19

The Costs of Philosophy as CARE Work

Kevin Timpe

1 Introduction

Philosophy can be done in a number of ways; indeed, it is done in such a range of ways that it's not always clear what unifies them perhaps beyond a historical, genealogical connection with a certain, fairly well-established canon. There is, as we're all likely aware, a danger, fostered by the incentives built into the current system of rewards and incentives of the academy, for our sphere of engagement in philosophy to be too small. Our work, as George Yancy puts it, "can also become insular to the extent that one writes only for those who have degrees, read certain journals, and engage in philosophy speak" (2002, p. xi). For some, there's, as Lorraine Code describes it, a "rift between philosophy and 'everyday life'" (2002, p. 85). Such an approach may be fine for some philosophical projects. But to insist that philosophy should always be insulated from how we live our lives together would be to misunderstand what philosophy is for. Joseph Margolis describes the situation this way:

> I would mistrust a career in philosophy that didn't address—philosophically as well as personally—the natural bearing of all the philosophical specialties that one might pursue and the puzzles of personal and political conduct and responsibility, one on the other. Yet a very large part of American philosophy *has* favored (and prospered by favoring) the sort of "academic" turn that confidently separates the best professional work from personal commitments of the political and ethical sort.
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> (2002, p. 192)

In recent years, there have been a number of pushes to steer philosophy away from a *mere* series of puzzles or problems back toward an approach more in line with philosophy as "care for the soul."[1] Perhaps the best known such push[2] has been the recent resurgence of "philosophy as a way of life." Here the work of Pierre Hadot has not only been extremely influential but has (so far as I know) lent this way of thinking about philosophy the title of one of his papers. Hadot was primarily a historian of philosophy, but he saw in ancient Greek philosophy a way of doing philosophy quite different from how it is often practiced in contemporary academic settings. Rather than being primarily an attempt to build a philosophical system, philosophy as a way of life approaches how we think of philosophical texts and issues by situating them in the "living praxis from which they emanated" (Davidson, 1995, p. 10). The spiritual exercises at the heart

of this way of approaching philosophy "were not conceived of as purely intellectual, as merely theoretical and formal exercises of discourse totally separated from life" (Davidson, 1995, p. 21). The propositional and systematic nature of philosophy that has perhaps become the raison d'être of much analytic philosophy should be approached within the context of a lived ethic that puts into practice philosophical reflection. Robert Solomon describes how much of contemporary philosophy is disconnected from this earlier approach: We need "to realize that what was once a liberating concept has become constricted, oppressive, and ethnographic" (2001, p. 101; see also Sanchez, 2011).

Philosophy should thus not be understood as merely an academic venture of system building and critiquing, but instead as "a mode of existing-in-the world, which has to be practiced at each instant, and the goal of which was to transform the whole of the individual's life" (Hadot, 1995, p. 265). It's worth flagging, given that I'll return to issues of community later, that this quotation can make Hadot's approach sound more individualistic than it actually is. The transformation of lives that philosophy aims at is not only of individuals' way of being but also a transformation of our communities. One of the reasons that philosophy as a way of life is so valuable, on both his view and mine, is that it seeks to change the communities that we are inexorably a part of:

> An essential place is accorded to the duty always to act in the service of the human community, that is, to act in accordance with justice.... This concern for living in the service of the human community, and for acting in accordance with justice, is an essential element of every philosophical life. In other words, the philosophical life normally entails community engagement.
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> (Hadot, 1995, p. 274)

This "engaged" approach to philosophy has, over the course of my career, come to increasingly shape both my scholarship and my teaching. Granted, certain kinds of topics have a more natural connection with such an approach to philosophy. It's easier to do when focusing on the ethics of embodiment as compared to the metaphysics of preemption as it relates to free will. But overall, I think there should be space for a wide range of ways of doing philosophy. I think it's natural that as my scholarship focus has shifted, I've leaned more heavily into a way of doing philosophy that directly engages lived experiences. Of course, phenomenology as a philosophical approach is particularly well suited to examine lived experience and philosophical praxis. In what follows, I share phenomenology's commitment to taking seriously our lived experience rather than a supposed detached, theoretical "view from nowhere." While I draw more explicitly on feminist philosophy and disability studies, I converge on themes that are also explored by others working more clearly within the phenomenological tradition (such as Joel Michael Reynold's *The Life Worth Living*).

Not only are there different ways of doing philosophy, but there are different ways that we come to and get motivated to work on various philosophical projects.[3] (These two spectra are likely related, at least for many of us.) Many, and very likely most, of our projects are in part motivated by or in response to our own particularities. Not just particularities of our historical and social context, though that too; but I'm thinking also of our own psychological histories. My work on free will, for instance, traces back to my initial engagement with philosophy as an

undergraduate trying to understand my own faith in terms of issues of providence and human responsibility.

One of my favorite philosophy of religion papers is Michelle Panchuk's "That We May Be Whole." Her paper is an excellent discussion of what is wrong with attempts to keep "the philosophical" from also being, or being rooted in, "the personal." Panchuk discusses how philosophy of religion, and I think philosophy more broadly, is worse off for the insistence—sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit—on "the myth of the disembodied, dispassionate view from nowhere" (2019, p. 56).[4] Not only is it not the case that analytic philosophy of religion must be practiced in this "dispassionate, ahistorical mode, but there may also be [and in fact *is*, I would say] a whole range of valuable evidence, reasons, experience, and topics that we lose when we exclude emotion and lived experience from our theorizing" (Panchuk, 2019, p. 59).[5]

But not all projects are motivated by our own histories or lived experiences in the same way. I don't think my own work on free will benefits from the embodied, impassioned lived experience of my trying to figure out divine providence in the same way that my work on disability or Panchuk's work on religious trauma is. Sometimes, a philosophical project is motivated by little more than the belief that we have an insight that contributes to an issue, that we've found a clever counterexample to some principle, or how to make a principle resist someone else's counterexample. Others are undertaken as an attempt to figure out what we should think about an issue that we find to be perplexing and worth understanding. Oftentimes this desire for understanding might be for the sake of our own understanding, what we should think about some issue, though it need not be. Yet at other times it is done in an attempt to change individual or communal belief or practice. Other projects might have a mixture of these or other motivations behind them.

Certain philosophical projects are done largely because people themselves have had certain sorts of experiences and to push back against the ways those sorts of experiences are often misunderstood. Here again, I think of Panchuk's (2024) work on religious trauma; Kate Manne's recent book *Unshrinking* (2024); Eva Kittay's (2019) work on caregiving; Elizabeth Barnes's (2016, 2023) work on disability; Talia Mae Bettcher's (2018, 2025) two excellent pieces on trans philosophy.[6] Some folks think these involve a problematic blurring of the personal and the philosophical, that the "self" and its experiences in some way contaminate the scholarly value of the output. Perhaps that can happen. But there's also a danger of our philosophical projects being too sterile and insulated from our lived experiences. Barrett Emerick has recently written that "the professional is personal" (2022, p. 181). It doesn't have to be. But often the best philosophy is.

I think this holds for much of the work being done, for instance, at the intersection of bioethics and mental health. Much of this work is humanizing and humane in a way that is all too rare in larger cultural responses (e.g., how not only trans identities are stigmatized after a recent mass shooting but mental illness is too, regardless of whether the shooter is trans or cis—though the asymmetry is certainly telling). In one of her papers on mental illness, Jeannette Kennett writes:

> A full understanding of the impact of mental illness on agency and responsibility must also examine the impact of mental illness on the self-conception of people with mental illness, and on their

> interpersonal relations, for these are intimately connected with the exercise of their agency and their capacities for autonomy.
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> (2007, p. 9)

Though I wish the framing here were on mental health rather than mental illness, I think Kennett raises an important point: We need to examine the impact of our work on people's self-conceptions and relationships. While I think she meant this about how our work can impact others' self-conceptions and relationships, I think it's also true of our own. And here then I (perhaps finally!) get to the central topic of this chapter, and that's how some of our philosophical projects can, whatever their other goods, be bad for our own mental health and flourishing. That doesn't mean we shouldn't work on them, though I do think it raises issues of how others can scaffold and support us in that work, an issue I turn to briefly below. Before getting there, however, I need to first discuss how certain philosophical projects can be expressions of advocacy or CARE work, and then how these same projects can simultaneously be bad for the mental health of at least some of us who work on them.

2 Philosophical Work as CARE Work

I've already indicated that I'm a pluralist about motivations for philosophical projects. Some projects are motivated not only by a concern for or love of the truth. Some of them are motivated, hopefully "also," by a concern for and love of people. If we think that people are being mistreated, oppressed, or otherwise harmed by systems, people, or attitudes that are informed or supported by problematic philosophical views, we might work on projects related to those views as a way of loving those people and helping resist their mistreatment. We may in fact have an obligation to work on such projects, though perhaps those obligations are sometimes trumped by other considerations. Balancing obligations is hard, in part because prudence is hard. In what remains, I'll leave obligations to the side.

