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IL LAVORO UMANO
TRA RICERCA DI SENSO,
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E OCCUPABILITÀ

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PONTIFICIA FACOLTÀ DI SCIENZE DELL'EDUCAZIONE AUXILIUM



DOSSIER
**IL LAVORO UMANO
 TRA RICERCA DI SENSO,
 NUOVE COMPETENZE
 E OCCUPABILITÀ**

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 the search for meaning, new skills and employability**

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RSE

RESTRUCTURING WORK FOR *(PART) TIME* FOR ALL

RISTRUTTURARE IL LAVORO *PART-TIME* PER TUTTI

JENNIFER NEDELSKY¹

1. Introduction to *(Part) Time for All*

Western societies² face three critical problems that arise out of dysfunctional norms of work and care: unsustainable stress on families, persistent inequality for women and others who do care work, and policy makers who are ignorant about the care work that life requires. We urgently need collective deliberation about radical transformation of these norms. I have a proposal that I hope will spark that deliberation.

Norms around work and care can change, and have changed hugely over the past few hundred years. Think about ideas about how many hours a work-day should be—from 12 hours a day to the successful battle for 8 hours a day to current norms of 60-70 hour work weeks in the financial sector; who should do care work (should female aristocrats nurse their own babies)? whether the elite should be unemployed (the definition of a gentleman); whether children should work; whether it is ideal for women to be home when their children are young. Many of these is-

ssues are still contested while some (like the unemployed gentleman) seem like ancient history.

Let me open with an example of a very recent change in norms that captures the kind of change I will be proposing here: a friend of mine asked a young male colleague at Swedish university whether he would be taking the full paternity leave available to him when his wife had their first child - or whether he would feel career pressure not to take the leave. He answered, "Are you kidding? If I *didn't* take the leave all my colleagues would be saying, who knew he was such a money grubbing careerist".

From concern about undermining one's career by taking paternal leave (a story one hears everywhere), the norms had so changed that to *fail* to take the leave would subject one to the disapproval of one's colleagues. That is the kind of change I am looking for. My project here is to radically change the kinds of things that generate approval and disapproval among one's colleagues, friends, family, neighbors and society in general. (Although I am hoping the new norms

will be fostered more by support and encouragement than by disapproval). I am advocating new norms about how everyone should engage in employment and in providing care.

My proposal is that all mature, competent adults are expected to be employed part-time (what we would now call part-time): no less than 12 and no more than 30 hours a week, and to do unpaid care work part time - also somewhere between 12 and 30 hours a week. People would encourage one another to resist the pressure of taking on more work, and support and appreciate the care they do, as well as the leisure time they take. In short, the new norms would generate a collectively supported shift in how people allocate their time, indeed how they experience time as the pressures of widespread “time-poverty” are eroded. Conversely, the failure to meet these norms by working long hours or failing to participate in care, would generate the sort of concern, disapproval, embarrassment, pity, and unease that currently would arise if a competent adult male announced at a party that he had never held a job. One might, for example, offer a “workaholic” advice on where to get help. But whether the response was kindly or disapproving, it would be clear that an important norm was being violated. Thus new norms of work and care would be enforced by serious social constraint (like most norms), but not by law enforced by the state.³ Throughout the paper I will refer to paid work as “work” and unpaid care as “care.”

My argument is that without such norm transformation, we cannot hope

RIASSUNTO

L'articolo presenta una visione innovativa del lavoro, che potrebbe diventare realtà attraverso un cambiamento nelle norme sociali. La proposta è quella di lavoro part-time per tutti e attività di cura per tutti. Secondo l'Autrice nessuno dovrebbe lavorare più di 30 ore alla settimana e nessuno dovrebbe dedicare meno di 12 ore alla settimana alla cura, in famiglia e nella propria comunità di riferimento. Un profondo ripensamento del rapporto tra lavoro e cura, e quindi tra uomini e donne, giovani e anziani, ricchi e poveri, è un tema essenziale in un mondo dove la componente degli anziani è in aumento. Senza una svolta collettiva e seria nella cultura della cura in rapporto a quella del lavoro, è la democrazia e l'uguaglianza tra le persone che vengono sostanzialmente negate. **Parole chiave:** lavoro, cura, trasformazioni del lavoro, part-time per tutti, norme sociali.

