Green Paper 03 — Viability and the Conditions for Care

Green Papers: Notes Toward Planetary Guardianship

Author: Lars A. Engberg · Status: Working paper (v0.1). Revised over time. · January 2026

Author's note — AI co-creation. These papers are working notes authored by Lars A. Engberg. They were drafted and edited in conversation with an AI language model (*GPT-5 Thinking mini*). The AI assisted with phrasing, organization, and initial drafting; the author curated, edited, and is fully responsible for substantive claims, omissions, and interpretations. Where passages were substantially shaped by the AI, this is indicated in the editorial log. The work is offered as field notes and an experiment in collaborative composition rather than a finished, peer-reviewed product.

Abstract

This paper explores care as a viability condition. Care is often treated as a moral ideal or a personal virtue, but it is also a systemic capacity: something that requires time, attention, trust, and institutional support.

In overloaded systems, care becomes fragile. It collapses not only through cruelty, but through exhaustion, fragmentation, and the disappearance of repair. Viability, in this context, refers to the ability of people, relationships, and institutions to remain coherent enough for responsibility to be carried over time.

1. Care is not only intention

Many societies speak of care as a value. Many institutions speak of care as a principle. Individuals often hold care as an aspiration.

Yet care is not sustained by intention alone. It requires capacity: time, stability, and access to repair.

2. Viability as a quiet ethical concept

Viability means the capacity to remain alive and coherent through change. It is not perfection. It is not growth. It is the ability to continue without collapse.

3. The hidden costs of care

Care is not free. Even when it is offered lovingly, it has costs: emotional labor, time, responsibility load, and exposure to other people's distress.

4. Institutions that ask for care while removing its conditions

Many contemporary institutions demand care rhetorically while making it practically impossible.

5. Care under planetary constraint

Planetary instability changes the ethical landscape. Care is no longer only a local interpersonal matter.

6. A practical orientation

The point of this paper is not to define care. The point is to protect the conditions that allow care to remain possible.

Methods / Editorial note

These Green Papers are written as field notes and working reflections. The drafting process combined (1) authorial writing and revision, (2) iterative prompts to an AI language model for drafting and editing, and (3) conventional editorial revision. Key practices:

- **AI assistance:** The AI produced early drafts and suggested language; the author reviewed and revised every paragraph.
- **Sourcing:** The papers use a "working bibliography" as orientation rather than a formal literature review. Citations are selective; empirical claims should be verified before formal use.
- **Verification:** The author is responsible for verification of cited sources and accepts responsibility for errors. Prior to academic submission, each reference and empirical claim should be independently checked and expanded.
- **Versioning:** Each paper carries a version line (v0.1). Substantial revisions will be tracked in a change log at Planetary Guardians / Spiralweb.

Closing questions

- What makes care sustainable rather than heroic?
- Where does care collapse first: body, relation, or institution?
- Which institutional designs consistently produce overload?
- What forms of repair restore viability after rupture?
- How do we carry planetary responsibility without burning out?

References (Working bibliography — selected, APA 7)

- Bachelard, G. (1958). *The Poetics of Space*. Beacon Press.
- Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. University of Chicago Press.
- Durkheim, É. (1912). *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (English translations available).
- Illich, I. (1973). *Tools for Conviviality*. Calder & Boyars.
- Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the Social*. Oxford University Press.
- Lederach, J. P. (1997). *Building Peace*. USIP Press.
- Meadows, D. H., Meadows, D. L., Randers, J., & Behrens III, W. W. (1972). *The Limits to Growth*. Universe Books.
- Ostrom, E. (1990). *Governing the Commons*. Cambridge University Press.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone*. Simon & Schuster.
- Raworth, K. (2017). *Doughnut Economics*. Chelsea Green Publishing.
- Rockström, J., & Steffen, W. (2009). A safe operating space for humanity. *Science*.
- Sennett, R. (2008). *The Craftsman*. Yale University Press.
- Simon, H. A. (1997). *Administrative Behavior*. Free Press.
- Steffen, W., et al. (2015). Planetary boundaries update. *Science*.
- Tronto, J. C. (1993). *Moral Boundaries*. Routledge.
- Turner, V. (1969). *The Ritual Process*. Aldine.
- Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Sage.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1971). *Playing and Reality*. Tavistock Publications.

License & archival recommendation

Spiralweb: spiralweb.earth