

6 A third way? Moralities, ethics and families

An approach through the ethic of care

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Introduction

It might be common knowledge by now that ‘the’ family is in many ways a powerful myth. It is not only a sociological myth, since there are many different kinds of family form and family practice, which shift over time and according to cultural context. It is also a political myth, since ‘the family’ is to a considerable extent constructed by state policies (family law, social policies) and by the idea systems of political institutions (political parties, advisory bodies, institutions of the welfare state). It matters how political theories conceptualise family, kinship and care and, at the heart of this complicated nexus, gender. As a contemporary illustration of the process by which a concept of ‘the family’ is implicated in political strategies, I will consider the contributions made by the British sociologist Anthony Giddens, especially in his book *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (1998).

Giddens presents his ideas as a middle road between neo-liberalism and ‘old-style social democracy’. I focus primarily on the political philosophy underlying his approach, rather than current policy making. I therefore leave open the question of how far his ideas have influenced the policy of the Blair government in the UK, which has at times traded under the same banner of ‘the third way’. Nevertheless, Giddens’ merit is that he echoes New Labour thinking on the family in a manner that is systematic enough to allow a detailed critique. My main contention is that the feminist ethic of care can provide a useful vantage point from which to demonstrate both the weaknesses in Giddens’ treatment of the family and the real possibilities for political renewal that lie in a potential ‘third way’ of thinking about democratic family practice that takes proper account of the ethics of care.

The normative framework of Giddens’ third way

In the opening chapters of his book, Giddens lays down what in his view should be the crux of the normative framework of third way politics: a balanced relation between social justice, emancipation, equality and social cohesion. In a later section he substantiates these values further. He introduces the themes of social democracy, viz. globalisation, individualism,

the meaning of Left and Right, the value of political agency, and how to respond to ecological problems. He then states that ‘the overall aim of third way politics should be to help citizens to pilot their way through the major revolutions of our time: *globalisation, transformations in personal life and our relationship to nature*’ (Giddens 1998: 64).

Equality and freedom should be at the core of the third way’s value system. Freedom to social democrats should mean autonomy of action, which in turn ‘demands the involvement of the wider social community’ (*ibid.*: 65). After the age of collectivism, third way politics should look for a new relationship between the individual and the community, a redefinition of rights and obligations. Old-style social democracy would be too much inclined to treat rights as unconditional claims. The prime motto for the new politics should therefore be *no rights without responsibilities*.

These notions are linked to two further core concepts, which are both relevant to his discussion of the family, that of *no authority without democracy* and *philosophical conservatism*. While the traditional Right looks to nation, government and traditional family life as a means of justifying authority and for ways to differentiate between right and wrong, and thus for moral judgement, social democrats should adhere to the idea that the only route to establishing authority is via democracy. The new individualism should not be seen as a threat to authority and solidarity but rather as a demand that authority be recast on an active and participatory base. The values of participatory democracy should in fact be applied to all spheres of social life. However, he qualifies these ideas by introducing the notion of philosophical conservatism. This norm should be adopted when dealing with the question of how to recreate social solidarity after the decline of tradition and custom, and how to deal with modernisation and economic growth in an era of environmental risk.

Modernisation should not be about ‘more and more modernity’ but should be conscious of the limits of modernising processes and about the need to ‘re-establish continuity’. Philosophical conservatism would suggest a pragmatic attitude of coping with change, a respect for past and history and, in the environmental arena, an adoption of the precautionary principle wherever feasible. ‘The family’ serves as the prime example of this notion of philosophical conservatism: sustaining continuity in family life, especially the well-being of children, should in Giddens’ view be acknowledged as one of the most important goals of family policy. Woven through these ideas are notions of obligation and responsibility. Let me first discuss, then, the role of these notions in the general framework of the book before looking in more detail at the proposals for family policies.