to solve the three pressing problems I noted at the outset that, in various forms, afflict all Western societies.⁴ Let me briefly identify each problem. The first is the unsustainable structure of work and family life that puts enormous stress on families, and forces workers (at all levels) into untenable choices between work and family. The stress has serious consequences (including health and autonomy) for

SUMMARY

This article presents an innovative vision of work, which could become reality by means of a change in social norms. The proposal is about part-time for everyone with wellness activities included for everyone. According to the author, no one should work more than 30 hours a week, and no one should dedicate less than 12 hours a week to wellness care, family, and one's reference community. A profound rethinking of the relationship between work and wellness, and thus between men and women, young and elderly, rich and poor, is an essential theme in a world where the component of the elderly is increasing. Without a collective and serious change in the culture of wellness in relation to work, both democracy and equality between persons is substantially negated.

Key words: work, wellness, transformation of work, part-time for all, social norms.

RESUMEN

El artículo presenta una visión innovadora del trabajo, que podría volverse realidad a través de un cambio en las normas sociales. La propuesta es la del trabajo part-time (tiempo parcial) para todos y actividades de cuidado para todos. Según la Autora ninguno debería trabajar más de 30 horas en la semana y ninguno debería dedicarse menos de 12 horas semanales al cuidado de la propia familia y de la comunidad de referencia. Una reflexión profunda sobre la relación entre trabajo y cuidado, y por lo tanto entre hombres y mujeres, ricos y pobres, es un tema esencial en un mundo en el que el porcentaje de las personas mayores está aumentando. Sin que se registre un gran avance colectivo y serio en la cultura del cuidado con relación a la del trabajo, la democracia y la igualdad entre las personas, son éstas las que resultan sustancialmente negadas.

Palabras clave: trabajo, cuidado, transformación del trabajo, *part-time* para todos, normas sociales.

all, and almost certainly harms children with long term, intergenerational consequences.⁵

While the popular "work-family balance articles" tend to focus on the fully employed, dual income families, everyone knows that there are also many people who are struggling to find enough work. They, of course, want more hours of work. But there are also many who put in very long

hours of work and commuting to work and to child care because they have had to patch together part time jobs, often with unpredictable hours.

They need more money, but they do not actually want to spend more hours working and commuting. What they need is stable, decently paid work.⁶ (There is evidence that increasing the stability of work is even more important than increasing income for the

well being of families). People who are trying to raise families while stuck in precarious work with no security, no benefits, and unpredictable hours face extraordinary levels of stress, as do their children. For them, the existing structure of work is deeply corrosive of satisfying family life that provides the time and security for nurturing relationships.

The second problem is equality. Care work is organized around categories of hierarchy and disadvantage. Many of these categories, such as race, class, ethnicity and citizenship status, carry with them long legacies of coercion and disrespect, which still shape the structure of care.⁷

As long as only a subset of the population does the care work, both the work and the people who do it will be denigrated. Societies can only achieve equality when the distribution of care is just.

Of course, the most obvious (and intersecting) category is gender. The shift in gender norms and the inequality of women improves at a glacial pace, leaving women with less pay, less economic security, vulnerability to poverty, less leisure time, less access to top jobs and to other advantages such as high quality health care. This inequality is tied to (although, of course, not exclusively caused by) women's unequal share of care responsibilities.⁸

The failure to achieve equitable care arrangements affects both autonomy and democracy. Women who come home from a full day of work to another 4-6 hours of care work do not have time for either personal or political reflection. They do not have time to

advocate for gender equality or anything else either in their workplace or in electoral politics.

Increasingly, some version of this corrosive "time-poverty" extends to men as well. Indeed, the current structures of work and care are a recipe not only for a wide variety of social ills, but for a population too stressed and exhausted to protest them.

The third problem is that least commented on in the now extensive literature on care. I call it the policy/care divide. This means that those in top policy making positions are almost always people with very little experience of the demands, or satisfactions, or importance of care taking. In my view this means that policy-makers are, for the most part, ignorant of a core dimension of human life.

