

TOWARDS “A CARE MANIFESTO”: INTERVIEW WITH JENNIFER NEDELSKY ON “GOOD LIFE”¹

Interviewed by Özlem Aslan

Toronto, October 2016

In this interview with feminist theorist Jennifer Nedelsky, we talked about her forthcoming book “A Care Manifesto: (Part) Time for All”. Nedelsky juxtaposes the feminist literature on carework with the studies on employment and argues that the organization of carework and employment cannot be discussed separately. While doing this she attempts to overcome the prejudices against part-time work and calls us to reconsider carework as a creative task that constitutes foundation for our relationship to ourselves as well as other living beings.

Let’s start with your motivation to revisit the issue of carework. Why did you feel the necessity to bring carework back onto the feminist agenda?

There are two kinds of literatures on the topic. There is a lot of literature on the importance of care and value of care: many feminist economists have done good work on why care is valued but not adequately recognized. And then there is another, different set of literature, on hours of work, the problems of employment and the need to provide better protection for precarious work, and the need to reduce the hours of work. But, these literatures don’t often fully come together. I thought that what we needed was a radical restructuring of both work and care. Because, you can’t restructure the gendered division of household labor without restructuring the workforce, and really, you can’t restructure the workforce unless you restructure the organization of care.

Your approach stands as a continuation of the feminist literature on care, but it is also radically different from it. Could you tell us more about the ways in which your work differs from previous work?

I will just first highlight the continuity side. This is in part inspired by Nancy Fraser’s article, “After the family wage” and the whole idea that we have to change the gendered patterns of caretaking. However, she wasn’t focused on the simultaneous transformations in the workplace that would be required to make this happen. Joan Toronto, who I had

talked to at an early stage of the project, thought it was important that the people who talk about reducing the workweek to add the dimension of norms of unpaid care into their work. My project would advocate for a change in social norms that will have to be facilitated by some legal changes. Right now, the norms for men are really clear. An adult competent man should have a full time job. He isn't really an adequate man if he doesn't. For women it is more uncertain and ambiguous: in some ways you fall short no matter what you do. If you stay home, you are wasting your talents, if you work full time then you are failing your children. The norms are unsettled and inconsistent for women. It is important to remember how much social norms can change even though they are very deeply embedded norms. The norms I am after, are that everybody engages in paid work between 12 and 30 hours of week, nobody stays home and doesn't do any paid work and nobody works more than 30 hours a week. If you don't meet these norms you suffer the same social disapprobation that will happen to a man who tells somebody that he has never had a job. Similarly, this is the more novel side of it. It is that strong social norm that everybody participates in unpaid carework between 12 and 30 hours of week. One of the things that means, is that your care responsibilities no longer just follow the arc of an individual life. My picture even if you don't have intense demands from your immediate family and friends, your care responsibilities are always there and you take on care responsibilities within a community of care. People will organize these informal, small communities of reciprocal care- it could be your neighbourhood, your block, could be a church, it could be a political organization where there are strong norms that people will look out for each other. Not in a quid pro quo way; you know, if I cook for you, you cook for me. But, we know that people will be attending to the needs of the others in their care community and providing that care, if people get sick and need help, or they break their legs or they are elderly and they can't shovel a sidewalk.

For many years, feminists tried to address the unpaid nature of carework. You argue that paid carework cannot be considered as carework. Do you think this demand was wrong?

In a sense, yes. First of all, I wouldn't say that I don't consider paid carework as care, because I do. But I don't believe that paid carework constitutes a substitute for your unpaid care obligations. Even though you do carework as part of your job, you still need to be doing some unpaid carework. Part of the reason for that is that as I picture the evolution of these new norms, care becomes a really central part of social citizenship. That is how

you know each other, how you learn about care in a much wider way than you might learn just from your job. Our bondage to other people is an important part of the building of community, which is essential for both well-being and democracy. That's the distinction between paid care and unpaid care. Why is this really different from just housework? Some of it is pragmatic. That demand has been on the table for decades and has never made any inroad. But part of it is that so much care needs to be done by people who affectively care for the people who they are offering care to. Monetization is not the best way to respond to that. People say that in our culture the only way value of anything is ever recognized, is if you pay for it. I want to resist that and say that everybody should be participating in this unpaid care. Part of what I am after of course, is that men and women equally care for their children. This does involve policies to make sure that both men and women are able to be home with an infant. Actually, I think it is very important that they be home at the same time in that first month or so after a baby is born. When both parents are there, they both become the primary caregivers. They both learn this expertise. You don't have a situation where the woman is the one who really knows how to take care of the baby, and the guy is just the helper. Actually, we see some version of these patterns even in same-sex relationships, usually built around the higher-income owner. I think we are going to get a better quality care over time. I actually think that building a deep understanding of the value of care, is better done this way. Every person learns this value. I picture that this is happening and will change our norms around what young children do and it will change our norms around what elderly people do. Nobody is just a care- receiver. We are all both care-givers and care- receivers throughout our lives. I think that's a better way of transforming the understanding of value of care, than trying to monetize it.

You present carework as an interpersonal relation, but also state that rehabilitating the soil can be considered as carework. Then you add that taking care of pets cannot be. Could you elaborate more on the definition of carework in your mind in relation to human and non-human beings?

This is one of the most difficult parts in the study and it is one that I need to think about more. You should remember that the whole purpose of this argument, is to get people to talk to each other about how they value care. Different care communities could make different judgments about how to evaluate these things. I do think that care for the earth should count as part of care, but it is complicated: as you said, the way I define care is focused on building interpersonal relationships. You know, in the dominant cultures in

the West, we don't have a very good vocabulary for talking about the relationship to the earth as an interpersonal relationship, even though of course in many aboriginal traditions, these are completely normal kind of language. At this stage, it is important not to exclude care from the earth because for so many people in the world, it is actually a relationship of care and the part of what we need globally, is to increase our capacity to understand our relationship to the earth as a caring relationship. So pets I actually think are tricky: for me and many people, important part of what people's actual experience of the human and non-human bond is , comes through their relationship with a pet. Of course, when you have a pet, you have obligations of care too with that particular creature. But, I am reluctant to actually say that you meet your care obligations, your 12-30 hours a week, by walking your dog. In our household, one of my dogs died and I wanted to get a new dog. My family said: 'okay, you can have a new dog, but it is your responsibility. You don't get to not help cooking dinner, because of walking the dog. That's your personal commitment and pleasure.' So taking care of a pet is not a substitute for the collective care obligations. I hope that later on in my life, my husband and I will have a dog together. We will have a shared care commitment. Another close call between those two questions is: what if you are living in a city and you have a garden, but aren't producing vegetables. You are producing flowers, instead. What does that count as? I think that this example is a really close call because for many people, gardening (even with your little backyard gardening) is one of those ways in which you do experience a bond with the earth. Part of what I am after is fostered by that. But I worry about the fact that some people spend lots of money and lots of time in their private garden.

It is hard to decide whether gardening is considered self-care or care for the earth.

I do say that I finally come to the view that we need to have separate designated hours of care for the self. This is a good subject for community deliberation. At the moment, I am a little too worried about growing kinds of care needs there are going to be for elderly people, people who have all kinds of both mental and physical health challenges, to be willing to say that I am spending my 15 hours on my garden. I am not sure if I want to accept that.

I feel like carework has two sides: one of them is the celebration of care as a sacrificial and sacred thing that women do as mothers; and on the other

hand, care is considered as burden. I am going to ask you a question about the burden of care later, but firstly, what is your approach to sacredness of carework?

I do have my own inclinations in that direction, but for the purposes of this public argument, I am not using that kind of language. The language I am using is (as I was referring to briefly before as citizenship language) membership language. People who don't do carework, which I think are mostly men in positions of power, don't understand the way in which care is essential to building bonds. Anyone who does care for young children in a hands-on way understands that. It is one of the important ways that care informs people, so that they have the capacity to be good policy-makers. They get this kind of embodied understanding of care as building bonds. But it is also true with adult-to-adult relationships. I want to cast care in that language. People in our culture, I think mostly wealthy white men, think they can have friendship and family bonds without the care side. I think that getting all the benefits, you know, going out to fancy dinners for example, without actually offering the care, is a misunderstanding of how human relationships work. Then, if we transpose this idea onto a larger scale, these interpersonal bonds also become solidarity bonds. Even though your care communities will be small, and face-to-face, you will be more and more attuned to the interconnections among people, and the need for solidarity at a wider level. That's kind of the approach I am talking about. It is a language of well-being, and a language of collective membership of the sort that can support democracy.

In that context, how do you imagine the power relationship between the caregiver and the caretaker? How can we go beyond a hierarchical relationship?

One of the answers overall in the big context, goes to this idea that everyone will have, by the time they get to be 25 or something, experienced themselves as both caregivers and care-receivers. They will understand that human beings by their nature are both, and something has gone wrong when people get pigeonholed in only one category. There should be no caregivers who aren't receiving care, which of course is common now. People get burnt out, both as mothers and as professional caregivers, because they aren't getting the care they need. But, it is rare that people spend long chunks of their life only being the care-receiver. I think it is really important that, as in traditional societies, the elderly are

present to tell stories to children: in passing on skills they are not just passive care-recipients. So many elderly people live terrible lives, they are isolated, they feel useless, they feel like they are burdens, because care is just a burden.

Just to say a word about that side of it: I think that a big part of the point of this norm transformation, is that people will understand the benefits of care, and not just the burdens. That's another reason why I resist the economizing around care. I think it has been absolutely crucial that the feminist economists have given us a model of the economic value of the carework that's done. But the problem is that it codes all carework as a burden, as a cost, not as a benefit. Carework is the easiest with young children. But people who do that carework, talk about what an important benefit it is to them - actually, even at the other end, people who have been able to be with a parent as they die and care for them over an extended period of time, talk about that as an invaluable experience. It is not easy. It can be even very physically demanding.

You mention the pleasure of care, or creative potential of care, and the bonding function it has: would you like to elaborate on how we can conceptualize care as a creative activity that has pleasure in it?

The easiest cases are of caring for young children, because if you are lucky enough to not be financially stressed and not exhausted, and have somebody who shares the care responsibility with you (these are all the prerequisites for care to be nurturing to you) it is just incomparable joy, watching a child develop. I've learnt that when you get to care for an infant especially, you have the capacity to give in a way that isn't all about what you receive back. One of the benefits is learning that you are not actually a bargaining being. You learn that there is just an unparalleled joy, feeling this love for this infant in a way that you might have thought that you are not capable of. Adult-to-adult relationships are not quite like that and I think maybe, they shouldn't be. But with an infant, you get to have that experience. People also feel like they come to understand something and feel a bond that they know is not replicable in any other way. Dads who play with their children on weekends, they like it, but they are not getting the full dimension. They literally don't understand the bond that forms between the caregiver and the care-receiver. You can't separate it off and say 'let's pay somebody else to do the hard carework, while I get the benefits.' Unfortunately that's so often how childcare is organized, because for many women, there isn't really an option. For men, that is what they end up doing: they pay

someone else to do the carework and they hope to build the bond over dinner and reading bedtime stories, and that's a sad thing.

Do you consider love as a care relationship?

Well, it should be. I think at least in the early stages, most people in love relationships understand that mutual emotional care is part of what builds that love. That's often why you fall in love with somebody, because there is this mutual emotional connection and caring. But again, you know, the gendering of this allows this connection to happen. Because of the way they have been socialized, women will demonstrate their caring, their love, by making him dinner, by maybe even doing his laundry, and so on. He also is modeling his socialization. Maybe he will think his form of caring is taking her out to a nice dinner. He will provide the economic wherewithal for doing that. It's not that taking someone out to dinner cannot be a gift. That is a caring gift but if these tasks get divided, as culturally we are taught to do, the woman expresses her love through care and the man expresses his love through receiving that care, then this isn't a good recipe for a healthy relationship.

How do you think this new approach to carework will effect gender norms, and societal structures in general?

I see this as one of the biggest benefits and the biggest challenges. The hardest norms to change are the ones that are very closely tied to identity and are integrated with a set of multiple norms. That's what I picked as well because these norms around care are so tied to gender identity and so tied to sense of competence, excellence and success— these are a whole set of norms that have to be transformed. Care is so tightly connected to one's identity as a woman. When somebody says, “well, you are an uncaring person, you are not capable of care,” this is a blow to the heart of any woman, because care is so tightly tied up with a woman's identity. I think this crosses boundaries of class, race, ethnicity. Women are supposed to be good at caring -if you aren't good at caring you are a failure as a woman. But for men, it is kind of optional.

Or you would be called “soft” sometimes.

Yes, or it could be negative. I think this is such a huge part of gender identity. If you can just change this one thing, so that men do care and learn the value of care, then women might come to recognize that it is not their sole responsibility, but they need to find a man

who is good at caring. Just like man who has to find a woman who is good at caring. I hope that one of the things that would happen, is that this will actually shift the norms around what we think is sexually attractive. What is considered sexually attractive should shift as this relationship between gender and care shifts. There is some really interesting preliminary, but very hopeful, research on this topic. As men become more involved in care, particularly for children, it seems to disrupt the association between the masculinity and violence, which has been such a difficult project for feminism all over the world. It seems so intractable, I think this is going to turn out to be a tremendously powerful indirect way of shifting the deep connection between masculinity and violence. Even though the relation of masculinity to violence takes different forms in different cultures, it is pretty close to uniform in its prevalence. That's the gender side.

The two other things I want to talk about are excellence in relation to the structure and value of work and the nature of policy making. Western culture has come to identify excellence with focus on one thing. As I was working on this topic I was watching the Olympics at one point. The commentators talk as if excellence is an unquestioned good: you see this wonderful skater and you hear she does nothing but skate. School gets cut way down, they don't see their friends, and they just skate, and you are supposed to admire this commitment to excellence which has brought them to the Olympics. You see something similar with music performers. Each of us experiences this professionally. I think it is so destructive to what a good human life is. It is complicated, because if you live in that competitive world, where you practice skating or you practice running, and you do nothing else and if winning is about carving off one tenth of one second from your race, you probably can't achieve that if you don't do this training. Is that what we want to model as excellence and admire and appreciate? I think the answer has to be, no. I just can't see that that's the right thing to do. Maybe a harder example is physicists: their peak creativity is between a certain number of years. During those years, which happen to be also childbearing years for partners, they need to be totally focused but you know, you have to have some breaks. Your breaks should be with your kids. I recognize that there are many jobs that have episodes of intensity. So if you are a lawyer and you are in litigation -which most lawyers are not - or you are managing some kind of international company merger, which for three months requires your undivided attention, I am not insisting that we undo all that. But, you do that for three months and then the next three months you catch up on all the carework you haven't done. There have to be patterns of rhythm and cycle that recognize intensity. But that's not the same thing as encouraging a young athlete, to spend

eight years of her life, doing nothing but skating. I think excellence of high intensity performance, needs to be reduced, and the way we think of excellence in life, having an excellent life, involves multiplicity if we look at studies on happiness. Those young people are not learning during these crucial years of their life how to build relationships because they are totally focused on this excellence of performance. Do they really catch up? I don't know. But I think our notion of excellence as a singular focus, is a big mistake. This is actually connected also to our sense of what counts as success, what counts as contribution or as high performance, and what counts as excellence in your work, whatever that work are. Relationships and care are somehow put on the side, and you are either doing them in your free time or you pay somebody else to do it. I think that's a terrible mistake. The kinds of norms I am recommending would in and of themselves shift that around, because nobody is spending all their time on work. If they do, they are seen as somebody with a serious mental health problem, - which is probably true. How we value contribution, how we value success, what we define as success all that would change under this kind of system. The last piece about public policy is that we would really come to understand that you aren't going to entrust either a corporation or a country to people who are ignorant of the value of care. Now, the topic isn't even on the table. Nobody asks what people's experience or knowledge of care is. Care is considered something for women, a threat or distraction from what they should be doing, which is excelling at their job. Nobody is asking if this person in charge knows the foundations of human life. Not even when there's a woman in charge. Because, women want to show that they have the competency that men have. I would expect a real reorientation in terms of what we expect from our leaders.

Antimilitarist feminists criticize military institutions, and would argue that the knowledge of care should encourage people not to go to war. On the other hand, there are female policy-makers who probably did some carework at some point in their lives, who still might take their countries to war.

These patterns are cultural patterns. I don't think any of these things can be broken down fully to the individual level. It would be interesting to look at women in charge, like Margaret Thatcher, or whoever, and actually ask how much hands-on care they did. I don't actually know the answer to that. If they were ambitious from when they were young, they probably hired somebody to do a lot of carework as any professional men had to have done. There are very few professionally successful people with high levels of recognition who

have spent half their time doing carework. I did hear from some people who heard me give this talk. They just chose on their own to do that. They sounded very positive. I did have an older student in my class several years ago, who said that she and her husband had done it. Maybe 20 years ago she really had her doubts because it was a terrible career sacrifice for both of them. You just cannot get a tenure track job for part-time. That's why it is so important to change the work structure. You can't just fix the one without the other.

Regarding this transformation: you are insisting on a norm shift rather than systemic change, or structural change - like getting rid of patriarchy, or getting rid of capitalism. Can you elaborate more on your insistence on norms?

Firstly, I don't want to wait for the revolution. I think we can make significant headway on this right away. Although we can't make change in any simple way I think it is possible. Secondly, if you think about democratic decision-making, (leaving aside revolution) I think sometimes you can get a positive upward spiral between norm change and democratic decision-making. I don't think it is only driven by one or the other. Gay marriage is a good example of that: politics responded to norm changes. More norm change means more political response: each facilitates the other. The bottom line is that we have no examples of important democratic social transformation or political transformation like the civil rights movement, women's movement, gay politics, which isn't based on norm change. Because our politicians want votes, most of them do not come into politics with the project of being norm-transformers. They are norm-followers. Realistically, for democratic transformation you have to start at the norms. Like I said, this project isn't going to work without facilitation for good part-time work. We know how to do that because many of the European countries have done it. It will require legal assistance. The more norm change you get, the more legal transformations will happen to facilitate. If you are in a democracy, and if you want to keep democracy and actually want to make it robust, I think this is the way to go. I think this system of mine requires one or two things: a basic income provided by the state to everyone, which would have to be a legal transformation or a return to the idea of a living wage, which was never law, it was always a norm. The living wage was always above the legal minimum wage. The idea was that a man should be able to support his family, his wife and three children. Five people should be able to be supported on 40 hours of work. I want that to be changed. One person can support herself and a child on 20 hours of work: the same basic framework. Capitalism

did fine under the living wage for decades. We need to adopt something like that. I do think that this whole project will reduce material production and reduce material consumption. In the long term this is going to have significant impact. This impact in wealthy western societies is essential because the way we live is unsustainable, using up, gobbling up huge hunks of world's natural resources. It is indefensible in terms of justice and it is unsustainable ecologically. These transformations can be coded as a cost but I think they are also really a benefit. For example, I get to live in this huge big house. I don't think this is sustainable in the long-term. Middle class European professionals do not live in the square footage that North Americans have come to accept as their due as successful middle-class people. You can't heat and cool and maintain this kind of square footage per person in the long run. Ultimately, what is really going to drive a transformation is the need for sustainability. That's actually why I am cautiously optimistic: people are becoming more and more deeply dissatisfied with what passes under the term work family balance; and people are also recognizing sustainability issues such as climate change and seeing that we can't really go on like this.

You mentioned two things: work-family balance and good part-time jobs. Part-time jobs and flexibility have pejorative connotations in today's world since many people work under precarious conditions as a result of policies related to part-time and flexible work conditions. Could you clarify what you mean by part-time jobs in that sense?

I actually have a co-author who is going to have these political economy details in his chapters. But I do think that one of the important communication problems with this project is that right now, when people hear part-time, they hear: bad. Part-time work means bad work. That's most acute in the US, pretty bad in Canada, quite as bad in parts of Europe because they have this protective legislation. You need legislation that says: part-time work has to be compensated with the same proportional benefits as full-time work so you don't get denigrated. We will need, particularly in North America, a kind of overhaul of labor legislation, because currently, most people in this precarious work don't even count as employees for the purpose of labor law. There is a lot of catching up that needs to be done. That need isn't generated by my project. It is already out there. I see it really as a communication problem. I mean good work by part-time work. There is a lot of adjustment that would have to happen that I don't envision this little book mapping out in its entirety. People have to become more creative about what a job is and try to figure

out a mix of dividing up jobs – for example, this type of job used to have these eight components, while actually one person could do four components of the job, and another person could do the other four. But other times you are going to need job sharing. That has a certain amount of transaction costs of communication between people. Different jobs will have to figure out what the barriers are, what the problems and advantages are, what the different ways of doing it are, and what the intensity of the job is. They will vary hugely. Until now, there has been no particular incentive for figuring this out. Some European countries have generated good protection for part-time work and tax incentives for companies to develop good part-time work. There were different motivations in different European countries. In some cases, it really was about unemployment. Why not have more jobs for more people at decent number of hours? Instead of having what we have now: few people who have fairly secure high paid jobs and huge number of people with no security and no benefits. I think overall, the current situation of work and the rise of precarious work is an independently terrible situation, which however, would also be benefited by what I am talking about.

Regarding the creation of new jobs, I want to ask you this question about professional care workers. What do you have in mind for them? When people start to do their own carework, are they just going to be unemployed?

I think this question is most pronounced in the context of the global care chain by the people who migrate to do carework. I have a rough guess at this point that I think the demand for paid carework would go down, say, 30%. I picture people would still want some paid care, just to provide time for leisure and self-care. I also picture the ongoing importance of professionalized care both for young children, for the elderly and for the disabled. People are trained in varieties of carework that many of us could learn to do aspects of, but there are other things that professionals would be required to do. Professional care will not go away. The demand would be significantly reduced. The biggest, the most pronounced impact will be that the demand for important domestic labor will go down. I think that has both costs and benefits to the world. People do professional carework because in their judgments, it is economically in their best interest. Whole countries like the Philippines decide to organize their economies around remittances of carework. The cost to the women who do this kind of work, and to their children, is enormous. I am not willing to say that my proposed system will cause that type of harm.

Even though we reduce the economic opportunities nontrivially for the women in the world, the current arrangement is still a bad one. I am willing to say that that is a cost that I am willing to bear. I want to insist that there are no exceptions to the idea who does this unpaid care. No matter how important you are and how specially talented you are, nobody gets to say: 'oh, but I am such a fancy good heart surgeon, I shouldn't waste my time.' If you don't do that, you are full back into the denigration of care work, where it is seen as the lowest. So we will match hierarchies of work to the hierarchies of people. I think we actually cannot succeed in undoing those hierarchies of people without undoing the hierarchies of work and care. Even if all you care about is equality or justice, you need to be on board with something like this. Because we organize the hierarchies of people so heavily around care that you can't undo it without restructuring the care. That's in fact the biggest contribution of this work on care: that it would undo this sense that denigrated work is done by denigrated people. Because a big chunk of that work is carework. Maybe there would be also some adjustment in the sense that people who had relied on badly paid carework would have less of it available. One would had to hope, that the multiplication of jobs would arise with the norm of part-time work as well as the protection of part-time work. There would be a greater percentage of jobs that are protected than what we currently have, and it would bring a greater range of decent jobs to the labor force.

I want to ask a question about family. Family is a tricky institution that feminists have been very reluctant about celebrating. But in your text, family is a central element for this unpaid carework. In that context, as a feminist, what is your definition of family? How does your theory speak to other ways of intimate connections like friendship or comradeship, given that many people don't accept their families as the initial site of care.

I think that these new norms will be very beneficial to what is happening anyway, which is a multiplicity of family forms. In the United States where that data is the best, there is no longer a majority of children living in the nuclear family. The 'heterosexual mom and dad with their kids in their little house' is not the norm anymore. Transformation of families is happening. I think this model is actually going to make it easier for people in the many many different forms, family organizations, care organizations, or organizations of intimacy, to manage carework because everybody would be part of some care community.

Single mothers, most of them, find some kind of community care, because they can't survive otherwise. But now, they would be embedded in more diverse groups of people, which would probably encompass many different family forms and many different forms of intimacy with the expectation of being able to rely on each other. I think it would make it a lot easier for people to be engaged in already expanding forms of intimacy, when you could just know that everybody is going to connect themselves to some kind of community of care. They are not going to be on their own as a couple, as an individual or a commune or whatever it is. People will see that there are these needs for care. It will help people who are ever increasingly in diverse forms of intimate connections. I think childrearing particularly is very demanding, very intimate, very rewarding, and if you aren't totally stressed, for many people it is where you learn the special importance of care. I don't know whether it is intrinsically easier or just that as a culture we do transmit something about childcare, whereas we don't about elderly care. However badly childcare is supported, it is better supported than elderly care. Over the years when I have given talks on this topic several times, I had people say "you just don't know how terrible it can be caring for an elder parent who needs a huge amount of physical help". This has actually happened mostly in the US where there aren't the resources to help you, you are just stuck there, you have no options, you have no help: it is just terrible. I don't doubt that. I am not saying that I would do any better under these circumstances. But, it is heartbreaking because surely the person receiving the care knows how the care-giver feels. Again in Australia, I got a very lovely email from somebody who listened to the recording of the talk. She couldn't be there because of the childcare obligations. She said that "a child deserves to be cared for by somebody who delights in her." I thought that's so wonderful, but it is such a high threshold, you can't legislate it. You can hope for it. You can try to facilitate it. I know one friend who really delighted in caring for her mother, even though it was exhausting for her. In the last eighteen months she did receive help, but she was responsible for organizing all that help. She still took pleasure and joy, and still found her mother charming. I am sure her mother felt that she was receiving care at the very end by somebody so valued being able to do that. I hope these kinds of norms would make it possible for more and more people to have that relationship to caring.

Do you have a hierarchy of carework in your mind? Like, you have to first take care of your children or your parents before you take care of a friend for example?

No, I really don't. I am glad that you asked that. I don't mean, first of all, that everyone should have children. I actually think that part of the virtue of this system is you don't have to have your own biological children. You don't have to even take on being a primary caregiver in order to have a close relationship to a child. I had a friend who said to me years ago that, the only way to have an intimate relationship with a child is to own one. That's such a crazy thing. I am sure that on this block there are young parents who are going out of their mind with their care responsibilities and other young couples who have been trying to have children and have not been able to. They feel desperate to have a relationship with a child. These families are never meeting, and they could. I think for many people what they want is to have a sustained, ongoing intimate relationship with a child without being the primary caregiver. That's very hard to do in our world. I think it happens occasionally, you might still have that role but in this model lots of people would opt for that which would be a tremendous benefit to the kids, to the biological parents, to the primary caregivers, to the people who get to form those bonds. I think the same thing would happen with the elderly. Because often, you know there are tensions between parents and children. Sometimes, some of the elder care could be better provided by somebody who doesn't have all that history and can just see that person for whoever they are. I do think that family is special, but I don't think it is unique. I think we need to think about relations with those children and elders that aren't biological, that aren't even our primary responsibility.

I am talking to a lot of people about your project. A major question they all ask is: how is this whole norm change about carework going to happen if state isn't there? As far as I understand, the state is there to organize the work part, but not for organizing the carework itself. Why do you want to take the state out of this picture? How do you think this will start?

This is the part I think I need to elaborate on a little more. I should say that the state isn't going to be heavily involved in the work either. It would be facilitating. It will provide some basic provisions. It might provide some incentives as well. I don't picture this happening through mandatory hours legislation or anything like that. It is all going to be facilitative; it will prevent certain kinds of exploitation that are currently easily available. I think some of it comes from my own predilections on the care side. I was never really drawn to institutionalized childcare. I think this is a big difference between me and many feminists. It has really shaped a lot of my own thinking. I didn't want my kids in daycare eight hours a day. Why would I make that my policy position if it wasn't something I wanted? I do

know that it works well for some parents and for some kids. That's part of it. I think the first important thing to say is that I think many feminists and many people on the left make judgments about things that are matters of collective concern, and care is a collective responsibility. This entire argument presupposes care as a responsibility of all of us. Then, without an argument they move from that recognition to assuming that the state should take it over. Once you establish it as a collective responsibility it follows that the state should do it. I think this turns out to be a mistake. We need to be a lot more imaginative at every level, whether it is about the environment, or childcare, or structures of work, about how to implement collective norms. There are some things we really need the state to do. But there are other things that can be organized in other ways, which will be more flexible, more tailored more able to move and change. We should always see state as one option, not the option. Of course within the state, there are other options; do you want a regulatory system, do you want a single piece of legislation, do you want a criminal sanction? The state isn't just one thing either. I have some disinclination towards state organized care, but I think it is actually because I have a little bit disinclination towards institutionalized care. Somebody said something to me about this recently; she has a sibling who is a young adult with mental health problems. She lives in a kind of institutional home; not huge but not tiny either. But it is way better for her and way better for her parents that she isn't stuck in their home. I got that immediately. There are examples of professional care capacities, of institutional arrangements, that are just going to work way better. My mom lives in a really wonderful retirement home. But one of the features of these is that they are segregated. All the old people are over there. I think of it at least as an intermediate thing. I sometimes have fantasies of an elder commune, in one of these big old houses that could house six or eight people and you could hire someone bringing food. It doesn't have to move all the way from being on your own, to some giant institution. I am sort of hoping that this sort of thing would generate many different forms of semi-collective childcare as well as parents having time on their own, and different forms of semi-collective elder care. At the moment we just have that: Either you do it at home which fewer and fewer people do or able to do or it is some institution that kids go for eight hours a day, and elderly go forever. It just seems too limited and too primitive. I think the imagination around this and the capacity to generate an alternative is going to work better if it isn't all state driven. It doesn't mean that there could be state support of various kinds.

You don't consider activism as care. This made me think about my own experience as an activist and the difficulties I have had trying to balance my activist life with my family life. Some activist circles criticize their peers for spending private time away from activism with their family, as many see family as an institution that is part of the system that will manipulate you and take your time away from working for the greater good. I know that many activist women, especially when they have children, have a hard time to find balance. How do you negotiate all these demands?

