to the flora and fauna, and so begin to shelter ourselves against ourselves. We create a technological self. “We are human only in contact, and conviviality with what is not human (Abram 22).” If this is the case, what are we doing to ourselves in building gilded prisons of the mind in which only technology is embraced?

As part of this process, I have slowly been dismantling myself from my technological self. I used my wire cutters. Unwire me. We’ve lost touch with ourselves. Click, refresh, scroll. An unyielding, unstopping onslaught of information overload, constantly uploading into our brains. I’ve lost touch with myself. An android of a person who unceasingly checks and rechecks machines for gratification. Intangible gratification of the next like, comment, text, email, bing—poke. The world is not spinning any faster but mine is. Sitting in silence is hell. Can’t do it. Need to do it. A deep guttural yearning to reconnect. Reconnect to what? What is this modern prison we have constructed for ourselves? My blood source has been rewired so that it is wired. Wired to this cyber-age and wired to a necessity to be constantly connected. All my friends are wired. We are wired together, through this tumultuous form of communication that isn’t actually real. If words are passed through a screen are they real?

Heavy, bogged down, need to cut the wires. Need to cut it off. In this technological fast, I began to explore the imperatives of solitude, the drippings of silence. Transfixed by technology, I have short-circuited the sensorial exchange between my breathing body and the bodily terrain (Abrams 262). I supplant my technological yearnings with my own mind. I find the nourishment of my own breath. I imagine my veins are filled with chamomile tea and that my heart is the fire in the hearth. I begin to understand my body as a flock of cells, riding waves of sensation. In this way, I consider the dividual and the individual. I explore the relationality of our existence. I began to attune myself to my animistic sensibility. In this way, I can truly care for bees. As a beginner meditator it is often a frustrating, grueling activity. It is imperfect yet deeply rewarding. The human mind is incredible. As I learned to quiet the mind, I learn to tap into a deeper self, a self that is imbrued with gratitude and a curious connectivity. The lines become blurred between the “others” of the world and myself. I become a subject, not in front of an objective background, but I begin to share agency with others who have lost their autonomy (Latour 5).

Human stratification from nature is a farce. This separation creates antimony, a clamorous need to reconnect. It is what made me unwire myself. This disconnection paints allurement with the natural world and a painful feeling of being out of sync. But, it is in our own control to re-sync ourselves to the rhythms of life. Our mind is not an otherworldly essence—if we begin to acknowledge links between our inner selves and the terrain around us, we, “loosen our psyche from its confinement within a strictly human sphere.” We become part of the earth, immersed within its depths, and only from this place can we truly feel for the earth (Abram 262). From this place, I learned how to grieve for the bees.

**Part 8: Grieving for Bees**

Freya Mathews has said that it isn’t that bees have become unloved, but rather they have lost their place in our cultural imagination. We have forgotten the role that bees play in enabling our lives; the process of pollination and the bee’s part in this process has slipped from our collective consciousness. It is not only taken for granted but also only vaguely understood (Mathews 160). I disagree. I think to become lost from our thoughts one needs to disconnect appreciation and gratitude. The plight of the bee is representative of a loss of love, for the bee, but also for the planet.

Humans can be fairly ridiculous animals. In the face of extensive species die-off and ecological crisis, we cling to images of creatures we can understand. Charismatic mega-fauna dominate our thoughts as we worry about rising ice caps. A pervasive worry for polar bears and orangutans, for seemingly soft and cuddly creatures, has dominated our worry. It strikes me that the very human categories of affection, cuteness, beautiful, graceful, wild and domestic, have been some of the mainstays of the general public appeal of environmental and habitat conservation. Human rhetoric inadvertently creates a hierarchy in which entire species fall outside these laudable human values, beyond our registers of despair. When we think of the plight of the polar bears or orangutans, we develop a sense of moral outrage; a horror that is reminiscent of the feelings conjured by human atrocities (Mathews 161). But the disappearance of the honeybee doesn’t receive the same sort of anguish. What makes the bee’s life less grievable than those of the charismatic mega fauna? Perhaps its lack of fur, its lack of thick pose and a wet nose. Perhaps it is because it has compound eyes, and a tri-part body plan. Moving past our own mammal centric view of this world, we need to consider the bee in order to consider the other, less explicitly vital insect species. Our own ethic of morality has been scripted by a lexicon that precludes care from an entire kingdom.

In thinking of the bee, we often think of a hive—a whirring, clicking, cluster fuck thick with bees. Yet, we need to consider the individual. The honeybee has interests of her own, she is “a teleological center of life,” and is sentient. She makes decisions, and dare I say, the honeybee thinks. Against the typical framework of moral considerability, the honeybee should then be considered.

In her question on the loss of the honeybee, Mathews pinpoints the physical and tangible importance of grieving for the bee. “Without the honeybee, the renewal of plant life is impaired, and with impairment of plant renewal, terrestrial life generally is doomed. (Mathews 174).” We have already imagined the After, a time bleak and desolate without the vigorous thrums and hums of the little creature. A time we don’t want to reach. The first step of acting is grief. In grieving for disappearance of the honeybee, we grieve for the diminishment of the biosphere (Mathews 174). We grieve for the end of the single story narrative, a story that ties us to this earth and to the other species that inhabit it. This is the story that got us here in the first place. Through grief, we can begin to care.