This renders them unfit for the job. We should no more consider electing someone without substantial experience in caregiving to public office, or appointing them CEO of a corporation, than we would someone who had never held a job.

Those who DO have the requisite knowledge and experience (primarily women) have very limited access to high level policy making positions. My claim (elaborated in the introduction) is that knowledge of care is essential to good policy making, and the necessary knowledge can only be acquired by hands-on experience. Reading reports, or novels, or talking to one's mother is not a substitute. To ensure that everyone has the capacity to make and evaluate policy, everyone needs substantial experience in providing care.

Many efforts to make the gendered

division of care compatible with gender equality run afoul of this concern. For example, wages for housework, or well paid, long term maternity leave, or part-time work that is overwhelmingly taken up by women, or pensions for homemakers will not solve the policy/care divide. Only breaking the link between care and categories of hierarchy can do it.

In sum, my claim is that none of the problems outlined above can be fixed unless everyone, with no exceptions, participates in part time unpaid care and part-time paid work.

2. Care

Now let me say a bit more about care, remembering that the most important point in the argument is that everyone should do a significant amount of care.

In the introduction above I treat the meaning of care as obvious, although, of course, it is not. In the care chapter, I go through some of the contentious questions about what should count as care for the purpose of meeting the new norms I suggest.

Here, let me just provide a brief statement of what I have in mind. First I would note that there are a wide variety of definitions used by scholars of care. This makes sense since the definitions serve different purposes for different projects. For my purposes here I mean care that is directed at particular people, which might include a household or other small group, or even those who live on a particular city block. These are people who have material or emotional needs that they are often not able to meet themselves (such as children, the sick or

elderly). I say “often” because there would also routinely be sharing or exchange of care work between people who *are* capable of doing it that would also count as meeting one’s care obligations. The kind of care I have in mind includes the usual range of household labour—cleaning, shopping, cooking, bathing a child, changing a child’s diapers, taking a child to school, helping her with homework, doing laundry— as well as keeping sidewalks safe by shoveling snow, reading to someone sick or elderly, bringing them meals, talking to someone who is lonely, helping someone who is depressed find help.

I don’t use the term “face-to-face” care because shoveling snow or cleaning someone’s kitchen or toilet is not really face-to-face care. I want to include both intimate or “nurturant”⁹ care and more mundane, material “non-nurturant” care like cleaning. But I want to limit what counts for one’s care responsibilities to care that builds personal connections.¹⁰

I think this is important for learning about the demands, the rewards, and the importance of care for people’s well being. One way of putting it, to which I will return, is that when one receives the kind of care I have in mind it makes one feel valued.

It affirms one’s sense of worth. It makes one feel cared for. It allows both care-giver and receiver to feel a mutual appreciation and satisfaction. It is important here that the norms I propose would foster patterns in which almost everybody is, to some extent, both a care-giver and a care-receiver.

In the care chapter I also explain that

one's care responsibilities are not limited to family and friends. When those more immediate demands are relatively low, people will provide care to members of their chosen communities of care. What matters here is that one's care obligations do not follow the arc of an individual life, large when children are young or parents are aging, and then diminishing. Most people will have substantial care commitments throughout their lives.

Everyone will learn to provide care as they are able, probably beginning around age 3 and continuing until they are no longer able to contribute, even in (relatively) undemanding ways like visiting and telling stories.

One of the benefits of the new norms would be a great deal more creativity about how those with limited abilities, including the very young and very old, can contribute. Thus, well past the time the elderly stop earning income, they would remain contributors to their society. And they would have spent a lifetime experiencing the reality that everyone is both a care receiver and a care-giver, with the intensity of each varying over time and context.

Finally, I make clear that although I need juxtaposed categories of "care" and "work" in order to argue for the radical restructuring of both, I recognize the distinctions as somewhat arbitrary: care involves work and good work involves care. collective reflection on what counts as care and as work will be an ongoing process in my model.

In thinking about all the contentious issues about what should count as care, it is important to remember the

objective: to create norms such that *everyone* does unpaid care work (between 12 and 30 hours a week).

I think one of the most fundamental problems such a transformation will encounter is the powerful urge (and current norm) to avoid doing care on the grounds that what one is doing instead is REALLY important, and the kind of thing not just anyone can do (unlike lowly care).