The ethic of care versus contract and obligation

The notions of obligation and responsibility in third way discourse serve to bridge the gap between individual and society and to forge a new relation-

ship between individual and community. In opposition to conservative ideology, Giddens does not want to see individualism as a threat to solidarity and the existence of social ties. As he states succinctly, we do not live in an age of moral decay but rather in one of moral transition, in which we have to live our lives in a more active way than was true for previous generations, and in which we have to find a new balance between individual and collective responsibilities (Giddens 1998: 37). At this point, it is important to note that he embraces human agency and self-fulfilment as positive normative goals, refusing to equate this with the notion of narrow-minded egoism that conservatives tend to ascribe to neo-liberalism.

However, the need for these metaphors of bridging (and thus the need for a 'third way') are created by the very discourse that Giddens uses in *The Third Way*. Despite his professed progressive intentions, a retrospective mood underlies his text, a mood in which the opposition between individual and society is accepted as given. He frequently uses metaphors of reparation for something that has been lost, such as when he states that third way politics should *re-establish* continuity, *recreate* social solidarity and *repair* the civil order. A feminist ethic of care denies such oppositions between individual and society in the first place. In three respects, the care ethic yields a different perspective on this topic than that provided by Giddens and related third way thinkers: first, with regard to the idea of human subjectivity; second, with regard to the ideas adopted about morality and politics; and, third, with regard to the underlying 'political sociology of care'.

As argued by a great number of authors, the ethic of care is inherently characterised by a *relational ontology*, both in the descriptive and in the normative respects. This is encapsulated in the idea that individuals can exist only because they are members of various networks of care and responsibility, for good or bad. The self can exist only through and with others, and *vice versa* (Gilligan 1987; Tronto 1993; Griffith 1995; Clement 1996; Hirschmann and DiStefano 1996; Sevenhuijsen 1998). In Giddens' approach, the need for obligations arises to counter the detachment that may arise in a society of atomistic, self-governed individuals: in this respect, his framework is permeated by the assumptions of contractual ethics. Conversely, the ethic of care takes the idea of self in relationship as the point of entry for thinking about obligations and responsibility. While the moral subject in the discourse of individual rights looks at moral dilemmas from the stance of the 'highest moral principles' and takes rights and responsibilities as a means of establishing relationships, the moral subject in the discourse of care already lives in a network of relation and (inter)dependence, in which he/she has to find balances between different forms of care: for the self, for others and for the relations between these.

As I have argued elsewhere, it is not 'duty' that guides her/him through recurrent moral dilemmas but rather situated questions of responsibility and agency such as 'how can I best express my caring responsibility?' or 'how

can I best deal with the relations between vulnerability, dependency and power?' (Sevenhuijsen 1998: 56, 1999). This comes quite close to the suggestion made by Janet Finch and others of taking the question of 'what is the proper thing to do' as a way of thinking about morality as a situated practice (Finch 1989; Finch and Mason 1993).

Nancy Hirschmann argues in her work on obligation that liberal theories on contract and consent cannot adequately deal with obligation, since they depart from a notion of equal and separate individuals. Liberal consent theories 'seek to understand how separate individuals can develop and sustain connections and still be separate; how they engage in relationships and still remain free' (Hirschmann 1992: 170). In contrast, a feminist approach would start from an understanding of obligations and responsibilities as daily human practices. Responsibility and obligation then become a basic standard against which other things are measured, such as the freedom to act as one wishes. The central question shifts to 'how can I achieve some freedom and yet remain connected?' Carol Gilligan, who has provided the groundwork for a feminist ethic of care, has outlined the difference it makes when we think along these lines:

As a framework for moral decision, care is grounded in the assumption that self and other are interdependent, an assumption reflected in a view of action as responsive, and, therefore, as arising in relationship rather than the view of action as emanating from within the self, and therefore 'self-governed'.