In saying that some philosophical projects are motivated by love, I'm following Barrett Emerick's work and thinking of love as not primarily the sloganistic or fatalistic accounts of love he discusses and sets aside. The kind of love at work, rather, involves a disposition to work for the good of the beloved.[7] And while I think there is a sense in which we're to love all, I think what love requires of us can depend on *who* the beloved is and our relationship to them. Again to quote Emerick, there "is a special obligation that I bear to those that I love in particular, rather than an impersonal obligation that I bear to others in general, because it is within loving relationships that I can satisfy" (2016, p. 4) the demands of love.

It's in this context that I've recently begun to think of some philosophical projects as "care projects." We can even think of them as part of what Paulo Freire calls praxis, the "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (2000, p. 51). (I also think of them as "communal projects," given that I think care and transformation are best done intentionally as a communal activity.) I agree with Eva Kittay (2019, p. 1), who notes how caring for individuals can alter what we think philosophy *is* and *is for*.[8] This way of thinking about such projects and how they relate to care naturally connects with my earlier comments about "philosophy as a way of life."

We engage in certain philosophical projects because of *what* and *who* we care about, because of what we seek to live into as a way of transforming the experiences and lived condition of those we love: "philosophy is a life-practice rather than a mere field of theoretical knowledge" (Shusterman, 1997, pp. 18f.). Some philosophical projects are thus a kind of "care-in-practice" (Chatzidakis et al., 2020, p. 19).

Care work, like love, aims to promote the flourishing of the cared-for. But not all of it actually does contribute to their well-being. Kittay recognizes that not all attempts at caring succeed: "care in the fully normative sense is care as it ought to be practiced if it is to do what care is supposed to do" (2019, p. 137). Kittay uses small caps "CARE" to refer to this normative sense of the term. We can differentiate misguided, problematic, or vicious care, what we might call "mere care," from care practices that are virtuous or actually bring about flourishing, or what I'll write as "CARE."

We can think of certain philosophical practices as either supporting CARE work or themselves instances of CARE. As indicated earlier in connection with philosophy as a way of life, one way of thinking about philosophy is in terms of caring practices that aim at supporting people's flourishing. Kittay and other feminists have long recognized the gendered nature of care work and expectations (e.g., Glenn, 2010). In *The Care Manifesto*, the Care Collective writes, "Care has long been devalued due, in large part, to its association with women, the feminine and what have been seen as the 'unproductive' caring professions. Care work therefore remains consistently subject to less pay and social prestige" (Chatzidakis et al., 2020, p. 3). And this plays out also in how people in our profession value certain subdisciplines over others, what is sometimes allowed to be recognized as "real philosophy." But philosophy *can*, and I'd argue in fact *should*, have CARE as one of its goals. Again, to draw on *The Care Manifesto*:

> By care, however, we not only mean "hands-on" care, or the work people do when directly looking after the physical and emotional needs of others—critical and urgent as this dimension of caring remains. "Care" is also a social capacity and activity involving the nurturing of life. Above all, to put care centre stage means recognising and embracing our *interdependencies*.
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> (Chatzidakis et al., 2020, p. 5)

As I hinted at earlier, philosophy is best done as a collective project. Not only in the sense of engaging with each other's work, but together as dialogue, as a communal project done for the sake of the common good. Philosophy done in this manner can be life-giving. Fostering an ethos of communal solidarity can become a catalyst, a respite, a way of holding, in Hilde Lindemann's sense of that term, each other in our philosophical work. While most of us in the profession would probably easily grant that our teaching and mentoring can be CARE work, we should recognize that our scholarly writing and administrative work can be too.

We are stewards of our philosophical projects, and they can become a way of loving both other individuals and our communities and of seeking to help them flourish. And so we should live up to our responsibility for supporting others' projects and other scholars in the doing of their projects.

3 Costs of Philosophical CARE Work

One reason that some projects, or some of us, might need such communal support is because of the impact that our work can have on us. It's fairly well known that academia isn't exceptionally conducive to good mental health practices. In this section, I want to lay out a few ways that philosophical work on certain CARE projects can have emotional costs because of facts about the specific nature of those projects.