To avoid this resistance and the ongoing use of categories of hierarchy to distribute care, it is important that even vital work, including work that involves care or advocacy for care, should not "get you a pass", allow you to get out of, unpaid care obligations.¹¹

I will restate this in terms of a question: for what kind of work would one want to say that it excuses one from any responsibility for caring for themselves or others? Do we want a devoted mathematician or peace activist coming home and saying, I have been doing important things out there in the world, I have been promoting peace and care for the earth, so I would like my dinner made for me and I don't want to help cleaning up. Is it OK if other friends or family members "don't mind" doing that person's share of daily care work? I don't think so. This doesn't mean one can't buy or trade some care work. But the basic norm is everybody does care work. Otherwise, we end up with groups (classes) of people who don't do care work, and groups who do. It is hard to imagine this not generating an undesirable hierarchy and continued denigration of basic care work.

Under the new norms, Everyone should

feel that they are part of the group of people who are responsible for the care of those they love. No one should feel it is her responsibility alone. No competent adult should feel that it is someone else's job to do all his care for him or for those close to him.

3. Work

First, part time work in this model means good work: with benefits, reasonable security, access to advancement, and wage rates and opportunities that do not discriminate against those who work fewer hours. This is, of course, virtually the opposite of what part-time has come to mean, especially in the Anglo-American countries.¹² Some protections for the quality of part time work will need to be ensured by legislation. In this sense, the new norms need to be facilitated by the state, even if the norms themselves are not a matter of law. People will only adopt a norm of part time work if it is good work.

But it is also true that some of what will ensure that part time work is good work cannot be legislated. Workplace norms will have to shift so that people's access to the best work and opportunities is not distributed according to how many hours they put in. The "ideal worker" will be someone who spends their time at work effectively, not someone who puts in the most hours.

Second, the model requires that employers adopt a new version of the norm of a living wage. This once meant that a *man* should be able to support himself and his family on 40 hours a week. (This was always a norm, not law; the living wage - or

family wage - was higher than the minimum wage). Of course, the new norm would not incorporate the sexism of the old, which served as a justification for lower wages for women than men. The new norm would be that all responsible employers should offer a wage such that a person could support herself and a child on 30 hours a week. Government employers, perhaps starting with towns and cities, could take the lead on this.

Third, when part-time jobs are the norm, there will be more jobs.

The transition to this norm will require creativity in redefining what a given job is. Sometimes this will mean assessing all the different component parts of a job, and figuring out how they could be divided among different people. Sometimes the component parts are so tightly linked that the best way to reduce hours is to have two people jointly responsible for a job. Sometimes it will mean figuring out how to reduce the number of a worker's commitments, while still being available to the clients one has. (For example, Williams and Calvert lay out a detailed plan for law firms to reduce their notoriously long hours while still providing high level, competitive service.¹³

They have a separate book on how individual lawyers can negotiate reduced hours in firms where long hours are the norm). In a world where technological innovation and shifting markets mean that jobs will not be stable, workplaces need to be designed to be creative and fluid in ways that respect workers rights and well being. As we discuss below, and in more detail later, workers need security.

But there are different forms that security can take when most people can no longer expect to hold the same job for a lifetime - indeed, when we can expect that whole categories of jobs will come and go over a lifetime. The norms of part-time for all will foster the necessary creativity and flexibility, along with respect for the requirements of decent work.

In addition to these basic requirements, Part Time for All (PTfA) involves putting work in its place. This means a deep change in the extent to which work takes priority over care.

Of course, this involves the status and rewards accorded to each. But it is more than that. As John? Muirhead puts it, «What we do all day habituates and orients us in profound ways that over time impress a pattern on our emotional and intellectual life».¹⁴

Under the new norms, what we do all day should include a significant component of care, as well as community involvement, and leisure. Paid work should no longer define people's lives. Poor, living wage and greater economic security.

Improvement in quality of part time jobs. we can expect that the least well off will benefit as paid care work is better compensated.