Gilligan 1987: 24

These observations also point to different modes of conceptualising the *relationship between morality and politics*. Political programmes that are based on constructions of individual holders of rights as the 'basic units' of society tend to see the law as the main guarantor of the existence of morality, and in many cases also to single out 'the family' as the primary locus for morality. As argued by Zygmunt Bauman (1993: 29): 'individual responsibility is then translated as the responsibility for following or breaching the socially endorsed, ethical legal rules'. According to Bauman, modernity thrives on the 'expropriation of the moral'. Modernity is fuelled by a deep-seated mistrust of the moral capacities of its subjects and thus aims to press its claims to moral truth by laying them down in legal imperatives, which are then supposed to educate those who are beyond the boundaries of 'proper morality'. Hence the continual urge to derive legal obligations from notions of rights.

The ethic of care implies a radically different account of the relationship between morality and politics and thus between obligation and responsibility. Because it starts from a relational ontology, it focuses primarily on the question of what politics could mean for the safeguarding of responsibility and relationship in human practice and interaction. Policy making needs a

more sophisticated insight into the way in which individuals frame their responsibilities in actual social practices and how the moral dilemmas that go with the conflicting responsibilities of care for 'self, other and the relation between them' are handled. It would gain this insight from an attitude of initial trust in the moral capacities of individuals, and thus from an attitude of listening as a practice of democratic citizenship (Bickford 1996).

Social policies, and thus also family policies, should therefore be governed by responsiveness to the needs of those with whom they are concerned. It cannot be stressed enough that the 'caring attitude' is not confined to private interactions but should also count as a 'public virtue' that should enter the considerations of policy makers (Sevenhuijsen 2000a).

The relevance of these statements can be underlined further by pointing to the 'political sociology of care' that underlies the feminist ethic of care.¹ Care should best be seen as practice and disposition, as well as a social process. Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto (1990) have proposed a definition of care as:

A species of activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.

Joan Tronto (1993) has elaborated on how each of the four phases of care introduced by Fisher and Tronto (1990) corresponds to a specific value:

- *Caring about* consists of paying attention to the factors that determine survival and well-being and in establishing the need for care. The corresponding value is *attentiveness*.
- *Caring for* means taking the initiative for concrete activities, *responsibility* being the value that counts here.
- *Taking care of* is the concrete work of 'maintaining and repairing the world', carrying out the recurrent daily routines of caring work and developing a thorough understanding of these, and *competence* is the corresponding value.
- The fourth phase of care consists of *receiving care*. Here, open forms of interaction between care givers and care receivers are important as a check on the quality of care, *responsiveness* being the overriding value.

These four values – attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness – are thus the core of an ethic of care. To these can be added values like trust, honesty, respect and relational autonomy.²

Care can accordingly be conceptualised as a continuous social process and as a daily human activity. It should best be seen as a human practice that entails a set of moral orientations. These are aimed at the question of how needs should be interpreted, and if and how they can be fulfilled. This is

also why the care ethic cannot easily be seen as a version of duty ethics. The ethic of care does not presume that the caring actor has a universal moral obligation to care for the needs of others, an obligation that some writers derive from a 'feminine impulse to care on behalf of the other' (see, for example, Noddings 1984). According to Noddings, feminine care is inscribed in a Kantian ethic of obligation and duty: those acts should be considered as moral that are enacted from a universalisable feeling of duty.

In my view, it is more fruitful to stress that the care ethic implies being attentive to the other as inherently situated, and as different from the self. The implication of this point is that a pluralistic approach should guide policy formation as well as personal practice. The process of caring will typically bring together a variety of different actors (care givers and care receivers, private and public agencies, etc.), all with their own views on the caring process and with distinctive moral repertoires. Recognition of the moral agency of these actors calls for a new 'politics of needs interpretation' that takes full account of these local contexts of action and judgement.

