

Introduction

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Special issue on Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift's *Family Values: The Ethics of Parent-Child Relationships*, forthcoming in *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*.

In making the argument for the remedy of inequality, contemporary political philosophers often emphasise the arbitrariness of disadvantage. There are many ways in which inequality results from factors beyond people's control. To take two striking examples, one's lot in life is to a significant extent determined by where one is born, that is, in which family, and in what part of the world. In the latter instance, people differ in how well they live in large part because of their context in the global order, that is, if they live in a well off or impoverished part of the world, there are just or unjust institutions, a tolerant or repressive culture. But equally important for a person's chances in life is the family that raises her (if the person is lucky enough to have a family in the first place). It matters whether the family has material resources and how much, whether parents have good or bad parenting skills, are supportive or neglectful, or have sufficient opportunities to care for their children. And just as one cannot choose what part of the world to be born in, one cannot choose which family to raise one to adulthood. Moreover, these two sources of arbitrary advantage and disadvantage intersect, since some countries in the world have well-developed social welfare institutions to support families and the raising of children, and thereby mitigate the contingencies of family circumstances, whilst

elsewhere these contingencies are untouched or worsened by a society's practices. It is thus appropriate that political philosophy, for so long focussed on the policies of (largely Western) nations, has recently extended its scope in order to tackle the macro issues of global justice, and the micro issues of familial justice.

Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift have contributed an important work of scholarship on the latter question. *Family Values: the Ethics of Parent-Child Relationships* provides a systematic analysis of the morality and politics of the family, exploring why families are valuable, whether people have a right to parent, what rights and duties parents have, and in particular what rights children have that may constrain the rights of their parents. The book focuses on a number of conflicting moral imperatives. At the heart of the book is the idea that parent-child relationships produce the familial relationship goods that enable children, and also parents, to flourish. Children's healthy development depends on intimate relationships with authoritative adults, while the distinctive joys and challenges of parenting are part of a fulfilling life for many adults. Brighouse and Swift explore why a child's interest in autonomy significantly limits parents' right to deliberately try to shape their children's values, and why parents have no fundamental right to confer wealth or advantage on their children. The book reaffirms the vital importance of the family as a social institution whilst challenging its role in the reproduction of social inequality, and making the case for carefully balancing the interests of parents and children. The book's complex argument raises a number of controversial issues about autonomy, human flourishing, parental rights, and indeed the nature of childhood itself. The essays of this volume consider these issues and offer a range of arguments and considerations, some

challenging and others complementing Brighouse and Swift's account of the ethics of parent-child relationships.

Anca Gheaus's paper challenges one key assumption endorsed by most family justice theorists in the liberal egalitarian tradition, namely, that the family undermines equality of opportunity and other fair patterns of distribution in some special sort of way – as John Rawls famously commented. According to Gheaus, Brighouse and Swift take for granted this basic claim about the special tension between equality of opportunity and the family. In her view, however, there is reason to resist such a claim. Gheaus's central idea is that although the family does indeed disrupt fair patterns of distribution, and equality of opportunity in particular, alternative childrearing arrangements would also be disruptive in similar ways, and for similar reasons. This is so because the key elements that undermine equality of opportunity – caregivers' partiality toward specific children and their unequal ability to provide good care – “go deeper” than the family itself. They would be present in any other decent childrearing institution. Furthermore, Gheaus suggests, the institution of the family is not the only social mechanism that allows for the accumulation of economic inequalities. She concludes that family justice theorists should simply abandon the project of addressing Rawls's famous (perhaps rhetorical?) question as to why the family should not be abolished in the name of equality. Since any acceptable alternative to the family would similarly disrupt equality of opportunity, liberal egalitarians should not devote much intellectual energy to justifying the family against possible (unattainable and all-things-considered less desirable) alternatives.

Like Gheaus, Colin M. Macleod focuses primarily on the issue of the presumed tension between equality of opportunity and the family. Macleod also denies that abolishing the family would in fact advance equality of opportunity. His paper's main suggestion, however, is not that alternatives to the family would potentially disrupt equality of opportunity in similar ways (although he appears to agree with Gheaus on this point), but rather that there is no inevitable conflict between family values and equality of opportunity – contrary to what he takes Brighouse and Swift to believe. More precisely, in a suitably non-hierarchical (ideal) society, familial relationship goods could be realized at no cost to egalitarian justice. The main argumentative strategy deployed by Macleod consists in challenging key claims, which he takes to ground the idea of a principled “ineliminable tension” between familial relationship goods and equality of opportunity. In particular, Macleod suggests, in an idealized egalitarian political community, differences in terms of parental abilities and the development of valuable skills in children would be rather negligible, both as a result of egalitarian social arrangements and because well-functioning institutions would mitigate the residual differences effectively.