**Part 9: On beeing the last Bee**

*I hover. Suspended, facing the subtle tossings of the wind. My wings feebly whirring, unsure where to go. Around me, looming flowers offer no solace. Despite their colorful beckoning’s, I cannot seek refuge there. Yet—where do I go? My home is no longer a home. The edges of my geometric vision are skewed. The path back, that I have traced many times, is useless. There is no back. The keeper hasn’t come with her smoke, her large white hat, her suite, in days. The last I saw of her, as I zigzagged my way across her face, desperate to be noticed, her fingers brushed me out of her line of site. I watched as she burned my home. The smoke no longer soothed me, no longer caused a drunken bliss, but instead the tendrils of smoke erupted into flames, the hot light reflected my own inner turmoil. Weeks before all this, when my sisters still encircled me, I watched as the keeper plucked away our Queen. Held between her thumb and forefinger, held against the wooden railing, the keeper gently decapitated her. Muttering all the while about disease. A squish and she was gone. We were in uproar! We circled her body. It couldn’t be. We were lost. Day by day, I watched as my sister’s flew from our home, in search of something. I do not know what. There is nothing else. They did not return. Our numbers dwindled, until it was just three. My last sister’s left in the night. They were confused. We no longer were synced with our innate understanding of direction. They did not return either. I was the last left at the hive when it burned. I drifted above with the smoke, following its trail. Now, I wait. I aimlessly flutter. I dip and reach and fall as the bustle of the breeze pushes me. I am alone.*

**Part 10: Towards An Eco-Feminist Care Ethic**

Caring becomes diluted in a world that inundates you daily with stories that pull at your heartstrings. You begin to think you should care for everything. This of course removes the potency and power of the act of caring. In my case, in my attempt to connect with the world and bear witness to its tragedies, I undermined my own capacity to care. This project enabled me to refocus my own understanding of care and develop my own capacity to care.

Caring involves a “feeling with” the other (Nodding 30). It is understood as displaying kindness and concern for others, or, being able to empathize with that other. This form of caring necessitates understanding the other’s situation. It is the “power of projecting one’s personality into, and so fully understanding, the object of contemplation (OED).” This is a particularly western and masculine type of caring, where the act itself is completed via the projection of one’s feelings onto another.

In my own understanding of a care ethic, I lean heavily into an eco-feminist care tradition. This is based on reception, rather than projection (Noddings 30). This is a form of caring that neither plans nor analyzes by attempting to put myself into the other’s situation. Rather, this form of care is reliant on receiving the other. In opening yourself to the other, you become totally the other. The ultimate goal of empathy is achieved without the efforts associated with projection. It is important to note that this is not a relinquishment of self, but rather, “a shared energy,” one that increases both the care-er and the cared for in strength and hope (Noddings 32). The one caring is also dependent upon the cared for and it is through this mutual reciprocity that caring truly occurs (Noddings 43).

Ecofeminism has often been criticized for its essentialist tendencies. A simplification of the complex relationship between human and nature reduced to a biological basis. Genitals. Feminist theorists have either endorsed an innately feminine connection to nature or rejected it. Some have suggested a way of traversing this terrain by developing an ecofeminist philosophy that is built on an “inclusivist, integrative framework (Warren).” Rather than being a gynocentric or reductionist view, this form of ecofeminism underlines the complex connectivity between all life. Regardless of this debate and the larger question of nature versus nurture, the linkage between females and the environment is flagrant. Perhaps this is due to a connection to life bearing, in which both Women and the Earth are, “providers of life, sustenance, and creativity (Swanson 83).” Understanding the difference of feminine and masculine energies is a science that is not quantifiable but rather felt. These energies are directly connected to care.

Women are often associated with care, defining themselves as persons and moral agents with a special capacity of care (Noddings 40). This connection again stems from the maternalistic understanding of women. While some wish to quickly reject this understanding due to its own essentialist roots, I wish to explore it. By rejoicing feminine care, we rejoice forms of care that are, “rooted in receptivity, relatedness and responsiveness. (Noddings 2).” These forms of care are a mode of experience, dynamic and malleable. This is not limited simply to women. Rather, it is simply a different conception of how care is applied. To have an ethic built on caring is, “characteristically and essentially feminine—which is not to say… that is cannot be shared by men.” (Noddings 8). This is an ethic that valorizes and values the caring traditionally associated with women, and offers itself as an example of care for all. It is a type of ethic that is structurally pluralistic, adaptable to each circumstance and being.

This ethic of caring, based upon a principle of the feminine, lends itself easily to caring for the beyond human. Animals have been fraught in the discussion of ethics as we do not have a collective sense of the animal as subject in the way that we have a sense of the human as subject (Noddings 149). This often results in human behaviors towards animals being through them and not towards them (Noddings 162). For example, in a traditional understanding of caring ethics, I could not fully care for the bees as the bees would not be able to receive this caring as non-human subjects. In a feminist care ethic this is bypassed as multiple forms of receptivity are accepted. This ecofeminist ethic of care is inclusive (Swanson 95). It expands the boundaries of care by endorsing an openness of the care-er. This openness crosses the species divide, and creates a shared energy that is mutually beneficial.