In her paper on "doing philosophy of religion with the whole self" that I mentioned earlier, Michelle Panchuk talks of the "emotional preparation" (2019, p. 55) that goes into presenting (and I suspect actually doing) her own work on religious trauma. The frequent preference for the "view from nowhere" approach mentioned earlier can have a silencing effect, not only in terms of official gatekeeping practices but also in terms of self-silencing:

> If analytic philosophy of religion privileges the view from nowhere in the spirit of Russell's description (as I suspect it does), then it is not difficult to imagine which speakers would be most likely to smother their own testimony. Even if emotion and lived experience can expand our knowledge…,they may also be used as grounds for dismissing or attacking another's argument, strong-mindedness, and philosophical rigor. In such an environment, it would be reasonable for a philosopher to worry that expressing their emotions or offering of their lived experience as evidence is too risky.
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> (Panchuk 2019, p. 67)

Panchuk is surely correct here. But I want to add to this a slightly different cost. There's not only a risk that we run by doing philosophy in certain ways (especially if we're doing it in certain subcultures that have very strong but narrow views about what the right methodologies and "important sets of issues" are), but also a risk of self-silencing or self-smothering because of the toll that projects can have on our own mental health.

It may be helpful to have an example of the kind of work I think can have this negative impact on one's mental health. Here I'll rely on some of my own first-person experiences, though I don't intend this to be a kind of self-promotion. Rather, I intend it simply to help illustrate the larger phenomenon under discussion. In this example, it is helpful to know that my spouse and I have a son who is autistic and has both physical and intellectual disabilities. Because of our experiences as his parent in an ableist world, in recent years my scholarship has turned increasingly to issues related to disability. One paper of mine is on how administrative systems can lead to evils that no person in that system either intends or is causally responsible for; the paper was a result of dealing with two of our son's public school districts over the years (Timpe, 2018b).[9] Two papers examine how public schools responded to the pandemic in a way that disproportionately harmed disabled students for the districts' own gain (Timpe, 2022, 2024). For the first of these, I did a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)[10] request of the district's emails regarding their COVID response plan and received over a thousand pages of documents in response. When I began working through

them, our son still wasn't yet receiving the services that he was legally supposed to receive from the district. And yet they wanted to further cut these services for economic gain and to free themselves from various types of government oversight. Another recent paper explores dominant social norms that disadvantage autistics and other intellectual disabled individuals (Timpe & Reynolds, 2025).

All of these projects have been emotionally taxing, though simultaneously rewarding, because of how they intersect with my family's experience and those of families I do advocacy work for. While merely going through those experiences personally has negatively impacted my mental health, that impact is magnified by also doing scholarly work on the issues. One reason for the emotional toll is that, unlike other tasks, working on such projects doesn't function as a distraction from the real-life experiences that motivate these projects. While all parts of our job as academics can be tiring and emotionally draining, I find that I work best when I can rotate between a range of projects and tasks.

In her book *Ethics, Emotion, Education, and Empowerment*, Lisa Kretz gives the example of overhearing two students talking as they leave one of her classes: "This class is so fucking depressing," one says given the course's focus on climate ethics and the empirical work it draws on, specifically trying to engage student emotions. Kretz writes, "In the years since that day when my student flagged an impact the coursework had on them, I have had multiple conversations with students and colleagues who are emotionally weighted by the problems we study. There is nothing inherently wrong with being saddened and concerned about the state of the world, it is often a merited and appropriate response" (2020, p. 78). This can be true not only of students but also of the teachers responsible for this kind of coursework. Similarly, in a paper in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* a few years ago, Elizabeth Barnes (2018) talks about "Arguments That Harm" and why we need to engage them.[11] She writes: "It's hard to articulate just how awful it can be to hear them [i.e., arguments that call into question the value of her own life] politely and dispassionately discussed in a context—a conference, a seminar, a reading group—where you are just trying to be a professional and do your damn job." So this difficulty isn't just one that comes up in our teaching duties but also has a parallel in scholarly activities. Of course, one could simply not work on such philosophical projects. While perhaps this is sometimes an appropriate response, especially just for a period of time, overall I think it's not a good solution. We need to take seriously "the importance of maintaining an allegiance to one's own sense of what matters" (Wartenberg, 2002, p. 110). This will be especially true for those approaches to philosophy that see it as a way of life or a kind of advocacy or CARE work:

> Philosophy is supposed to be important to *you*. It is supposed to matter. It is supposed to enrich and stimulate imagination. It is supposed to foster and deepen vision. It is supposed to substitute wonder and the love of wisdom for dogmatism, prejudice, and the unexamined life. In sum, it is supposed to make a difference in the way *you* lead your life every day.
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> (Stuhr, 1997, p. 63)