The place of care in Giddens' conception of the third way

Against this background, it may become clear that in *The Third Way* Giddens discusses care in a rather paradoxical and defective manner. He mentions care in the chapter on family politics, stating that democratic family relations imply shared responsibility for childcare. Care is also mentioned in his chapter on the social investment state, where he says that the Left should accept the criticism of the Right that the welfare state is based too heavily on 'the motive force of protection and care' and thus 'does not give enough space to personal liberty'. Care and protection are nearly equated here. Together they are inscribed in a framework of control, where freedom, personal initiative and autonomy are constructed as their counterpart. By implication, care is conceptualised in terms of negative freedom, as an entity that stands in the way of self-fulfilment. This notion is far removed from the notion of the care ethic, that (good) care provides an indispensable contribution to human flourishing.

In his sociological observations and normative framework, Giddens also forgets to mention care where we might expect him to. The most remarkable passage in this respect is the one in which he writes about the meaning of involvement in the labour force as a means of attacking 'involuntary exclusion'. Work, he says, has multiple benefits: it generates income for the individual; it gives a sense of stability and direction in life; and it creates wealth for the wider society. But he also adds an important observation about the limits of the work ethic:

Yet inclusion must stretch well beyond work, not only because there are many people at any one time not able to be in the labour force, but because a society too determined by the work ethic would be a

thoroughly unattractive place to live. An inclusive society must provide for the basic needs of those who can't work and must recognise the wider diversity of goals life has to offer.

Giddens 1998: 110

To see how painfully this remark misses its target, we need only reflect on the limitations of the work ethic as a guide to public policy in contemporary society. The quotation fails to address the importance of caring work in society and of the values of attentiveness and responsibility in creating humane relationships in daily social interactions. Also, a questionable distinction is made between those who can and those who cannot work. An outdated division between a category of 'self-sufficient workers' and 'dependent others', which is based on the independent male citizen-worker as the paradigm for citizenship, is thereby repeated (Fraser and Gordon 1994).

These contradictions can be overcome only by explicitly including the providing and receiving of care in ideas about 'the wider goals of life' and in our image of a society that 'seems attractive to live in' (i.e. in notions of the good life). In consequence, it should also be integrated into notions of collective agency and citizenship (Sevenhuijsen 1998).

In his paradoxical and defective discussion of care, Giddens misses the crucial sociological message of feminist theories on this topic: the notion that caring is a social activity in itself and that the moral orientation of care is crucial both for the provision of basic needs and for processes of social cohesion.³ In this respect, it is striking that Giddens does not include care in his remarks on the 'transformations in personal life', which he nevertheless refers to as a major revolution of our times. In this context, he mainly talks about the individualism of the younger generation, although he does defend this against conservative worries about moral decay by pointing to their 'post-materialist' values and lifestyles. The problem with this approach is that it tends to reduce everything that happens in personal life to a matter of identity politics. In fact, these ideas are based on a separation between the psychological and the material elements of social life and human agency. The care ethic denies such a separation of material life and interpersonal relationships and points, by its insistence that care is work, to the inter-relatedness of agency and morality and to the manifold gender subtexts in discursive patterns on the relation between paid work and care.

By omitting the social importance of care, Giddens also misses the *political* message of contemporary feminist theories of labour and care: that as many individuals as possible should have the opportunity to combine paid work and informal care in their life course. This is not just because there happen to be needy persons who cannot take care of themselves (and thus fall outside the category of 'responsible independent individuals') but because caring should be valued as an important human practice that contributes to the potential for moral agency. A democratic ethic of care starts from the assumption that everybody needs care daily (albeit care of

different sorts and with different grades of intensity) and is (in principle at least) capable of giving care. We might conclude that a democratic and inclusive society ought to encourage its members to give both of these activities a meaningful place in their lives.

This point may be pursued by elaborating the moral and practical implications of the notion of care as a 'democratic practice'. As Joan Tronto has remarked, both caring as intimate involvement with others and caring in broader and more abstract long-term ways are essential to the roles of citizens in a democratic political system. Their development requires an involvement both in the intimate relations of daily life and in the more distant relations of public life (Tronto 1996).