Part 11: On Caring

In this project, more than an actual tangible object, I have created a new understanding of what it means to care. In my efforts before to project myself into situations of despair, I felt worn out and weary, crushed by unending burden of doom. My galvanizing moment was the realization that this form of caring, which seems most important in the quickening pace of disaster, was unsustainable. Caring should be aimed at promoting mutual well-being, and I was doing anything but.

In making a beehive and a bee sanctuary, I have entered a new dialogue with the bees and engaged in a feminist ethic of care. Only with interc-oherence can aware self-existence be generated. By according to the desires of the bees, seeing the individual bee and the collective bee, I secure their existence and my own. This becomes a code of mutuality (Mathews 175). I am constructing a home for the bees, and through this, I have learned about myself.

So is the case of the disappearing honeybees an ethical issue? Yes. It is an issue that calls us to examine our own ethical alignments. An issue that asks us to act and to give, but also to reconstruct how to care. It asks us to step down from a pedestal and realign ourselves with a basic harmony. An ethic of intercorporeality, creating a connectedness of beings through body. This ethic implies openness and employs empathy. This ethic gives rise to a shared orientation towards the world. Ingold said, “animals are not like persons, they are persons.[[4]](#footnote-4)” I argue, “persons are not like animals, they are animals.”

This ethic calls for learning to be affected in a multispecies world. It is a question of scale, no longer should we be disparate from experience or animate life. It calls for bio-interactiveness, a post-Cartesian understanding of the connection of us humans and the rest. This is the paradox of perception, we can see ourselves as above and beyond or we can embed ourselves in the same experiential world. By using bees as my guide, I have engaged in a type of bio-mimicry. Their vibrant minds have drawn a beeline for me, allowing me into their flight pathos, in order to escape my own construction of reality. The bees have allowed me to enter into a more than human world. They have let me construct my own love letter to the earth.

In short, the bees have given me a crash course in reciprocity. Ethics is not possible when entities are not able to relate, when they are not part of the same world and have no shared commonalities (Abram 2001). To actively care, it is not simply a matter of passive acceptance or collection of knowledge. If we just do this, “we rob ourselves of our own active agency, our own ability to willfully act, to respond, to reciprocate another being (Abram 2001).” Caring is only possible if there is some common ground, a mutual exchange between us and the rest of the world.

**Part 10: budding fruition**

To learn about caring for the bees it was not only helpful, but also necessary to care for myself and to learn about myself. To fully give and reciprocate with the bees, I need to embrace my own senses. It is only at this scale, the scale of sensorial interactions, that we can notice and respond to the needs of the living world (Abram 268). In this exchange, this communication and commingling, with bees, I affirm their existence and my own role in their fate (Abram 56). I had to awaken these senses to become attuned to the intentionality of the world, the precarious balances and subtle offerings we give to one another. I stopped estranging nature as the fantastical and began to see myself as part of it. Through this practice, I began to persuade myself that this isn’t an unattainable goal. Practice is persuasion, and my hope is that by my small actions others can begin to step in line, propagation will ensue, and they will be able to experience the same lift this semester has granted me.

In the face of the all-consuming anthropocene it is not a moral impossibility to conceive of ourselves as part of this earth. Rather, it is a moral obligation. We need to see ourselves in the beating heart of the forest, the living lungs of the biosphere. To put the earth first and break free of our own psychological inertia, we need to be part of the ultimate equation. To be sensuous is to be interstitially linked in our own grief and love, to the planet. It allows our own subjective reality to become stitched into the ground of objectivity (Abram 34).

The story of The Man Who Planted the Trees ends with the narrator’s thoughts on the hermit, ““that a *single man, relying only on his own simple physical and moral resources, was able to transform a desert into this land of Canaan, I am convinced that despite everything, the human condition is truly admirable.”* I guess in a way this is true—the hermit rocks. But, to endorse this statement is to ignore all that I have come to understand in this project. The narrator is blind to his own internalized anthrocentrism. This was not a single man. The hermit was simply engaging in a land ethic. The hermit saw himself in the landscape. He saw himself in the trees. In this way, his acts of planting were his own dialogue with the earth. Thus, it is not the human condition of this man that is truly admirable, but the incredible syncretic possibility that he captivated, his own acceptance of the world and his entangled vulnerability. In planting acorns this man dovetails his love, distilling it into a simple act, and cuts across the chiasmic divides of human versus nature.

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1. I often refer to bees as a collective species. Really I am referring to the honeybee, *Apis*. This genus of bee has many sub-species based on locality. I homogenize the species when I refer to them as “bees,” but this is a necessary simplification for the sake of this essay. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Inspired and reformulated by beth franks [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This phrasing is borrowed from David Abram [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. I had this quotation scribbled in my notes from the conference I attended. I cannot find the citation for it but I wanted to play with my understanding of it. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)