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Justice, Care and the Welfare State by Daniel Engster Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. ISBN: 9780198719564; £55.00 (hbk). (pages 288)

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‘Justice, Care and the Welfare State’ presents a justice theory to guide welfare policies across Western societies. As the author highlights “the main value of this book is to provide some insight into how Western welfare states can be reformed to better promote justice under contemporary social and economic conditions” (p.3).

The book makes a strong argument for care ethics in public policy. It provides guidance for welfare reform, maintaining that decisions about welfare should be theoretically informed, aiming for ideal caring relations in order to achieve social justice. This approach is contrasted to other justice theories.

The author gives a thorough explanation of ‘non-ideal’ and ‘ideal’ theories, providing policy suggestions in the text. Rather than drawing comparisons between welfare systems of one country over another, or examining different welfare systems, such as ‘familistic’ (Esping-Andersen, 1990), the author examines specific policies from different countries as well as developing new proposals that are amenable to public ethics of care.

The key philosophical standpoint is laid out well in the introduction where he describes a spectrum of ‘ideal’ and ‘non-ideal’ political philosophies. A helpful diagram illustrates where the authors particular theory sits.

In the following chapters, the author explores justice and care across five key areas ‘Justice, Care and Children’, ‘Justice, Care and Health Care’, ‘Justice, Care and the Elderly’, ‘Justice, Care and Disability’ and ‘Justice, Care and the Poor’.

The key aims of the book are suitably addressed. The book insightfully gives practical guidance for how welfare states might hope to adopt and implement public care ethics. The author suggests how policy makers might empirically measure justice. For example, by looking across different countries’ health systems, in terms of “ease of access to medical services, chronic care services, proactive care services and patient trust and satisfaction” (p.105).

The book is timely in its addressing changes within Western societies. For example, health care has been sluggish at transforming towards a system that appreciates the new demographic profile of society. The author explains how a care ethics perspective to health care can address the shift towards ageing populations. It argues that there needs to be a transition towards ‘care’ of individuals rather than ‘cure’ as there is an increase in the prevalence of chronic conditions where older people need support.

The key limitations of the book are outlined by the author in the opening chapter. Firstly, there is a lack of detail on how a care ethics perspective could be implemented in *individual*

countries, although the author takes examples from different western countries. Secondly, the discussion on how to implement care ethics is restricted to western societies only. In addition there is little discussion about the ethnic composition in each country and, something that may be frustrating for political philosophers, it does not fully explore a theory of justice.

The book might have benefitted from a more detailed conclusion to draw together the key arguments and themes that were addressed in the main body of the text. The arguments are nevertheless made clearly throughout the book.

This book is particularly interesting as it is aimed at both political philosophers and social scientists. This target is met as there is a clear and useful introduction for those less familiar with political philosophies. Academics and students from philosophy, social science and politics backgrounds, who are interested in care ethics, will benefit from this book. It is also helpful for those who would like to learn about social policies across states. The book has an international appeal, although it has relevance for western countries in particular as the author acknowledges.

References

Esping-Andersen, G (1990). *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity