

Daniel Engster and Maurice Hamington (editors)
Care Ethics and Political Theory
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Helena Olofsdotter Stensöta is an associate professor of political science at the University of Gothenburg. Her research centers on issues of gender, ethics, public policy, and administration. Some of her publications include: "A Public Ethics of Care: Bringing Ethics of Care into Public Ethics Research," in *Ethics in Public Policy and Management: A Global Research Companion*, ed. Alan Lawton et al. (2015); "Public Ethics of Care: A General Public Ethics," *Ethics and Social Welfare* (2015); "Gender and Corruption: The Mediating Power of Institutional Logics" (with Lena Wängnerud and Richard Svensson), *Governance* (2015); "Grades -- For Better or Worse? The Interplay of School Performance and Subjective Well Being among Boys and Girls" (with Erica Nordlander), *Child Indicator Research* (2014); "Political Influence on Street-Level Bureaucratic Outcome: Testing the Interaction between Bureaucratic Ideology and Local Community Political Orientation," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* (2012); "Do Family Policy Regimes Matter for Children's Wellbeing" (with Daniel Engster), *Social Politics* (2011); "The Conditions of Care: Reframing the Debate about Public Sector Ethics," *Public Administration Review* (2010).

An ethics of care perspective is important for many reasons for coping with contemporary political problems theoretically as well as empirically: not only are Western worldviews, such as liberalism, not equipped for handling global problems or problems in non-Western contexts, but care ethics may also serve as a vehicle for repoliticizing the feminist movement. I gained these insights from *Care Ethics and Political Theory*, edited by Daniel Engster and Maurice Hamington. They have identified an important task and engaged a number of distinguished scholars based mainly in the United States, who regularly meet at conferences. The volume finds its place among other publications that forward the discussion in the field by collecting ongoing work, such as the very interesting special issues published by *Ethics and Social Welfare* over several years (2010, 2011, 2015).

The editors present two motivations for the volume: Its scholarly contribution centers on the perennial question of how care ethics relates to justice, including questions on how we can "translate" our reasoning about central matters such as civil freedoms, privacy, and welfare to accommodate an ethics of care perspective. Its social/political contribution is more complex; care ethics may serve as a basis for developing a "new political theory that can usefully guide analysis and action under contemporary conditions" (7). These contemporary conditions are to a considerable extent left to each contributor to define, but their basis is the limits of Western individualistic ontologies to cope with current transitions.

Regarding the scholarly ambition for the volume, the authors are united by the goal and the conviction of care ethics being the broadest and most fundamental moral perspective, which is commonly supported by its importance for the foundations of life. The chapters then explore varying ways to argue and to convince the reader of the central position of care and care ethics and the way they relate to justice.

Virginia Held argues that previous theory has often applied a theory of justice to the activities of care (23), which she believes does not tap into the radical potential of care ethics. Rather, we should strive to develop a new moral theory centered on care. Echoing Tove Pettersen, she uses the image of circles, suggesting the connection of specific moral theories to different circles (Pettersen 2008). Care ethics applies to the widest circle of society, where both the strongest caring relations, those in the family, as well as the weakest, those in civil society, are anchored. The subdomains of law and politics give room for other moral reasoning such as justice. Michael Slote argues that such ambition is not radical enough. He holds instead that care ethicists should reformulate and reconceptualize our central thinking about rights as an empathetic concern. According to Slote, the concept of empathy can stand alongside the Rawlsian principle of improving conditions for the worst-off in society, as caring about others depends on the development of empathy in individuals.

Slote's suggestion is in turn criticized by Nel Noddings, who writes that the concept of empathy is too vague and that scholars of care ethics should aim for "the activation of genuine caring-for, the person-to-person relationship characterized by attention, dialogue, recognition of expressed needs and immediate response moved by the feeling aroused when people are in contact with those in need" (76). Noddings's rich definition of care leads her to conclude that organizations such as schools and social services cannot care-for in the sense prescribed by care theory, as they don't provide such person-to-person relationships. What organizations (and politics) can do is to provide the foundations for such relationships to grow. Although the question of how this can be done is left out of Noddings's reflections, this thread is taken up by Maxine Eichner, who argues that we need to rethink the neutral character of the state, central to liberal theory, and instead discuss "the supportive state," a state that helps families to take care of themselves, mainly through financial assistance.

The part of the book that addresses the development of new theory in more depth contains an interesting section in which care ethics is expanded to non-Western and subaltern cultures, including thoughtful contributions such as those by Amanda Gouws and Mikki van Zyl proposing to develop a feminist moral theory from the global South through a feminist ethics of Ubuntu, which captures people as bound together in relations of mutual respect and dignity, and to which care is central.

Joan Tronto's contribution proposes a new way to think about responsibility, which is needed to strengthen and secure care concerns and which picks up on the central argument of her latest book (Tronto 2013). She argues that most theories don't offer a framework for "unintended consequences" within the theory, and that current times demand theories that do so. Care ethics provides a needed framework for integrating such consequences within the theory because of its "messy feedback loops and overlapping forms of responsibility" (264), and because it requires the perspective of both the cared for and the carers.

Julie Ann White's chapter makes an interesting contribution to the debate on mothering. From a feminist perspective, one central problem of care ethics has been its relation to women and traditionally female activities. The central stance of "mothering" in care ethics entails a promise, as it politicizes care issues that have previously been considered nonpolitical; at the same time it contains a threat, as connecting mothering to women might cement the role of women as carers. White captures the promise of care ethics to reform social theory in the way that care can be made more public (a public virtue) and likewise more central to democratic commitments. She coins the practice of "other-mothering," meaning to take on maternal responsibilities for nonbiological kin, as a way to illustrate how care can become more public-

-a "half-step" between private and public. She pictures other-mothering as a kind of ritual, an ethic of generosity and sacrifice that challenges both neoliberalism and a logic of exchange. Her chapter includes a nice example of a way to care for nonbiologically related children, not through adoption but rather by transgressing a formal contractual arrangement.

Narrowing the discussion to what is *new* in the volume in relation to feminist theory, the chapter by Fiona Robinson provides some important insights. Robinson raises the question whether care ethics may provide a response to what she sees as the crisis in contemporary feminism, which has to do with lost political strength. Robinson's short answer is that care ethics can play an important role: "by foregrounding the giving and receiving of care as fundamental to the experience of being human, care ethics offers a substantive basis and a shared moral language from which to build social policy both within and across societies" (295). As in her earlier work, Robinson offers a reading of the ethics of care as the basis for transnational feminist politics. She comprehends care ethics as a critical theory that creates conditions for feminist solidarity and thereby brings back "the political" into feminism. In the global world, care activities become a lens through which patterns of power in sex, race, and peripheries may emerge more clearly.

I am sympathetic to the ambition of tapping into the radical potential of care ethics to handle contemporary social and political challenges. I also agree that a critical assessment of liberal thought is central to this endeavor. However, the volume leaves some important problems underdeveloped.

The manner in which these authors interact in a discussion with one another evokes several impressions of the book. First, it becomes clear that the authors are rather familiar with one another: They are driven by similar interests, and they address one another's propositions in critical ways. This is, on the one hand, positive, as it is precisely where edited volumes often fall short. In this instance it seems likely that the editors commented extensively on the manuscripts, which may have cultivated a rich cross-fertilization among the contributions. On the other hand, a negative consequence may be that a reluctance to reach beyond their own circle can result in a kind of groupthink, and a decline in innovative and critical power. The latter risk is more obvious in relation to the second of the editors' stated goals, to develop new theory to address contemporary social and political problems.

It is common to connect care and care ethics relatively tightly to family care, making the familiar person-to-person relationship central in the definition. This leads, however, to problems of how to accommodate this rich definition of care and work to make care more public--to politicize care. When Tronto argued in 1993 for the politicization of care ethics, the transgression of the boundary between between public and private was one important goal (Tronto 1993). Aiming to make care public without reflecting on the option that good care can be performed outside of the family and outside of civil society seems to leave out several important options for making care political. And, as the volume claims to discuss the limits of liberalism, the limit of the public--private divide, central to liberalism, could have been a point of further discussion.

This point also becomes important because the connection between care and the family leads several scholars in the volume to argue that organizations cannot care. Noddings explicitly advances this argument, and White also argues that the need to be responded to by a particular person who is familiar is not met when care becomes outsourced. Here, it seems that the authors assume that organization equates to neoliberal organization and therefore is not fit to

accommodate care. But neoliberal organization is only one form of organization, and the failure to address the relationship between care ethics and different types of organizational principles is a missed opportunity in a volume aiming to forward theory. For example, perspectives come to mind that use care ethics as a critical lens to discuss welfare policies, as in the works of Fiona Williams (Williams 2001).

This problem becomes more crucial when care ethics is connected to democratic commitment and ideals. Eichner's discussion of the supportive state sees the state as assisting families only financially and not also possibly providing care through (public) organizations. I would have liked to see a deeper problematization of how care receiving and caregiving *for all* might be guaranteed through this suggestion.

In sum, it is important to document how a scholarly discussion within a field proceeds, even when no coherent "new" approach is presented. At the same time, the book is more a documentation of an ongoing discussion than an exposition of a coherent *new* argument on care ethics. Especially in regard to the discussion of liberalism, its critical potential might have been deepened by engaging a more heterogeneous set of contributors. If we are determined to make care more democratic in people's equal access to both giving and receiving care, then additional problems pertain that are not dealt with by the scholars represented here.

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