A good-enough life

Developing the grounds for a political ethic of care

Fiona Williams

Fiona Williams *argues that a political ethic of care offers a new way of dealing with contemporary changes in family lives and family policies, particularly in providing a new political vocabulary that is more capable of connecting the two.*

In an article in *The Guardian* in September 2004, Martin Jacques wrote of a 'profound malaise' at the heart of Western societies:

> The very idea of what it means to be human - and the necessary conditions for human qualities to thrive - are being eroded … the intimacy on which our sense of well being rests - a product of our closest, most intimate relationships, above all in the family - is in decline … We live in an age of selfishness.

He argued that three things have occasioned this: the rise in individualism; the marketisation of all forms of human life; and the rise in communication technologies, which have contracted our private space and accelerated the pace of life. Divorce and the decline of the extended family, he suggests, have

undermined family life, and the worst casualty has been the deterioration of the parent-child, especially the mother-child, relationship, because of women going out to work and couples' reluctance to make financial sacrifices.

This is a familiar argument from left and right: loss of commitment, self-seeking individualism, and children harmed by divorce or by a parenting deficit. For some it's godlessness, for others it's capitalism that has corroded community and moral character; others argue that consumerism has fostered individual acquisitiveness, infecting even the closest of our relationships. But research we have conducted over the last five years at Leeds University leads me to believe that such arguments are quite mistaken, and that they provide no basis for the changes we need in political thinking and in social and public policy.[1]

Certainly there have been changes in family lives and personal relationships. Over our lifetime many of us will cohabit, parent on our own, live alone, marry, divorce, or do all these. Our family networks may well include step-relations, close friends, same-sex partners, ex-partners, and relatives of different ethnicities. These changes are accompanied by women's greater involvement in the labour market, by children being economically dependent on their parents for longer, by the inadequacy of a single wage in a household with children, and by the growth in housing costs. We are also an ageing society with declining fertility, and a globally mobile society where families' care commitments are stretched not only across cities but across continents. But to suggest that we are witnessing the moral decline of family life is, I believe, quite mistaken. To do so too readily collapses the moral economy of capitalism into the moral agency that people exercise in their close relationships; and it underestimates the nature and extent of people's resistance and resilience as they struggle with dilemmas in their everyday caring.

Resistance and resilience

This is not to say that consumerism has not invaded the domestic sphere. One

1. Our research was carried out by the ESRC Research Group on *Care, Values and the Future of Welfare (CAVA)* at the University of Leeds, with funding from the Economic and Social Research Council www.leeds.ac.uk/cava (M564281001). The findings are discussed in Fiona Williams, *Rethinking Families*, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2004. The research cited here was carried out by Shelley Budgeon, Simon Duncan, Sarah Irwin, Greg Martin, Bren Neale, Sasha Roseneil, Lise Saugères, Carol Smart and Fiona Williams.

instance of this is the damage done by the food industry to the health of a generation of children. But here the problem cannot be understood though the simplistic idea that parents have simply swallowed unhealthy products and regurgitated them through take-away, throw-away relationships with each other and their children. The public support in the spring of 2005 for a campaign for state intervention to raise the nutritional standards of school dinners demonstrated the resistance of parents to the idea that they were to blame because they made wrong food 'choices', or because they don't care about their children's health; and it also exposed the consequences of the contracting out of school dinners and the deskilling of dinner ladies.

The contemporary organisation of working life places enormous strains on family life, but this does not mean that it inevitably corrupts what people seek from their relationships. Take the example of the strike in July 2003 by check-in staff at British Airways. The strike gained national media coverage for disrupting international holiday air flights, and this was amplified by the fact that the mainly women strikers were more usually known for their civility than their civil disobedience. To begin with, many reports in newspapers and interviews with trade union leaders identified the cause of the strike as dissatisfaction with changed conditions; and the women were presented by the media as both selfish (spoiling holidays) and laggards (not adapting to a new electronic clocking on system). But they did not mention the nub of the grievance: that rosters had been changed without warning and threatened to disturb the very carefully negotiated child care plans that many of the mothers had in place. These involved complex, time-managed connection points for mothers and fathers and grandmothers to exchange child care responsibilities. The women's actions chimed with one of our research findings on how mothers with young children make decisions around work and care: working mothers' investment in employment is based upon their own and their networks' moral reasoning about what is right and proper for their children. They do not act as individualist 'rational economic actors' where financial costs and benefits determine decisions. Money does matter of course to working mothers, but decisions about working are also taken in the context of being able to provide the quality of care they think is best for their children. When this moral reasoning behind the strike emerged, it changed the way trade unions, employers and the media described it: it turned into a grievance over 'work/

life balance'. Kevin Curran, the general secretary of the GMB, was quoted as saying that 'time is the new money, and work-life balance and the quality of people's lives will become a major part of the collective bargaining agenda'.

People care a great deal about doing the right thing by the people they cherish. Far from a loss of commitment, they are anxious to carry out their commitments in the ways they think fit, given the different pressures in their lives. That was one of the main findings in our in-depth interviews with almost four hundred people from different localities about the things that matter to them in their experiences of parenting and partnership. As well as looking at work and care, we focused on other areas of change - what happens to relationships with the wider family following divorce, who do people turn to when they live in 'un-familiar' ways, and how do people maintain kinship commitments when these are in different continents? We also looked at what values are important to community and self-help groups who organise around these issues, and to larger voluntary organisations. Given the degree of change, we were interested in getting a grass roots view of the practical ethics that inform how people take decisions in their relationships of care and intimacy, rather than a top-down view of 'family values'.