It is precisely when we do scholarship as a kind of CARE work for those we love that the repeated costs of such work builds. Eva Kittay clearly captures this difficulty in her fantastic

paper "The Personal Is Philosophical Is Political." Kittay recounts having to respond (repeatedly) to Singer and McMahan on their comparison about the moral status of cognitively disabled persons, including her daughter Sesha, and nonhuman animals:

> To respond to the challenge to articulate the differences between a human animal with significantly curtailed cognitive capacities and a relatively intelligent nonhuman animal means that one first has to see the former as the latter. That is the moment of revulsion. Relating with that stance to my daughter as my daughter is an impossibility.
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> (2009, pp. 612–613)

As both Kittay and Barbara Schmitz note, there is a tendency in philosophy of "viewing cognitively disabled human beings as 'something else'" (Schmitz, 2014, p. 51) worthy of less moral consideration. It's one thing to simply read such work; that I can sometimes ignore, emotionally speaking. But when one thinks about the larger pattern of not only history but one's discipline having a general tendency to devalue cognitively disabled lives all while trying to navigate, in one's personal life, social systems built on that devaluation, things are different. Similarly, engaging in particular philosophical projects, especially in light of certain social facts regarding the discipline, can cause suffering. And while the suffering may not itself be a major problem, it can intersect with one's depression and anxiety, and fatigue.

In addition to this book chapter, I'm currently working on two papers related to cognitive disability. The first is a response to James B. Gould, who argues that cognitive disability is in all cases not only a global bad, "it reduces a person's well-being overall and on the whole," but also an intrinsic bad, "by itself it makes a person worse off, apart from an unjust social environment" (2018, p. 469).[12] The second is a response to Richard Swinburne, who is one of the most influential philosophers who works in one of my scholarly areas, philosophy of religion. He not only treats disability in an overly simplistic way but feels just fine making pronouncements such as the claim that "autistic children… have no sense of right or wrong" and "are to that extent incompetent" (Swinburne, 1999, p. 225). Swinburne repeatedly assumes that disability in all cases is an intrinsic bad, and thus that "disabilities need to be prevented and cured" (2007, p. 304). And yet in discussing the problem of evil, he thinks that God is justified in causing people to suffer the harm of disability in order to "be of use" to others, whether or not they consent to be used in this way. Instrumentalizing individuals in the way that Swinburne's view does makes it all too easy to justify various forms of oppression and harm where socially disadvantaged individuals or even classes of people must suffer for the good of those who perpetuate their oppression. In fact, this is exactly what we find in Swinburne's discussion of the "good of being of use" in chattel slavery (2007, pp. 245f.). The history of bioethics is full of such examples of disabled individuals purportedly being used "for the good of others" in just this way: the intentional infection of disabled children with gonorrhea by Henry Heiman, the US military and Atomic Energy Commission giving disabled children radioactive food or calcium to measure radiation exposure, the pattern of abuse and death at the Sonoma State Hospital in California, the widespread intentional infection of disabled residents with hepatitis at the Willowbrook State School, and so on. These historical realities of how disabled people have been "put to use in

promoting the good" of nondisabled people is horrifying. This is the heritage that all too easily could have been our son's.

Having to engage such claims comes with first-person cost given that our son is both autistic and cognitively disabled. These comments come across as simply condescending. But more problematically, Swinburne seems confident in making such claims without engaging any of the existing literature on the issues. His assumption seems to be that his conclusions are so obvious they need no substantive philosophical defense. I view his comments as instances of what Marilyn McCord Adams calls "the metaphysical devaluation" of human beings in discussions of the problem of evil (1999, p. 86).

It'd be nice, in a way, not to work on such things. And I acknowledge that I could refrain from writing on such issues and thereby avoid engaging with folks like Gould and Swinburne. I could perhaps even avoid knowing that scholars in my field share the larger cultural assumptions that so often devalue our son. Knowledge may be power, to quote *Schoolhouse Rock!*, but it can come with an emotional cost. However, as Myisha Cherry reminds us, ignorance is not bliss. There is "seduction and comfort that comes from being willfully ignorant of suffering in injustice (as well as their sources)" (Cherry, 2020, p. 2). Like general awareness, engaging in scholarly projects on such topics can come at the expense of our own well-being and often brings mental and emotional pain (Cherry, 2020, pp. 2, 3).[13] These views make me angry, especially Swinburne's given how some friends and others in the discipline fan-boy over his work in a way that doesn't seem to take seriously the possibility that his view is not only wrong but could be used to justify abuse.