My co-author, he is really an activist. He is an academic activist and he puts in a huge amount of time. First of all, I do think that it is important to say that there are some forms of activism that really are care. He gave me examples of stuff he does with refugee families. What he describes would just meet my criteria on paid care. He does it through his activist commitment. There is a bunch of care that is important to recognize. Something that actually I would call care. Sometimes, activist communities generate better care norms. He was also the author of the story about his experience being at a meeting for graduate students where there was issue about funding. There was a woman with a baby who was crying, and nobody offered to help her or to take a turn with the baby. She ultimately had to leave and missed this really important meeting. He said that, if that had happened in his activist community, people would each take ten or fifteen minutes walking the baby up and down, but this group of political science graduate students had no shared norms that would assume that this is a collective responsibility. I think you can have activist communities that actually generates better care. But in regards to your big question, I really noticed this when I had my first child especially. I had no time anymore for activism. You know I had a full time job - those days maternity leave was 17 weeks, which I thought as heaven compared to the US. I think in the ideal world, I am going to end up saying people should devote time to community work and it could be political activism. I was originally inspired to think more seriously about this, because there is a German author who had said: there is care, there is paid work, there is activism and self care. A good life does some of all of that. I think that's right. Because of the way in which we defined care, which came out of the care for the earth, it would exclude a lot of activism that I want to recognize as viable. But really, my motivation for saying activism is not care, is that there is a lot of activism that is definitely not care work. It may be motivated by justice, but it isn't actually very caring. All the relationships within activist organizations are built around an intention to care. They are often no better than work environments, sometimes

more ruthless since justice is at stakes. I don't want men in particular, saying "I am out there saving the world, doing whatever it is, therefore I shouldn't waste my time taking care of my kids, or doing the dishes or serving the coffee at our meetings" and we have a long history of male activism that has those features. I don't want some story about that you are saving the world, so you don't have to be doing this manual work. I will explain why it is ok for you to put your private concerns, your family commitments, ahead of this work, which is for everybody, which is justice for everybody. I think the answer to that for me is that is the kind of creatures we are as human beings. If we don't put our friendships (it isn't just biological family), if we don't put our friendships and our intimate relationships to parents, to children, to siblings, to close friends, ahead in some instances of our collective commitments, something bad is going to happen to our souls. We are not going to be kind people, even good citizens or policy makers or anything. It is a perversion, abstraction. Even if the government is arresting people, you should be out there fighting it - again it is sort of the intensity issue around work. I am not saying that there are not moments when everybody should drop everything and call us around an emergency. That can happen. But it can't be sustained. You can't spend your whole life being an activist and making your relationships secondary without harm to yourself and others. This sort of life limits you as a human being, even if you accomplish some important things. A long-term organization of such people is not likely to do the best kind of work for justice.

Or it is important to negotiate these things so that the carework doesn't become the excuse for not doing any collective work or something that you have to be ashamed of doing. There are two sides.

I agree, and I think that's why in the end the book is going to be a little different, from an earlier draft. There is a call to all of us to actively be committed to changing the norms and structures of our world. Whether being focused on your local community or broader community, that's an obligation we all have. It has its own rewards that are distinct from the rewards you get from intimate bonding. This is a different kind of relationship. It is really important. I agree. Over the long term you shouldn't substitute intimate bonding for that. It might even be as long as two years, maybe even three years for some. When children are very young, that's just consuming, especially if you are trying to work as well. There will be periods. Truthfully, it isn't a matter of time but a matter of my attention. I was just locked onto my young children. I just literally wasn't as interested, even though there were moments when one of my kids would be sick, I would get up in the middle of

the night and rock my child, feel that I am safe, that there are no bombs, the house is warm, if I have to sleep in tomorrow I can, and just feel this sense of the millions of mothers outside with a child who couldn't do what I could do. On the one hand, I felt this empathy and connection, and on another level, I had absolutely no time to do anything about it. But in this new world of mine, many people, I am not picturing that it is going to solve poverty. There will be people who still feel very pressed for time and money. But many, many people will have the scope to do the carework. I actually think that these communities of care will build a wider sense of solidarity that will spill out into various work of community and activism. Over a life time a lot of the care work will not happen only in the intimate sphere. Being part of these slightly more distanced communities of care I think there will be more continuity.

¹ I want to thank Rosa Van Den Beemt and Pınar Dokumacı for helping in the preparation of this interview for publication.