The demand for equal access to different social spheres springs from the democratic moral impulse that individuals should have the ability to circulate in different roles and positions, where they can become acquainted with the needs and moral viewpoints of different social actors. Democratic life can flourish better when people have the ability to circulate between different positions of responsibility and can thus practice values like attentiveness, responsiveness and trust in their different walks of life.⁴ The field of social policies and family politics is an important arena, where the policies supporting these notions should be developed. Again, we may wonder whether Giddens' proposals for a 'third way' are adequate in this respect.

Family practices, care and the search for new social policies

At several places in his book, Giddens argues for 'family-friendly' work environments. Again, however, his practical proposals are not sufficiently linked to his normative framework. The main problem in this respect in his version of the third way is that his normative image of citizenship is still principally grafted on to that of the wage-earning independent citizen. Access to paid work is constructed as the primary dimension of social inclusion. But this wage-earning citizen has to change in character, according to Giddens. In his ideal of the 'social investment state', citizens cannot rely on social rights and social security any longer to sustain their lives when the labour market fails. They must take their own responsibility and turn into 'responsible risk takers', the main subject position used by Giddens to construct his brave New Labour world of welfare policy and social citizenship. But there is a long way to go before access to paid work and the responsibilities for care are shared equally in gender terms. And Giddens' case at this point is not helped by the casual and self-contradictory way in which the concept of care enters his analysis.

Let us start with Giddens' proposals for a new family politics, in his own words a 'key test' for the new politics. In his section on 'the democratic family', he argues vehemently against conservative fears of the breakdown of the family and related arguments for a return to traditional family life and male authority. In his view there is no way back: recombining the traditional

family would be a 'non-starter'. However, libertarian social democrats also get it wrong: their arguments for a 'proliferation of lifestyles', like one-parent families and homosexuals who raise children, are 'simply not convincing'. The (supposed) effects of divorce on children epitomise Giddens' concern for social cohesion: children in one-parent families would suffer not only economically but also from 'inadequate parenting and lack of social ties'.⁵ A 'third way' in family politics would have to start from the normative notion of equality between the sexes. The idea of democratic family life suggests how individual choice and social solidarity might be combined. Formal equality, individual rights, mutual respect, autonomy and freedom from violence should serve as the normative framework for family relations, both between parents and between parents and children.

Care enters the story where Giddens states that the protection and care of children is the single most important thread that should guide family policy. Again, divorce and single parenthood serve as the negative counter-image here. Democratic family politics should enable shared responsibility for childcare, while the ability to 'sustain relationships through change, even radical change such as divorce', becomes paramount, even comparable in importance to flexibility and adaptability in the workplace (Giddens 1998: 94). This would imply introducing shared responsibility for childcare; the possibility of contractual commitments to children between parents but also between parents and non-parents (parenting contracts, separate from marriage); the enhancement of fathers' rights, for example to child minding and out-of-school care; and enhancing the responsibility (or even the obligation) of children to support ageing parents.

While care is certainly not absent in these proposals, it is striking that caring values are not mentioned in the normative framework for the new family politics. This should not come as a surprise, since as we have seen the basic approach in the book is informed by the idea of the individual rights holder as the basic unit of social life. In the end it is *contract* that has to secure relationship and responsibility in human life, instead of connectedness and 'lived' ties. The ease with which Giddens singles out care for children from wider networks of care, responsibility and dependency can also be questioned. It is as if the accomplishment of formal equality between the sexes leads to children being singled out as special 'objects of concern' for family politics. This concern is also rather one-sidedly perceived through a male gaze: reading between the lines, absence of the father is seen as one of the main concerns for family politics.