Reading, taking seriously, and finding out the best way to engage without one's own experiences, anger, or sorrow being used to deflect criticism is difficult. Continually coming up against and trying to push back against such attitudes heightens my anxiety, contributes to depression, and leaves me a bit raw. Especially now that I've written a number of papers addressing some of the structural issues in both the profession and wider culture, I feel like I should be able to succeed in resisting those structural forces. But I often can't, despite my best efforts. Knowledge means that my failures are all too salient.

In his insightful book *The Life Worth Living*, Joel Michael Reynolds contrasts three categories of pain. The first of these, what he calls component pain, is "pain that enters into one's preflective and reflective awareness but is not definitive of one's life projects" (Reynolds, 2022, p. 51). He differentiates two subcategories of component pain: feeling pain and being in pain. Feeling pain "comprises unpleasant sensations that are of note, yet do not substantively enter into one's projects" (p. 51). Being in pain, in contrast, "comprises unpleasant sensations that inform one's short-term projects" (p. 52). Being in pain has an impact on our life projects, but that impact is not definitive of such projects. The difference between this first category of component pain and the second, constitutive pain, has to do with the degree to which the pain shapes one's projects. "Constitutive pain is pain that substantively and definitively enters into one's life projects" (p. 52). It is here that Reynolds thinks that pain rises to the level of suffering. Constitutive pain informs and orients one's long-term projects.[14] Finally, consuming pain "comprises constant or recurring unpleasant sensations so intense that one's experience primarily or solely consists of them" (p. 54).

I suspect we're all familiar with ways that philosophy can involve component pain. Grading, the effort required to follow or reconstruct certain arguments, and putting an accepted article

into a journal's idiosyncratic house style can all easily rise to the level of feeling and being in component pain. But there's probably no job, no vocation, that doesn't have aspects involving that sort of pain. One of the things I'm trying to sort out is whether philosophical projects ever involve constitutive pain. I'm not convinced that my own projects are shaped by constitutive pain, but it strikes me that some philosophical projects could easily be. And if so, then that's another route by which working on those particular projects could be bad for one's flourishing, even if one thought the reasons that one did focus on such things justified such a decision.

4 CARE-ing for Those Struggling to Do Philosophical CARE Work

In this final section, I want to return briefly to the issue of community that I've mentioned a number of times to discuss how we can CARE for people as they engage in the kind of scholarly pursuits I've discussed above. Individuals working on philosophical CARE projects themselves need support in order to continue working on such things rather than burning out or turning to easier pursuits. We need, as a community of scholars who care for each other and their work, to foster a better sense of solidarity and mutual support (see Hunt-Hendrix & Taylor, 2024; Shelby, 2017). Turning again to the wisdom of the Care Collective, "practices that are conventionally understood as care… cannot be properly carried out unless both caregivers and care receivers—indeed, all of us—are supported. This can only happen if care, as a capacity and a practice, is cultivated, shared, and resourced" (Chatzidakis et al., 2020, p. 6). We need to grow what Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, in her book *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*, calls "networks of care." In such networks, CARE work is not taken to be "an individual chore, an unfortunate cost of having an unfortunate body [or set of experiences]" but instead is recognized as "a collective responsibility that's maybe even deeply joyful" (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, p. 33). Later in the book she refers to this work as "a radical act of love" (p. 76). Philosophers concerned with the sorts of issues I discuss above need to work on developing such networks for the purpose of solidarity. We can better understand what it means for a network of care to hold others in solidarity by engaging in what Myisha Cherry calls "solidarity care." She gives three ways that we can extend this practice to those around us who need it:

1. by becoming aware of how we're a problem to others so that we can "stop being a problem" (Cherry, 2020, p. 6);
2. by providing reciprocating care and mutual responsiveness (p. 7); and
3. "through affirmation and encouragement" (p. 8).

