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In *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice*, Joan Tronto critically examines democratic life within the United States after the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center and 2008 financial crises. Her assessment, which is supported by recent work in political theory, illustrates how strikingly undemocratic American democracy has become in response to the pressures of global insecurity and neoliberalism. Rather than addressing the everyday needs of American citizens, politics within the United States is hyper-focused on protecting the free market and, concomitantly, national security. This inattention to the needs of individuals has created a care "deficit," or infrastructural incapacity to support the most vulnerable members of our society (17). Merging democratic theory with feminist care ethics, Tronto's caring democracy "offers substantive opportunity to reopen the closed, game-like political system to the genuine concerns of citizens" (ix). Tronto's book presents a clear, timely, and much-needed criticism of the role of the economy in democratic governance.

With this new publication, Tronto contributes to contemporary dialogues about the role of care ethics in political theory. Drawing on the feminist works of Virginia Held, Eva Feder Kittay, Nel Noddings, and Margaret Urban Walker, Tronto examines how the neoliberal preoccupation with global free markets and economic growth distorts and obscures core values of democratic life, such as freedom, equality, and justice. Her previous book, *Moral Boundaries*, identified the need for a political concept of care. Now, with *Caring Democracy*, Tronto proposes "caring with" as a strategy for revitalizing the foundation of democratic citizenship: the practice of caring not just for fellow citizens, but also for democracy itself.

Tronto's argument, briefly, is that a revolution of care is necessary to sustain democracy in the United States; if caring duties are left to the play of market forces, radical inequities in the distribution of care will grow, barriers to inclusive political participation will multiply, and distorted, antidemocratic caring practices will flourish. The viability of US democracy's future hinges on the eventuation of a public and holistic "rethinking of the meaning of democratic politics" (7). For Tronto, this means that only a robust

understanding of democratic citizenship can create and preserve a political environment in which citizens can "care with" each other.

In support of this thesis, the book contains seven chapters, divided into three parts. Each of the three main parts addresses a central argument of the text. Part I, "Envisioning a Caring Democracy," argues that the allocation of caring responsibilities is the foundation of democratic politics. In the next part, "How We Care Now," Tronto offers her diagnosis of American politics, with particular attention to the role of gender norms in the distribution and social recognition of what counts as valuable work. The final and third part, "Imagining Democratic Caring Practices and Caring Democracies," begins the difficult task of closing the gulf between the ideal of caring democracy introduced in part I and injustice of a market-obsessed political climate identified in part II.

The main contribution of *Caring Democracy* to feminist and political philosophy is Tronto's idea of "caring with." However, before defining this concept, I must situate her work within care ethics. Because care ethics is a prominent area of feminist philosophy, there are many available descriptions of care itself. Tronto, carefully paying tribute to these varying definitions, situates her thought in response to Margaret Urban Walker's ethic of responsibility. Specifically, Tronto develops an intentionally broad understanding of care, which she defined with Berenice Fisher as: "a *species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible.* That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web" (19). From this perspective, care is not a naturally motivated disposition or affective connection with another person or group. Rather, care is a technical term for the complex, skilled practices for addressing the needs of others.

Tronto extends four steps in the caring process, which she has described previously. The first is *caring about*, or the identification of an unmet need. The second phase, *caring for*, names someone(s) accepting the responsibility to meet the identified need. Next, *care-giving* takes action to meet such needs. Finally, *care-receiving* represents the response of the care recipient, including judgments about the whether the care work sufficiently addressed his/her needs. Acknowledging related criticisms, Tronto indicates that this four-stage concept of care is merely descriptive; she intentionally does not include criteria for evaluating the effectiveness or value of care. This is because some caring practices can be deployed to obscure or rationalize injustice; for example, imperialist nations have frequently justified colonialism by asserting the "benefits" of civilizing indigenous populations. As a result, a concept of care becomes normative, Tronto explains, only when situated in a particular political theory.

All political frameworks, she argues, advance implicit accounts of care. Within the capitalist economy of the United States, this means that caring obligations compete as commodities, valued in terms of profit and efficiency. Individuals and their families hold the primary responsibility for addressing their own everyday needs. Consequently, responsibilities are allocated according to the rules of the free market, creating a hierarchy of care labor. So-called "non-skilled" caring, especially services that are

considered "dirty work" (for example, housework and waste removal), is devalued and poorly paid. At the same time, she notes, some care work is revered as professional expertise (for example, medicine, law, education), highly paid, and practiced within powerful institutions. As a commodity, caring support becomes available to individuals on the basis of ability-to-pay, except perhaps in the case of limited social "safety nets." Expending financial resources, in a neoliberal world, is itself a form of caring; through the same consumption that supports his/her family, a citizen performs the civic duty to simulate economic growth. Although Tronto's characterization of the economic status quo will not be new to many feminist philosophers, this background analysis is for readers not well-versed in theories of oppression.

With her characterization of neoliberalism as a "disastrous worldview" (38) facilitating "collective irresponsibility" (43), Tronto lays her cards on the table; the free market unequally and unfairly allocates caring responsibilities. Because lesser-valued care can be "outsourced" to wage workers (105), disparities in wealth perpetuate an "upside-down" distribution of support, in which the most vulnerable citizens perform the lowest-paid care work and, as a result, have the least access to vital resources like child care. Moreover, gender, race, and economic privilege can be exchanged for reduced caring duties, which Tronto terms "passes." For example, as "protectors" or "providers" for their families, middle- and upper-class men are often exempted from caretaking for children and sick or elderly relatives.