Starting from the notion of care as a democratic practice instead, the first social problem that should be addressed is the social inequality in the distribution of giving and receiving care, and of paid work and informal care structured along axes of gender, class and ethnicity. When we acknowledge the significance of care as a human practice, we should critically assess group privileges and systematic patterns of exclusion in these

While the ethic of care would probably acknowledge the ‘sustenance of relationship’ as an important concern for family politics, it would not initiate its concerns at the point of the *failure* of relationship, i.e. divorce. It would prioritise social and political arrangements that enable adults of both sexes (and regardless of their sexual orientation) to participate in different forms of care: care for dependent children, care for partners and friends, care for dependent parents and, last but not least, care for the self.⁶

This would probably also contribute to a solution of the problem of absent fathers after divorce, since the presence of caring fathers *during* relationships between adults creates ties of care and trust that are based on daily practices of care, and that is likely to produce lasting commitment after the breakdown of the relationship. It would thus probably change the nature of ‘divorce’ as we know it. The primary arena for ‘family politics’ would then not be ‘family law’ (i.e. the regulation of kinship contracts) but rather the field of social policies: the policies that determine the regulation of working, the spending of time and the generating of income and maintenance, and related rights, duties and responsibilities.

It is at this point that we have to investigate the practical and moral suitability of the ‘responsible risk taker’ as the model for future social citizenship. In Giddens’ view, social democrats should shift the relation between risk and security involved in the welfare state: ‘people need protection when things go wrong, but also the material and moral capabilities to move through major periods of transition in their lives’ (Giddens 1998: 100). Again, an approach from the ethic of care may clarify the shortcomings of these statements. Care should not be conceptualised as a safety net in times of misfortune and transition but rather as an ongoing social process that demands our attention daily and thus should figure prominently in any scenario for future social policy.

Many moral transitions in life have indeed to do with the demands and the failures of caring relations (Smart and Neale 1999). Giddens is in fact quite close to these insights when he draws attention to the limitation of the work ethic, and to the trend that more and more people are looking for ‘opportunities for commitment outside of work’. Again, however, it is striking that he does not take the step of including care in these commitments: the working citizen remains in this respect the model for social citizenship.

In addition, the idea that people are more and more looking for ‘opportunities for commitment outside of work’ actually represents a male perspective, and in that sense it may not be a coincidence that caring is not adequately mentioned here. For women, after all, the situation is the other way around. At this moment in history, they are looking to extend their commitments from the home to the labour market and to social and political participation in a broader sense. For men, the situation is different. When engaging in care they do not need to claim access to a social domain that was formerly closed to them. Rather, they have to change their commit-

ment to and identity in a sphere where they already live: the intimate life sphere, where they have to alter their way of dealing with responsibility and dependency. The point is that these intricate gendered relations of labour and care are part of the normative assumptions of modern welfare states and the creation of the 'modern individual'. Once we realise the extent to which not only work-family arrangements but also, for example, corporate cultures, urban planning and public transport arrangements are built on these gendered assumptions about labour and care, it may become evident that the development of new social infrastructures of care should receive high priority from policy makers.

What do these remarks imply, then, when evaluating the notion of the 'responsible risk taker' through the lens of care? In the care ethic, the notion of responsibility would certainly be crucial for social policy. But instead of deriving responsibilities from rights (a top-down model), the care ethic starts political reasoning from an understanding of interconnection and relationship, and thus from knowledge about daily practices of care and responsibility and the dilemmas contained therein.⁷ Integrating the practice of 'care for the self' into notions of responsibility may contribute to current discussions on responsibility. By deconstructing the normative notion of the 'independent individual', the ethic of care undermines the entrenched patterns that have released men from daily caring responsibilities (for others and for themselves) and that have enabled them to count on women's availability to provide for their care needs. We may expect that in a situation where the practice of 'care for the self' is more 'normal' and where this is linked to the willingness to take responsibility for others and for relations of dependence, individuals will develop a wider range of moral sensibilities and thus also the capacity to take responsibility for their own actions and major life decisions. In this respect, the care ethic could be seen as a support for Giddens' new notion of human subjectivity.

