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## Review

# Care ethics, democratic citizenship and the state

Petr Urban and Lizzie Ward (Eds.)

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The chapters in this edited volume offer an excellent occasion to take stock of current developments in care ethics. Rooted in western feminism, today the theoretical horizon of care ethics has significantly broadened. This review explores this development and asks what it implies for the position of care ethics in the broader field of political theory.

If there is anything that ethicist Petr Urban and social scientist Lizzie Ward want to make clear in their introduction, it is that they consider care ethics to be a moral and political theory. They argue that its origins predate the 1982 publication of Carol Gilligan's famous book, *In a Different Voice*. In 1980, Sara Ruddick was the first to observe that practices of care have too often been marginalized, gendered, and relegated to the private sphere, despite the fact that caring about and for others is fundamental to sustaining human life. Therefore, working towards a more just society should start with a recognition of the moral and political importance of caring and its underlying rationality. Since the 1990s, Joan Tronto (1993, 2013), Selma Sevenhuijsen (1998), Eva Feder Kittay (1999), Virginia Held (2006), and other feminist thinkers have developed more full-fledged political theories. They consider it the collective responsibility of all citizens to ensure an equal voice for, and access to, giving and receiving care. Today, care ethics is a burgeoning field of study, applying a specific care perspective to topics from migration to obstetric violence.

In 2015, Daniel Engster and Maurice Hamington edited a volume on *Care Ethics & Political Theory*, and they too aimed to highlight the political character of care. Most of the leading scholars in care ethics contributed to that volume. An entire section was devoted to liberal theory, and especially how (a Rawlsian interpretation of) justice relates to care. But this justice/care debate is conspicuously absent in Urban and Ward's book. The fact that John Rawls makes only one appearance indicates that, five years after Engster and Hamington's intervention, care ethics is entering a new stage.



In her chapter, Tronto addresses these changing tides head-on when she seeks to provincialize care ethics. Its roots within Western feminism resulted in a strong focus on gender. As a result, there has not always been enough interest in other types of marginalization. For instance, the specific contribution of black feminists to care theory is not sufficiently recognized. To come closer to a more caring democracy, there is a lot to learn from intersectional theory, critical race studies, and postcolonialism. A potentially fruitful exchange with religious ethical traditions also remains underexplored. Moreover, Tronto observes that an academic context dominated by liberal-democratic thinking has left its marks on care ethics. Here too, a broader perspective is needed. Tronto recommends expanding the as-yet weakly developed line of critical care ethics, for example, by drawing on Iris Marion Young and her focus on the forces of domination and oppression.

Provincializing care ethics is important, as Tronto argues that for care ethics to travel to other contexts, its specific place and timebound assumptions should be made explicit or even left behind. Otherwise, the approach itself could become a force of domination complicit in practices of epistemic injustice. Tronto formulates three travel conditions. First, doing harm to local contexts should be avoided. Second, echoing Nancy Fraser, Tronto underlines that the politics of needs interpretation should be as fair as possible. Third, care ethicists should be deeply attentive to the (limited) scope of their claims. It is perhaps only when care ethics critically engages with neoliberalism that its insights are more universally applicable. Since neoliberalism itself has traveled to every corner of the world, critiques of care ethics and its assumptions are relevant to different contexts as well.

Tronto's analysis is helpful, as it offers a framework to distinguish four emerging characteristics of care ethics that become apparent in this volume. The first is that care ethics can indeed travel and proves to be a helpful tool for critically analyzing the distribution of caring responsibilities in different contexts. Further, the 'critical care ethics' approach that Tronto recommends is a second characteristic that is developing quickly, especially in relation to neoliberal capitalism. A third characteristic is connected to Tronto's call for a caring democracy. Care ethicists prove to have valuable normative resources to propose alternatives that strengthen both deliberative democracy and caring practices. While critical engagement with liberal theory is on the wane, there is now a more appreciative exchange with social democratic theory. The fourth characteristic is the wish to ensure a proper understanding of caring needs and the attentiveness this requires. This has contributed to a specific combination of normative reflection and empirical analysis. These four characteristics will be discussed below.

