

H. Brighthouse & A. Swift, *Family Values. The Ethics of Parent-Child Relationships*, (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), 216 pages. ISBN: 9780691126913.
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Brighthouse's and Swift's book *Family Values* discusses the value of the family from a liberal egalitarian perspective. This important contribution to an emerging field does not only target an audience of moral and political philosophers. Written in an extremely accessible style, it should also interest social scientists, educators and family law scholars. This book should be highly helpful to tackle issues such as child custody, family reunification, parental education or surrogacy.

Family Values defends a liberal egalitarian justification of the family from which implications for the rights of parents with respect to their children are derived. The book demonstrates that, despite the challenges it poses to liberal egalitarianism, the family should be preserved because it gives access to 'familial relationship goods'. 'Familial relationship goods' describes the objectively valuable contribution familial relationships make to the flourishing of parents and children.

The first part of the book discusses two key challenges the family poses to liberal egalitarianism.

Chapter 1 exposes the *liberal challenge*. For liberals, individuals should be free to choose how to live their own life. Children are not their parents: they are separate individuals. Who (parents? the state?) should have authority over children, and what the limits upon the exercise of authority over children should be? The chapter then responds to the objection that liberalism, which assumes individuals are free and rational, and frames moral issues in terms of rights and duties instead of love and affection, is ill-equipped to deal with the family.

Chapter 2 focuses on the *egalitarian challenge*. The family is a major obstacle to the realization of fair equality of opportunities, which requires the mitigation of the influence of children's background on their chances of success. The authors suggest we should aim for all-things-considered judgments that involve a balancing of family relationships goods with egalitarian ideals.

Making these balancing judgments requires an explanation of why the family (here, the parent-child dyad) is valuable. This is the aim of the second part of the book.

Chapter 3 shows why the family is valuable for *children* and why they have a right to be parented. Because children have specific developmental interests, they are 'the appropriate object of paternalistic treatment' and have a right to have their interests taken care of by adults who act as fiduciary. The family is the existing child-rearing arrangement that the most reliably provides the loving and intimate relationship, the continuity of care over time and the kind of authoritative regulation children need. Importantly, nothing precludes familial relationship goods from being also realized in less conventional forms of family, such as single-parent, same-sex parents or adoptive families.

Chapter 4 shows why the family is valuable for *adults* and focuses on the right to parent. This right is not grounded on procreation, but on the non-substitutable contribution of parenting to flourishing. Parenting involves love, fiduciary responsibilities and meeting a child's developmental interests. Hence parenting enables adults to develop and exercise valuable

capacities. But, importantly, this right to parent is conditional upon adults being good enough parents.

The third part of the book derives some implications of this justification of the family.

Chapter 5 addresses the question of whether parents have a right to confer advantage on their children. The authors argue that, among the interactions that confer advantage, those which are essential for relationships goods have strongest claims to protection. These interactions are described as intimate, spontaneous, involving shared experiences and mutual identification. Hence bedtimes stories have a stronger claim to protection than bequests. Unfortunately, the enjoyment of relationship goods may result in the unequal transmission of valuable cultural capital. Whenever it is feasible, the state should break the mechanisms that allow the interaction (which should be protected) to yield the inequality of prospects between children (which should be mitigated). Whenever this is not feasible, the authors affirm familial relationships goods are more important than equality.

Chapter 6 focuses on the right to shape one's children's values. The crucial point here is that value-shaping is the inevitable outcome of the enjoyment of familial relationships goods. First, an enjoyable relationship is spontaneous, and spontaneous parents cannot avoid influencing their children's values. Second, a successful relationship requires some value-sharing. Therefore, parents have a right to shape children's values. But this right is limited by parents' duty of care, which involves a duty to facilitate children's autonomy.

Brighouse's and Swift's account really identifies why family values need to be weighed against freedom and equality, even if we endorse a progressive political agenda. I shall now offer a brief discussion of some of the propositions they defend.

A first issue concerns the right to parent. Is adults' interest in parenting sufficient to ground the right to parent? Brighouse's and Swift's argument is that the contribution of parenting to flourishing is non-substitutable. But the constituents of parenting (fiduciary relationships, unconditional love, meeting the developmental needs of a child (pp. 90-92)), might be separately realized in other types of relationships. Moreover, some adults fully flourish without parenting (p 100).

In fact, Brighouse and Swift worry that, without a fundamental right to parent, parenthood would be reserved to those who are the best parents. If the best parent for a child is the available adult who has the highest level of parental skills, the worry is justified. But the best parent for a child might rather be the parent who *wanted to parent this child* in the first place. A child has an interest in being parented by the adult who intended to parent her and who for this purpose either brought her into existence (a thesis the authors discuss, p. 79) or undertook an adoption. The adult for whom raising her child is what makes her life go well is in most cases the best available parent for this child. Therefore, in most cases it is not necessary to grant a fundamental right to parent to adults to avoid the reallocation of children to better parents.

A second item for discussion is the relation between familial relationship goods and fair equality of opportunities. Brighouse and Swift show that the conflict between them is much less serious than expected. This conflict is often generated by the social environment, which transforms familial relationships into competitive advantages, and we can change this environment without threatening the family. The authors complete this analysis by suggesting to '[treat] familial relationship goods as *distribuenda*: that is, as among the goods that people should have opportunities, perhaps equal opportunities, for' (p. 147).

Let me suggest a further move that could dissipate the conflict. Suppose we adopt a principle according to which each person should have equal opportunities for familial

relationship goods. We need a method to measure these opportunities. But there are serious obstacles to this: the information needed to measure achievements with respect to familial relationship goods is difficult to acquire; people who conduct their family relationships very differently may be equally successful; and few people agree on what the factors of successful familial relationships are. Now, a practical, albeit rough, proxy to assess people's chances to realize familial relationships goods is people's socio-economic opportunities. The factors that significantly affect socio-economic success (health, education, income) largely overlap with the basic conditions people need to enjoy familial relationships goods. If this method proved satisfactory, claims to familial relationship goods would coincide rather than conflict with equality.

The third issue concerns the compatibility between the right of parents to shape their children's values and the duty to equip one's child with the capacity for autonomy. In practice, value-shaping and educating for autonomy will be compatible only to the extent that parental values are compatible with autonomy. But many are not: fundamentalist religious doctrines as well as highly consumerist lifestyles avoid the development of critical thinking skills and the reexamination of personal commitments. Parents who endorse these views of the good life cannot simultaneously share their values with their children and discharge their duty to facilitate autonomy. What is at stake here is the conflict between people's interest in familial relationship goods and people's interest in autonomy. Brighouse and Swift provide three arguments in favour of autonomy (pp. 166-167). First, an autonomous person is better equipped to live well in modern societies, which are characterized by complexity and changes. Second, being autonomous enables people to revise their values so that they can fit with their personality. Third, being the author of one's life is valuable in itself, in virtue of personal dignity. The first two arguments allow that, for some, it might be better to adopt parental values than to cultivate their autonomy. But the third argument might prevent us from reaching this conclusion, since the contribution of value-sharing to well-being must be weighed against the child's interest in dignity. To conclude, Brighouse's and Swift's account of human interests needs to be specified further to decide this issue.

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