Let me expand briefly on each of these three aspects, though much more needs to be said about what it would take to engage in these activities. First, sometimes we'll lack the firsthand experience to fully understand the relevant aspects of the kinds of CARE work others are engaged in. Much of the literature on standpoint theory in bioethics and feminist philosophy will be relevant here (e.g., Wylie, 2003). Listen to and learn from those pointing out where even our own best efforts can be counterproductive. While firsthand experience is helpful to understand

what CARE work is needed and the toll it can take on those engaged in it, it's not necessary. Here, an example from Talia Mae Bettcher's work as a trans philosopher might be helpful:

> Consider the vulnerability induced in having to philosophize intimate details of one's life—the asymmetry, the power differential. One is automatically on one's heels. To be clear, it doesn't really matter whether the topic is sexually explicit or not. So long as the topic is personal, intimate, one has, as it were, been pushed into the center of the party. It's like spilling spaghetti all over oneself and then having to carry on a philosophical conversation while pulling noodles from one's hair.
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> (2025)

As a cis philosopher, I don't have the experience Bettcher does of having to pull saucy noodles from my own hair. But I can learn to support trans philosophers (and others) by engaging with their work and experiences, learning what otherwise I might not recognize.

But there's a tension here.[15] Those people close enough to understand and engage in the CARE work may be at increased risk of paying the costs discussed in the previous section. This is one reason that the second way of engaging in solidarity care is so important. There are a number of books with more practical suggestions for solidarity and acts of care, even if their focus is broader than the specific issue I'm addressing here in this paper (see, for instance, Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2019; Hayes & Kaba, 2023; Hunt-Hendrix & Taylor, 2024).

Finally, we should encourage and support, both personally and professionally, those engaged in such projects. Providing support can help develop a "political legitimation" (Hereth, 2022, p. 6, drawing on Dotson, 2012). While many of these practices will be informal, we should also think about how to build better environmental structures and policies that would enable better support. Legitimize their topics. Point out that methodology, *who* and *how* we engage, has moral implications. Make it easier, not harder, for people directly impacted by CARE projects to enter philosophical conversations. Cite their work; recommend it to others in conversations; teach it. Fund their grants and center their scholarship in conferences. Help them combat the alienation and loneliness that may result from their work on CARE projects. Dotson discusses how we can "create an environment where incongruence [between what the discipline often recognizes as appropriate justifying norms in the profession and what kinds of projects are worth doing] becomes a site of creativity for even-expanding ways of doing professional philosophy" (2012, p. 16).[16] These practices all amount to ways of "refusing to abandon" (Hayes & Kaba, 2023, p. 41) and are themselves instances of CARE work.

5 Conclusion

In a lovely blog post, Bessie Akuba Winn-Afeku uses a quotation attributed to Japanese filmmaker and painter Akira Kurosawa: "the role of an artist is to not look away" (Winn-Afeku, 2017). Winn-Afeku was walking down the street when she noticed a man get off his bike and crouch

down on the sidewalk. Initially amused that this man's butt crack was showing, she pulled out her phone to take pictures. But as she took the pictures, she noticed that the man was pulling out his works and cooking a shot of heroin. This became an opportunity for her to notice her own voyeurism as well as the cultural tendency to ignore certain kinds of stigmatized difficulty:

> This is what I saw, because I didn't look away. Because I didn't look away, I saw what might have been a moment that I was going to use another humans [*sic*] pain, for my amusement. I began to wonder where was [*sic*] his family and friends. Where were the people that love him? Who was he before he developed his addiction? It's because I didn't look away that I was reminded of the different battles we, us humans all have. I was remind[ed] of how much of A MONSTER addiction is. The role of an artist is to not look away, right? It is in the "looking away" that we miss life happening right in front of us. Imagine if we always payed [*sic*] attention, looked on, and captured every moment. There is grace in all the moments that make us uncomfortable.
>
> (Winn-Afeku, 2017)

There are voyeuristic aspects of this experience that I think Winn-Afeku doesn't interrogate enough. But I think she's right that there can be a responsibility to not turn from the reality of certain issues.

If a central role of philosophy is to help us live better, and if a central task of being human is to love others and help them flourish, then there's a kind of "not looking away" that is built into philosophical projects that aim at being CARE. But since these projects can often take a toll—an emotional toll, a professional toll, a eudemonistic toll—on those that engage in them, perhaps one of our responsibilities is to "be with," in solidarity, those on whom the work takes such a toll.[17]

Notes

1 Describing the situation this starkly is something of a false dichotomy. And some might think the description of the first approach is little more than a caricature. I know a number of philosophers who think of philosophical issues as the opportunity to think through puzzles that are not connected with everyday life. Don't get me wrong. I'm not in principle opposed to philosophical puzzles. I've contributed to the literature on some of them myself. But one of the reasons for the shift in my scholarly focus over the past few years has been an increasing conviction that one of the norms (though not the only one) that governs what we should do as philosophers is to collectively spend our time and energy on issues of practical importance. Many of the traditional philosophical puzzles are rooted in practical issues, though this is sometimes lost in *how* we approach them. Furthermore, by "soul" here I am not thinking so narrowly as what is often called Platonic or Cartesian dualism, but rather as the animating force of the totality of human life.