Tronto further argues that caring activities fall short of the demands of a market-based economy. As labor- and time-"intensive" (38), care is an expensive commodity. In other words, caring practices, by their very nature, cannot be mechanized for wide-scale production; they are not fungible, time-efficient, or uniformly manufactured. The attuned, individual attention characterizing care and participatory democracy requires the presence of humans and not robots, regardless of technological advances.

In an even more damning criticism, Tronto contends that free markets cultivate "anti-democratic" values and character traits that ignore vital components of human experience: vulnerability, connectedness, and interdependency (43). For example, the esteemed values of neoliberalism, such as rationality, independence, and personal responsibility, promote what she calls a "vicious cycle of uncare" (96) that ignores past injustices, structural inequalities, and the inescapable vulnerabilities of human existence. Additionally, Tronto condemns the idealization of the "self-made man" for encouraging self-centeredness, greediness, and thoughtlessness, under the guise of the right to autonomy. As she explains, "How 'we care now' misunderstands freedom as 'choice' regardless of domination, perpetuates inequality, and makes it impossible to raise questions of care as issues of justice" (139). Autonomy, in capitalist terms, is independence from social responsibility and the freedom to disregard the devastating human and environmental consequences of economic growth.

Perhaps accepting the inevitability of capitalism a bit too quickly, Tronto presents a strong argument that a democratic society cannot survive free-market competition without competing care-based values and institutions acknowledging the lived reality of

citizens. Instead of pursuing abstract economic growth, our democracy must address concrete needs, such as "the absence of jobs, inadequate health insurance, time-binds, how to take care of children and aging parents, trying to balance care and work duties, and so forth" (xiii). As Tronto rightly notes, the transformation of US political institutions and practices requires citizens to fundamentally "rethink" and "reimagine" (169) democratic life.

To this end, Tronto presents "caring with" as a foundation and criterion for democracy. Broadly understood, this idea is similar to the values of solidarity or pluralism in feminist philosophy. Unlike the original four components of care, caring with is explicitly normative; for Tronto this fifth stage does not merely describe the nature of democracy, but also highlights a condition of its survival and means for evaluating its commitment to "justice, equality, and freedom for all" (23). For Tronto, caring with develops a much needed, "more nuanced account" of the responsibilities of citizenship (11). My civic duties, from this perspective, do not end at the ballot box; I must contribute to the ongoing, collective task of rethinking democratic practice, institutions, and values, as well as nurture a political climate in which all citizens can equally participate. Significantly, these responsibilities include interrogating the gender, race, and class-based biases deployed to politically exclude marginal others and circumscribe the scope of democratic debate, aims, and practices. Although other critics may find it too demanding, Tronto's understanding of citizenship as participatory, socially accountable, and engaged complements the aims of other feminist philosophies.

Two important points follow Tronto's endorsement of caring with: one is an ontological claim about humanity and the other is a political requirement for democracy. First, Tronto asks democratic theorists to reframe the basis for the equality of citizens. Instead of understanding equality as a consequence of the agency of autonomous individuals, Tronto roots equality in the inescapable and universal nature of humanity as relational, vulnerable, and interdependent. The equality of democratic citizens stems from our shared existence as "*care receivers*" (29). Second, as a consequence of our equality in vulnerability, each citizen has an equal right to have his or her needs publicly recognized and addressed. The legitimacy of any democracy depends on its preservation of inclusive political participation for all.

Neither of these two claims is conceptually groundbreaking; there are certainly other, more sophisticated accounts of theories of democracies, analyses of interdependence, and critiques of neoliberalism. The book's most glaring limitation is Tronto's failure to adequately develop a clear definition of inclusion, while unquestioningly presenting it as prerequisite to a revolution of care. Tronto acknowledges this absence; in the introduction, she acknowledges the book assumes an "artificial limit" on inclusiveness (56): the contingent boundaries of the nation-state, and the resulting criteria for citizenship. Because one of the most significant conclusions of the book is that we must expand our care beyond the walls of our homes, Tronto's argument requires an analysis of any political exclusion. That being said, the significance of *Caring Democracy* lies not in any single idea, but in its unique aggregation of recent developments in feminist philosophy and Tronto's holistic assessment of the resulting consequences. The text is a

straightforward, well-argued presentation of the problems presented to democratic societies with the intensification of global capitalism; it will be useful not only for feminist philosophers, but also as a way of introducing other theorists to basic themes in feminist philosophy.

Tronto's conclusions are grim, but surprisingly hopeful. Upon finishing the book, I found myself generally depressed with the state of the world and the projected fate of democracy. Moreover, I was frustrated that Tronto did not seem to offer much direction beyond the vague imperative to "rethink" certain concepts. Although she acknowledged the impossibility of providing a blueprint in the introduction, I wondered if the limitations were a result of the book's conceptual framework. But then, as my irritation simmered, I began brainstorming ideas for alternative social arrangements and political organization, as well as the obstacles that they would create. In short, I was reimagining democracy. This, in my view, is the success of Tronto's book: she solicits and engages the very "thinking otherwise" that makes the transformation of democracy possible. With *Caring Democracy*, Tronto guides her reader through the horrors of our global status quo into the future for which she hopes, but which did not exist prior to the act of reading.

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