That care ethics can travel and progress at the same time is best visible in Kanchana Mahadevan's chapter on the international commodification of care work. She shows how the fact that care professionals leave for work abroad negatively affects the availability of health care at home. Tronto once proposed granting



migrating care workers (temporary) citizenship in host countries to prevent exploitation. However, Mahadevan objects that this would make migration even more attractive and further drain the resources of countries that are already struggling with a history of colonization. Therefore, Mahadevan proposes a decolonized cosmopolitan approach to care. This implies thinking about and organizing care relations at a global level and recognizing the needs of all involved. Although Mahadevan convincingly shows the importance of this broad perspective, relativizing citizenship rights might be too high a price to pay.

In other contexts, too, the strategy of combining a critical power analysis and a focus on caring responsibilities proves helpful. Political philosopher Yayo Okano and sociologist Satomi Maruyama adopt this approach for explaining how the combination of social protection provided by employment and strongly gendered family norms leaves women in Japan in a vulnerable position. Ethicist Adriana Jesenková uses care ethics to uncover a deficit of care in the Slovak education system. She argues that democratic inclusion rather than integration should be adopted as a framework able to ensure that marginalized groups have full access to the educational system.

The various exposés on neoliberalism indicate that the development of critical care ethics is in full swing. Philosopher Fabienne Brugère states that care ethics ‘must expose the processes through which caring for the most vulnerable has become marginalized and through which the recognition of care-related practices, people, and institutions has been undermined’ (p. 141). Building on Wendy Brown’s work, Brugère paints, in rather broad strokes, how care has been reshaped by an all-encompassing market rationale. Populism claims to provide protection against this development, but only extends to co-nationals. Brugère shows how both developments transform what she understands as ‘good care,’ which aims to reintroduce the most vulnerable into the social bond. These bonds should be institutionalized in such a way that the human dignity of all is protected. She recommends a revaluation of the welfare state as the most promising framework within which people can live a decent life.

Echoing Sheldon Wolin’s distinction between productive and democratic time, political philosopher Julie Anne White compares an accelerationist, neoliberal regime of time and the relationship-centered regime of caring. The latter is not only more adequate for actual professional and informal care work but also to deep democracy. White emphasizes that the temporal regime of caring is critical to democratic deliberation and the development of caring attention. However, for now, slowing down remains a privilege of the higher end of the socioeconomic spectrum, while at the other end, discipline seems to be the focus of many policies, including in the educational system. Political theorist Jorma Heier also discusses the deficit of care in democracy. To fight the systemic lack of democratic time and to recognize the importance of care, she joins the advocates of *(Part) Time for All*:



a regime in which citizens can combine work and care, enabling them to live decent, fulfilling, and included lives.

Finally, Brunella Casalini considers how to actually move away from neoliberal capitalism. She considers which social imaginary is most promising in offering a counter-narrative that can guide the way. Casalini compares feminist vocabularies of social flesh, affective equality, social reproduction, and care, which she conceptualizes under the umbrella of responsive connectedness. She convincingly argues that care is the only notion that is able to include the three other concepts. Nevertheless, Casalini emphasizes that care ethics should invest more in queering care by exploring the element of play. Care should also include relationships where desire rather than dependency is at the core.

In their critique of neoliberal capitalism, care ethicists especially focus on its transformative power of caring, time, and democracy. But care ethics goes beyond mere criticism. Having caring democracy as a political ideal also involves a constructive agenda in which the welfare state often plays a surprising role.

Defining care as a limited resource, and echoing Michael Walzer, political scientist Helena Olofsdotter Stensöta asks in which social sphere care can best be distributed. She joins the critics of neoliberalism in rejecting the market as a solution. Although cheaper for the state, care will only be available for those who can afford it. Stensöta admits that civil society might be better than the state in providing the kind of care that fits the particular context and needs of people. However, receiving care might then become a matter of charity rather than the answer to a justifiable claim. In light of these trade-offs, Stensöta argues that the responsibility for care should lie first with the state, since it disposes the public funds to provide it. Of course, this does not exclude contracting out certain types of care and coordinating the care responsibilities that citizens also have.