2 I think that at least some of what is called "public philosophy" can also be understood as a push to care for the *political* soul.

3 By "philosophical projects," I primarily just mean the articles, books, and conference papers that we decide to work on.

4 Commenting on this general issue, Barrett Emerick writes that "increasingly I find hope also in the nonideal turn, living much more happily down on the ground, engaging with the experiences and insights that come from living real lives, taking seriously the messiness and contingency of the real world, theorizing not from nowhere but from here and now, with actual history and the legacies of violence, oppression, and domination setting the stage for whatever conclusions we reach" (2022, p. 177).

5 Similarly, Yancey writes that we should not seek to "do the impossible: to become invisible, apolitical, decontextual, to speak from nowhere" (2002, p. ix). Kristie Dotson describes academic philosophy's "culture of justification" as a vetting process that makes it difficult for people to work on certain projects within the field; see Dotson, 2012.

6 Such projects are more likely to arise in subdisciplines such as bioethics, broadly construed, where philosophical reflection can help us better understand how individuals encounter social structures.

7 For an earlier discussion where I say that scholarly work as a kind of advocacy can be motivated by love, see Timpe, 2018a. I don't think that there's an easy way to delineate the boundary between scholarly work and advocacy in many contexts.

8 It's worth making explicit the role of gender here, as "care has historically been undervalued because it has been associated with the 'feminine' and with caretaking, which is understood to be women's work" (Chatzidakis et al., 2020, p. 24). This is also true of the philosophy profession, not only in terms of who does certain kinds of work (see, for instance, O'Meara et al., 2017) but also in terms of who is more likely to engage in philosophical projects as a kind of care work.

9 In fact, this paper is dedicated to the school districts that harmed him, with the hope that "may [they] one day no longer be deserving of its criticism."

10 The Freedom of Information Act grants members of the public the right to request access to information from public agencies, including public education institutions.

11 The actual title is "Arguments That Harm—and Why We Need Them," but I don't think that what we need are the arguments. What is needed, rather, is to engage those arguments in certain contexts.

12 In the same paper, Gould writes that individuals with cognitive disability can't engage in "meaningful communication, significant relationships [or] productive activities" (p. 449). One night while working on this chapter, I paused while writing to put our cognitively disabled son to bed and he asked me to snuggle with him. Don't [expletive] tell me our son is incapable of entering into significant relationships. It is clear that he both knows he is loved and loves in return. Those who assume otherwise fail to recognize him.

13 Cherry continues: "In addition, having the above burden of awakening and challenging others is not just the activity of bringing them to account but it also consists of having some form of faith in humanity that the person will change" (p. 3). Such faith is often very hard to hold and even harder to foster.

14 More specifically, Reynolds distinguishes two forms of constitutive pain: suffering and constitutive suffering. "*Suffering* comprises unpleasant sensations that inform or orient one's long-term projects.... *Constitutive suffering* comprises constant unpleasant sensations that fundamentally orient one's long-term projects and one's sense of self" (p. 53). This distinction isn't central to the use I want to put Reynolds' general classification to, but it could be incorporated into that use if one wanted or found it valuable.

15 I'd like to thank Amy Flowerree for helping me put the tension this way.

16 One way of doing this is increasing "a culture of praxis," which she further describes as involving at least the following two components:

(1) Value placed on seeking issues and circumstances pertinent to our living, where one maintains a healthy appreciation for the differing issues that will emerge as pertinent among different populations and

(2) Recognition and encouragement of multiple canons and multiple ways of understanding disciplinary validation (Dotson, 2012, p. 17).

17 Earlier versions of this paper were given at the Mental Health and Faith Workshop run by Mike Rea and Laura Frances Callahan and the Baylor BRIGHTS Center Workshop on Patience, Disability, and Suffering organized by Anne Jeffrey. In addition to helpful feedback from numerous others at these events, all three of these organizers engage in the kinds of social scaffolding I discuss in section 4, for which I am thankful. Zsuzsanna Chappell, who lives many of the issues discussed in this chapter, gave me helpful feedback on numerous drafts.

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