Christine Sypnowich's paper explores another, rather different, set of issues raised by Brighouse and Swift's work. She takes the authors to task for failing to appreciate fully the perfectionist implications of their position. Political philosophers are divided on the question of whether society should guide individuals to improve their wellbeing. *Family Values*, however, affirms that the flourishing of children requires relationships in which parents also flourish; and that furthermore, parents' flourishing is itself a reason to

safeguard the relationship goods of the family. Yet, Sypnowich notes that Swift and Brighthouse are concerned that their position be compatible with liberal neutralist accounts wherein the state does not seek to promote valuable ways of living. She contends, however, that once we see the role of the family in enabling the flourishing of children, we cannot avoid a commitment to furthering human flourishing more generally. The argument about the rearing and education of children falls down, Sypnowich argues, unless it presupposes a fact of the matter – however pluralistic and non-coercive – about living well and the proper role of the state in promoting it. After all, she contends, we need to identify what adult flourishing looks like in order to equip children for it, and we need to provide conditions to ensure that children, upon maturation, will be able to actualize their capacities to live well. Moreover, on her “egalitarian flourishing” account, a public commitment to providing support so that families may thrive can be seen as an equalizing policy. Sypnowich concludes that Brighthouse and Swift’s powerful argument for why families are valuable, and the intrinsically valuable relationship goods rightly enjoyed by all their members, makes it clear that political philosophy has been impoverished for its jettisoning of questions of human flourishing. Once we understand the flourishing provided by families, we should be prepared to develop an egalitarian political philosophy that centres on enabling flourishing, more broadly, for all.

Andrée-Anne Cormier’s paper examines a related issue concerning liberal neutrality or anti-perfectionism in upbringing, but from a rather different perspective. Her paper addresses the question of whether, and under what conditions, it is permissible for parents deliberately to try to shape their children’s particular comprehensive values in light of

their own. She offers an extended defense of the view endorsed by Brighthouse and Swift that at least some forms of deliberate comprehensive value-shaping are permissible. This is in opposition to Matthew Clayton's challenging account of legitimate childrearing, according to which the deliberate shaping of children's values is impermissible in principle, since it violates a principle of respect for children's independence. Drawing on Brighthouse and Swift's account of familial relationship goods, Cormier suggests that seeking to pass on comprehensive values to one's child is in fact compatible with proper respect for the child's independence, as Clayton understands it. This is because at least some limited forms of deliberate parental value-shaping can pass what she takes to be the most plausible test of respect for children's independence, namely, the "anti-perfectionist test of retrospective consent".

Daniel Weinstock's essay focuses on "the juggling act between intimacy and autonomy" that appears to daunt family life. On the one hand, parents and children share valuable relationship goods; on the other hand, those very goods can act to undermine children's ability to choose for themselves how their lives will go. And, though it is easy to pinpoint when it is illegitimate for parents to confer socio-economic advantages, it is much harder to isolate impermissible forms of value-sharing. This is because, as Weinstock puts it, the difference between permissible and impermissible ways of sharing conceptions of the good with one's children is, on the *Family Values* account, "adverbial" rather than "categorical". In other words, it is the manner in which values are shared, rather than the fact of value sharing itself, which requires monitoring. But value-sharing is so bound up with the goods of family life that children's right to autonomy looks

unenforceable if left to parents. At the same time, the kind of state intervention necessary to “police” family life is very unattractive: unlikely to succeed, and moreover, threatening to produce great harm that would undermine the essence of family life. Weinstock’s solution is to argue that it is not just the family that is responsible for developing children’s capacities for autonomous decision-making. The problem of children’s autonomy is best thought of, not as a matter of family ethics, but public policy. Political philosophers should thus, in their focus on the politics of childrearing, consider ways in which the obligation to inculcate autonomy resides with state institutions, in particular, the public school system.

Sarah Hannan and R.J. Leland’s paper examines yet an entirely different – and in some ways more fundamental – question, which *Family Values* does not directly explore, namely, whether adults’ interest in parenting supports a right to procreate. Hannan and Leland argue that although the interest that adults have in engaging in a parent-child relationship may generate a right to parent, as Brighthouse and Swift persuasively argue, it does not also support a right for adults to create a child for them to raise. The authors’ core and very original argument is that the interest in parenting is essentially tied to what they call the “bads of childhood”. Childhood, in their view, involves at least four bad conditions: an impaired capacity for practical reasoning, a need for extensive adults’ (and especially parental) control, a deep vulnerability, and a lack of stable practical identity. These bads are crucial to explaining the special value of parent-child relationships, according to Hannan and Leland. Adults would not have a special interest in engaging in such relationships if childhood did not have those bad features. So, adults’ interest in

caring for a child is fundamentally attached to what's bad about being a child. In Hannan and Leland's view, this implies that the interest in parenting cannot support a right for adults to create the need for care by bringing a child into existence.

Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift are the authors of the final paper in the volume, which provides responses to each contribution. Brighouse and Swift express appreciation for all the contributions, endorsing some points, whilst refining or rejecting others. Certainly the range of stimulating responses to their book is an indication of its significance and interest, and a tribute to the remarkable achievement of its scholarship. Inspired by the feminist critique of the family, political philosophers have only relatively recently looked into questions of justice, equality and autonomy in connection with the relations between parents and children. *Family Values* is an outstanding contribution to the philosophical inquiry as to how personal attachments and political principles may be reconciled. We hope that readers agree that the following collection of excellent essays is a worthy tribute to this important work.