

Family Values: An Introduction

ANDREW WILLIAMS

ICREA & Universitat Pompeu Fabra

The social, legal, and political institutions that constitute the family play a profound and unavoidable role in shaping individuals' lives and distributing opportunities amongst them. They strongly influence our psychological development, including the acquisition of a sense of justice, as well as various cognitive skills, and our prospects of success in the competition for positions conferring authority and influence in the economy and the state. Those institutions also have non-instrumental importance insofar as we have weighty reasons to care about our capacity to enjoy love and intimacy both as adults and children, and the degree to which we are protected from various objectionable forms of control by other agents. Since the design of the family is malleable any reasonably complete political philosophy needs to reflect on these and related issues. Fortunately, contemporary Anglo-American political theorists have attempted to respond to this challenge. In recent years, some of the most notable contributions to the emerging debate have arisen via joint work by Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift, leading eventually to the publication of their book, *Family Values: The Ethics of Parent-Child Relationships* (Brighouse and Swift, 2014).

Brighouse and Swift provide a sophisticated liberal egalitarian account of the essential role of the family in a just society. The account is distinctive in part because of the role it affords to the interests of parents in enjoying valuable relationships with their offspring as well as the interests of children and adults in being raised in families. At the same time as showing how their favored dual interest case for the family justifies parental partiality, the authors are keen to establish their account offers no support for the types of substantial inequality in opportunity characteristic of most societies.

These claims and others made by Brighouse and Swift raise a host of questions within ethics and political philosophy, several of which are pursued by the authors of the following three thought-provoking papers. Sarah Stroud calls into question some of the egalitarian assumption about inheritance that animate many recent discussions of justice and the family. Anca Gheaus focusses on the extent to an adult's interest in parental authority over a child can plausibly ground its possession. Luara Ferracioli asks whether Brighouse and Swift are over-reliant on an ideal of personal autonomy, and extends our attention to the interests of offspring in family membership over the course of their lives and not merely during childhood.

The discussion concludes with a substantial response by Brighthouse and Swift that elaborates their position, and defends it where necessary.

The Editors hope the four papers advance debate on issues of pressing personal as well as public concern. They are grateful to all the participants for their commitment to the Symposium, and to Marcos Picchio for his invaluable administrative and philosophical assistance with the project.