In some cities, in some countries, it will take a while before the poor can achieve a living wage on 30 hours a week. What they wage has to be, of course depends on what kinds of social services - transportation, health care, education, housing support - are available. One important expense, child care, would be significantly reduced.

Middle class-gradual trading of

wage for reduced hours.

For higher income people, the expectation is that they voluntarily downshift to part-time work. This will accompany a proportionate drop in income, but as long as career trajectories are not overly harmed by part-time work, this is a change that we think should be welcomed. For such people, the advantages of enhanced caring far outweigh the costs of reduced income.

At the upper levels of income there are also some additional problems. These deserve attention because the people at these levels are powerful decision-makers whose own lives and cherished values would be challenged. In addition, some of those values are widely shared even if the population at large does not benefit from them.

The first problem is the powerful nexus that currently exists between power, prestige, excellence, success and long hours of intense work. Virtually all the most "important" and high-paying jobs involve long hours, and a belief that the responsibilities of these positions can only be carried out by people willing to put in those long hours. The structure of these high level jobs would have to change, breaking up existing jobs into their different dimensions so that they can be spread and shared. In the chapter, we discuss the question of what the limits to high-level hours reduction might be: for example, whether there are supervisory jobs that require one person, with long hours, who can have a view of the whole, as in the case of a large scale financial merger.

We suggest that if such a person is

needed, once a project is done there would be a norm of taking a break from work to take/make up one's care responsibilities and enjoy the other dimensions of life.

This is just one example of term-limited intensity (lawyer's cases, a soldier's deployment, an international aid worker's urgent work abroad) that PTfA would be able to accommodate. Periods of intense work would be followed by comparable periods of time away from work.

People need to examine whether their beliefs about long hours and single-minded focus actually bring about the results they claim. Perhaps even more challenging, people need to rethink the nature of the values they are attached to, such as success and excellence.

For example, related to the power-success-time intensity nexus, there is a belief that the only way to acquire the "excellence" that would equip one for such positions is long hours of work and training. PTfA would challenge the very meaning of excellence: the person who would be successful and exemplary under the new norms would not be someone with single-minded devotion to one thing, but someone who excelled at care as well as at work, who made important contributions to her community, and who developed skills in leisure pursuits such as art, music, or sports.

Work will remain an important component of how people understand their contribution to society and how they gain recognition for that contribution. It will just take its place along side care, community, friendship and leisure. For all but the poor PTfA will involve

income reduction, while the reduction in consumption capacity might at first be seen as a cost of PTfA, we think of it as a benefit: a sustainable economy. Rich countries urgently need to reduce their consumption of material resources. A reduction in consumption that flows naturally from the benefits of reduced hours of work would be an effective and relatively painless way to accomplish this reduction. (The reduction in consumption is, however, as noted earlier, the reason we do not claim that the model we propose of PTfA would work in all countries).

4. Additional benefits

We also argue that there are some important additional benefits to PTfA beyond the core solutions to the problems of family stress, equality, and the care policy divide.

Two are very closely tied to the core project of PTfA:

1. A general re-valuing of care in society.
2. A transformation in how people experience time.

As care is no longer subordinated to work, the time rhythms of work would no longer control the experience of time in care, or, indeed of life. Under the new norms people could recognize and embrace the different rhythms of care, as well those of walks in nature. Just as current time scarcity undermines people's capacity for reflection, the new norms would foster it. We envision people encouraging one another to develop habits of receptivity¹⁵ - in listening to others, attending to different perspectives,

noticing beauty, and tuning in to their own deepest desires and values. Without the constant sense of time pressure, people would enjoy being more generous with their time, and patterns of requesting and receiving help would be supported. And the participation of everyone in networks of care would strengthen bonds of family, friends and community in ways that would enable people to see the importance of caring relationships for both the pleasures of life and basic needs.

We think that both the pressing nature of the problems and the scope of the benefits make it worth a vigorous and wide spread conversation about creating new norms of work and care.

NOTE

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² Although many of the problems that I address are growing throughout the world, I address my particular recommendations to the Western societies of Europe and the Anglo American world. The importance of a *conversation* about norms of employment and care would apply everywhere, but the proposal I make to focus that conversation may not be applicable in developing economies. In particular, my proposals would involve big reductions in both production and consumption. This is a good thing for the rich societies; it may not be for all.