However, the care ethic would be critical of giving the notion of 'risk' as much prominence as Giddens. It should be remembered that 'care' has, in his considerations on the social investment state, a negative undertone, as he associates it with control and opposes both these notions to personal liberty. From this perspective, it is evidently inconceivable that care might contribute to autonomy and liberty, or to the cultivation of human potential, goals that Giddens otherwise embraces as important for 'positive social welfare'. Again, the care ethic would stress that care is, on both an individual and a social scale, not something that protects individuals against risk but rather an ongoing social process that, when properly done, contributes to human flourishing.⁸

It should also be noted that it is often difficult to predict when either the need for or the availability of care will present itself in human life. It cannot be assumed that individuals will be able to predict their future needs for care before the event and to protect themselves against the failures of the caring arrangements around them. This would not only draw too heavy a bill on future social arrangements, it would also be an example of what Simon

Duncan and Anne Barlow have called the ‘rationality mistake’. Important decisions about ‘moral economies’ are usually not taken in the form of simple ‘cost–benefit’ matrices but instead involve moral and negotiated views about what behaviour is expected as right and proper and what kind of lives people want to live (Duncan and Barlow 1999). This includes arrangements of care and responsibility. Now that social policies can no longer build on the full-time availability of women for daily care, we should be looking for innovative and flexible caring arrangements that can prevent ‘caring gaps’ coming into existence.

Gender-sensitive social policies: a third way?

Paradoxically, it is at this point that the notion of a ‘third way’ may contribute fruitfully to the design of new forms of social policy. The notion of care as a democratic practice accords with third way arguments for new public–private alliances and with the importance of a strong civil society, acting in cooperation with state agencies, in this case with the goal of establishing new ‘social infrastructures of care’. But the care ethic also has something to add to third way thinking about human subjectivity and moral agency. Instead of talking about individuals as the basic units of social policy, we could take notions like ‘selves in networks of care and responsibility’ and ‘working and caring citizens’ as indices of moral subjectivity for social policy. Instead of deriving obligations from rights, we can start with knowledge about actually existing networks of care and responsibility. Instead of continuing to see care as a ‘private affair’ (and thus continuing entrenched patterns of domestication of care), we can reflect on how to align public and private responsibilities for care, and to include the values of care in the moral sensibilities that we bring to bear in our citizenship practices (Sevenhuijsen 1998; Tronto 1996).

This political attitude to care can be linked to a ‘third way’, since both these approaches cross the boundaries of traditional political thought systems. The notion of care as a democratic practice is at odds with old-style social democracy, where this has tended to insert issues of care into its normative parameters of solidarity and justice. This has left questions of care and compassion to conservatives and communitarians, who tend to link them to issues like ‘family values’ and to homogeneous notions of ‘community’. But the care ethic is at odds with neo-liberalism and conservatism, because it argues for making care into a public virtue and wants to extend notions of equality and social rights to include practices of giving and receiving care. It is situated at the intersection between social democracy and neo-liberalism, while it gives weight to notions of responsibility and trust and in fact substantiates and grounds these further. It would share some of the current concerns about social exclusion and social cohesion but would again extend the parameters of the discussion by implying (the importance of) caring practices within these concerns.

When a norm of equality in access to the giving and receiving of care both in public and private contexts is combined with democratic notions of equality of voice (and thus with the values of attentiveness and responsiveness), it can be expected that the institutions of care have the capacity to generate loyalty and commitment on the part of those who participate in them and can thus work as vehicles for solidarity and social cohesion.