With this renewed interest in the welfare state, Marion Smiley considers the timely question of how to ensure that this political idea does not fall into the trap of paternalism. Smiley first discusses approaches that define paternalism in line with Gerald Dworkin, namely as coercive interference with an individual's liberty for the sake of their own well-being. Smiley rejects this liberal focus on free choice as too narrow. Instead, she defines paternalism as a paternal mode of governance, organized around a model of political authority that places the image of a caring father at the center. A nonpaternalistic welfare state implies that distinctly paternal systems of power are absent in practices of care.

Smiley's chapter also addresses one of the major feminist objections to the welfare state: could care ethics help us reconsider its supposedly patronizing character? An important way to do so would be to ensure that needs are identified and addressed in a transparent and open manner. This implies that listening to others and understanding their positions and needs is crucial. This theme of attentiveness as a methodological orientation is also discussed in several contributions.



Political scientist Sophie Bourgault subscribes to Harry Frankfurt's warning against the growing carelessness and inattentiveness to the truth and to others. Combining feminist care ethics and Gadamerian hermeneutics, Bourgault develops an account of attentive listening as an antidote to post-truth politics. Awareness of deeply divergent views and values is the only possible way to recognize pluralism and to make political discussions more inclusive. Courage and humility are key to achieving this. Political solidarity does not stem from the identification of shared interests but from an acknowledgement of a shared vulnerability and plurality revealed through conversation. Important as listening is, Bourgault emphasizes that this should be accompanied by a power analysis. Indeed, citizens who already find themselves in an underprivileged position are often those who must sacrifice most when entering into deliberative exchanges. Bourgault calls for shifting the burden onto those who are powerful, but she does not show how this can be done.

Petr Urban aims to elaborate an institutional political theory that explicitly seeks to incorporate the lived experiences of citizens. Focusing on public administration, he criticizes the neoliberal concept of New Public Management. He argues that administrating should be a situational and relational practice that improves the lives of all individuals and communities. To discover how to better institutionalize, Urban contends that practice-oriented approaches are needed that combine reflection with ethnographic sensibility. Based on his own empirical research with the Czech Ministry of Transport, Urban recommends that both employees and their managers reserve more time for relationship building and for discussing how to navigate the different ethical frameworks they encounter. The outlines of 'slow administration' are emerging.

Lizzie Ward, Mo Ray, and Denise Tanner argue that participation in the production of knowledge about (good) care is as crucial as participation in decision making about it. To assess the assumptions that underpin its marketization, Ward, Ray, and Tanner contend that it is pivotal to map actual experiences of care in a neoliberal context. They seek to co-produce this knowledge with those concerned through joint empirical research. They convincingly show that the neoliberal imaginary of calculating consumer-citizens has little relevance to the emotional and practical complexities that people experience when they have to negotiate the vagaries of the social care market. The authors admit that the post-war welfare state should not be idealized, as it was also an exclusive system which promoted traditional gender norms and was dependent on labor migrants from (former) colonies. However, what was lost during its decline is a 'public' understanding of collective responsibility for care. Neoliberalism has impoverished our capacity to think deeply about the meaning of our actions and experiences, and researching lived experiences can help counter that.

What does this volume reveal about the position of care ethics in the broader field of political theory? As Tronto argues, the ties to feminist theory are loosening. Most of the contributions in the book can be characterized as some form of critical



care ethics, with the work of Iris Marion Young as a returning reference point for many authors. At the same time, none of the chapters deeply engage with critical race studies and postcolonial theory, while some chapters highlight the potential of engaging with social democratic theory and its focus on socioeconomic inequalities. The welfare state is considered to be the framework for a caring democracy where all citizens can live a decent, fulfilling, and included life. It is an open question whether, and how, care ethicists will be able to fruitfully discuss the relationship between questions of identity and inclusion, on the one hand, and concerns about social justice and redistribution, on the other.

All authors remain within traditional bounds of political theory, approaching the polis as a solely human enterprise. Challenging issues like the climate crisis and the relevance of a posthuman perspective are missing. Nevertheless, the volume indicates what a combination of normative reflection, empirical research, and critical power analysis can contribute to making our societies more caring and more democratic.

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