³ While I understand that for some legal pluralists the normative regime I am advocating is best thought of as a form of law, I think it is important for my purposes here to distinguish between state law and norms. Both the nature of the coercion and the challenges of genuine deliberation are very different in the two contexts.

⁴ This project builds on the work of FRASER Nancy, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*, London, Verso 2012; TRONTO Joan, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, New York, Routledge 1993; ID., *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice* New York, New York University Press 2014; KITTAY Eva, *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency*, New York, Routledge 1999; ENGSTER Daniel, *Justice, Care, and the Welfare State*, Oxford, Oxford University Press 2016 and many other important care theorists, and it will take up scholarship on the transformation of work and its intersection with transformations in the family (for example, WEIR Allison, "The Global Universal Caregiver: Imagining Women's Liberation in the New Millennium, 12 (2005) *Constellations* 308-330; RITTICH Kerry,

Families on the Edge: Governing Home and Work in "a Globalized Economy" 88(2010) *North Carolina Law Review* 1527-1558, CONAGHAN Joanne - RITTICH Kerry, (eds), *Labour Law, Work, and Family*, Oxford, Oxford University Press 2005.

⁵ Cf DUXBURY Linda - HIGGINS Christopher, *Revisiting Work-Life Issues in Canada: the 2012 National Study on Balancing Work and Caregiving in Canada*, in <http://newsroom.carleton.ca/wp-content/files/2012-National-Work-Long-Summary.pdf> (24-04-2017); SCHULTE Brigid, *Overwhelmed: Work, Love and Play When There is No Time*, Picador, U.S. 2014.

This is not a claim about the desirability of having children in full time day care, and, of course, it is not a suggestion that women should stay home with their children. It is a comment on the costs of the current stresses placed on families when the combined demands of employment and care are more than they can meet without great stress.

⁶ Cf LEWCHUK Wayne et al., *The Precarity Penalty: The Impact of Employment Precarity on Individuals, Households and Communities and What to Do About It*, PEPSO: Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario, 2015, in <http://www.deslibris.ca/ID/246690> (24-04-2017).

⁷ Cf DUFFY Mignon, *Making Care Count: A Century of Gender, Race, and Paid Care Work*, Piscataway, N.J., Rutgers University Press 2011; NAKANO Glenn Evelyn, *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press 2010.

⁸ Cf NEDELSKY Jennifer, *The Gendered Division of Household Labor: An Issue of Constitutional Rights*, in BAINES Beverley - BARAK-EREZ Daphne - KAHANA Tsvi (eds.), *Feminist Constitutionalism*, Cambridge, MA, Cambridge University Press 2012, 15-47.

⁹ This is Duffy's term in *Making Care Count: A Century of Gender, Race, and Paid Care Work*.

¹⁰ This would exclude some of the kinds of paid work that could reasonably be called care: doing laundry at hospitals, cleaning of office buildings and schools. Of course, as I will discuss later, there are no hard and fast

lines here. In some schools, the children have cleaning responsibilities. Cleaning their own school could easily take on the characteristics of care that I have in mind. Similarly, I think it is preferable when the cleaning of offices is organized in ways that those in the offices and those who do the cleaning have a change to meet and know each other. The more that a bond of connection becomes part of the care, the more it becomes the kind of care I include. What I define as care can be paid as well as unpaid care.

¹¹ This is Joan Tronto's phrase, from *Caring Democracy*.

¹² Cf GREENHOUSE Steven, *A Part-Time Life, as Hours Shrink and Shift*, in *The New York Times*, in <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/28/business/a-part-time-life-as-hours-shrink-and-shift-for-american-workers.html> (24-04-2017).

¹³ Cf WILLIAMS Joan C. - THOMAS Calvert Cynthia, *Solving the Part-Time Puzzle: The Law Firm's Guide to Balanced Hours*, National Association for Law Placement 2004.

¹⁴ MUIRHEAD Russel, *Just Work*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press 2007, 28.

¹⁵ Cf NEDELSKY Jennifer, *Receptivity and Judgment* in *Ethics & Global Politics* 4(2011)4, 231-254.