But on a more practical level, a potential alliance between the care ethic and a 'third way' in politics is also available. Both the design and the implementation of the new social policies have after all to be a collective endeavour of different social and political actors, and they thus call for new public-private alliances. Facilitating combinations of labour and care would mean the thorough reorganisation of the social arrangements of time and place for care and would, for example, imply the following:⁹

- the further introduction of flexible working hours and the right to part-time work without loss of job and social security;
- paid leave to care for children, sick relatives and friends;
- flexibility in retirement age and old age pensions;
- adapting corporate cultures to the presence of employees with caring responsibilities;
- adapting working and caring time, via the regulation of working hours and aligning public transport and shop opening times, to the needs of 'working and caring citizens';
- setting up arrangements to support lone mothers in caring for their children and earning a living;
- supporting men in further developing caring identities and caring practices;
- facilitating divorced parents in continuing to share childcare, both materially and emotionally;
- attuning schedules for professional home healthcare for the elderly to care by their relatives and friends;
- further adapting healthcare systems to users' needs and integrating considerations of daily care into medical practice;
- giving 'caring networks' a place in community work and in the school life of children; and
- building neighbourhoods in which persons of different generations can live together, and including caring facilities within them.

When considering both the philosophical and the practical implications of a political ethic of care, it may become clear that a notion of 'philosophical conservatism', as proposed by Giddens, is not adequate to approach future social policies regarding the family.

We are living in a period of change that could perhaps best be characterised as a transition from modernist forms of care policies, based on familial care and the heterosexual norm, to a politics that is better attuned to post-modern

caring practices, situated in different social domains and in a diversity of lifestyles. A notion of philosophical conservatism does not suit this situation, since it frames these policies too much in a backward-looking way. Too often, attitudes of philosophical conservatism harbour traditional and male-biased assumptions, which are at odds with the needs for new normative frameworks in a post-feminist age.

When we want to assist people to 'pilot their way' through current moral transitions, we need creative and forward-looking policies that draw on the moral capabilities and existing responsibilities of citizens. Therefore, the new social policies should not be aimed at imposing a new normative construction of 'the family' but rather should be attuned to both existing and shifting family practices and caring practices, and the need for new ones. This will contribute to a further de-privatisation of care while acknowledging the intimate aspects of caring relations. The moral considerations of care can become part of the political quest for new divisions of responsibility between public and private life. And because moral attitudes are thus brought firmly into public life, this may also provide an alternative to conservative pleas for 'family values'. In that respect, the ethic of care provides us with an elaborated alternative to the acceptance of the traditional family as the norm for state policies.

Notes

- 1 This chapter both includes and elaborates on arguments developed in my other publications. See Sevenhuijsen 2000a, 2000b.
- 2 On care and trust, see Sevenhuijsen 1999 and Dillon 1992. On relational autonomy, see Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000.
- 3 For a similar critique, see Levitas 1998.
- 4 This forms a substantial addition to Giddens's normative framework for the 'democratic family'. He links democracy in the family rather one-sidedly with equality in rights and decision making.
- 5 In this and several other respects, Giddens's framework is permeated with Durkheimian notions about the functionality of the family and the role of fathers. Ruth Levitas' critique of New Labour ideology refers to a 'new Durkheimian hegemony' (*ibid.*: 178–89).
- 6 As argued by Weeks *et al.* (1999), the issue of care and responsibility for children raises, in an acute form, the legal status and social policy implications of the emergence of elective families and the public affirmation of lesbian and gay relationships. They argue for a concept of 'intimate citizenship'. Caring practices should form part of the status of citizenship, not only because citizenship arranges the rights and obligations that are connected to parenting and parent–child relationships but also because the status of citizenship should be built upon the recognition of the need for intimate desires, pleasures and 'being in the world'.
- 7 It is striking that Giddens uses the concepts of responsibility and obligation alternately, as if they mean the same.
- 8 The notion of 'human flourishing' as a guideline for public policy is elaborated on by the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2000). It is a broader concept than the concept of 'human potential' as used by Giddens. In his book,

this concept fits into a discourse of economic rationality and functionality, where inclusion in the capitalist economy is the primary motive for developing the capabilities of individuals.

- 9 Some of these measures are currently under consideration or are being implemented by the Dutch government, which is a coalition between social democrats and liberals and thus in a way an example of a ‘third way’ government.

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