We were also concerned that much of the debate on changing family lives takes place with little reference to empirical research. This is true both for the 'family-in-moral-decline' view, and for the contrasting and influential view that current changes herald a new 'individualisation' in personal life, which, it is argued, brings with it the emergence of self-actualising men and women, less bound by obligation and duty, and with greater independence to pursue more satisfying and democratic relationships. While we found some evidence for aspirations towards democratic relationships between partners, and also between children and their parents, it is also the case that change and continuity co-exist in complex ways. Many old problems persist, in spite of the context of changed opportunities for women and greater emotional investment in children; these include gender inequalities in the division of labour at home, the lack of opportunities for participation of children in institutions and decisions that affect their lives, and physical and sexual abuse of both women and children. Just as importantly, the notion of self-actualising men and women underestimates the degree to which people are deeply embedded in the relationships that matter to them, continually

negotiating how to balance a sense of themselves with the needs of others around them, especially their children.

Balancing commitments

A good example of this juggling with commitments to others comes from research on how families live their lives after a divorce. These days the dominant idea is that, even if marriage is not for life, then parenting is. This was given force by the 1989 Children Act. Managing this is not always straightforward, however, especially where there has been violence, or where trust has completely broken down, or where divorce runs counter to a family's faith. In spite of this, many divorced parents, usually but not exclusively women, take it upon themselves to perform an active 'kin-keeping' role after divorce in order to sustain relationships, not just with the other parent, but with ex-grandparents and in-laws. Sometimes, of course, divorce provides the opportunity to withdraw from problematic relationships with in-laws. Either way, the ways in which people negotiate their kin-keeping tends to put a premium on what would be best for their children.

The way people re-partner after divorce also provides interesting evidence that, while the shape and texture of commitment might be changing, this does not mean that commitment itself is being abandoned; rather, people are working out different and new ways of meeting those commitments. Half of all divorced men and one third of divorced women remarry, many cohabiting en route. But some divorced parents, mothers of young children in particular, prefer to discount new relationships until their children are older, or at least to conduct them quite separately from their lives with their children. Another option some people choose is what is called a LAT relationship (living-apart-together), where partners are in committed relationships but live apart. At first sight this option might support the moral decline argument (flight from commitment; pursuing self interest) - or it might provide evidence of a single-minded search for self-actualisation. However, on looking more closely at why people opt for such an arrangement, and the financial disincentives it involves, it can be seen to be much more a question of attempting to find an equitable way of being with a new partner but at the same time sustaining your relationships with your children, or with their father or mother, or with their grandparents and your ex-in-laws. In fact, it is *all about*

commitment, and balancing that with your own needs. What seemed to be important to people in sustaining these relationships through difficult changes was being able to be attentive to others' needs, adaptable to new identities, and being open to reparation.

LAT living is interesting at a more general level in revealing new constraints and mores about partnering. It is not just a feature of divorced couples' living and loving, but also of younger partners who might work in different places, or of older widowed partners who don't want to disrupt their relationships or inheritance intentions with adult children or grandchildren. The Norwegian sociologist Irene Levin says that what we might be seeing is a third major social change in the connection between sex, love and parenting. In the 1960s 'free love' - the uncoupling of sex from marriage - was the focus of moral debate. In the 1980s and 1990s it became more acknowledged that marriage and committed parenthood did not necessarily go hand in hand; and now it seems that committed sexual partnership and co-residence (and parenting) are no longer assumed. Far from being the mirror image of consumerism, this is how, over time, we are reconstituting the cultural norms of commitment in our everyday lives.

The value of friendship

Until recently friendship has been little acknowledged in the mesh of care, connection and commitment. Our research studied people who live and love without a significant or co-resident partner - those who might be regarded as highly individualised. Yet here too, while some were emotionally quite isolated, many were embedded in networks of care, commitment and support. And where they were, friends were often valued over lovers or kin for their emotional and practical significance; as one 28 year-old woman said, 'I think a friendship is for life, but I don't think a partner is - I'd marry my friends. They'd last longer'.

In his study of friendship, Ray Pahl describes how people have varied 'personal communities', in which friends as much as family can play a significant part. Also, the metaphor of friendship is commonly used to talk about the quality of relationships in families. Research on teenage children and their parents finds that both invoke friendship and companionship to describe what they value in their relationships with each other. Research on post-divorce lives suggests that qualities such as mutual respect and shared interests give more meaning to relationships that were formed through blood or law.

'Friendship' says much about what we might seek in a good relationship: confiding, sharing, fun, non-judgmental, reciprocal, if not equal. Talking recently to mothers with young children who use Sure Start services - one of the more innovative programmes introduced by New Labour in deprived areas - they told me they valued the services because the staff treated them 'like a friend'; they were not judgmental, and shared knowledge rather than handing it down. I found similar views in interviews with self-help groups for parents with particular experiences, such as having a child with drug problems, or having lost a child, or having a child with a learning disability. The mutual support they valued was based on informality, trust and non-judgmentalism.

There are important political implications here. The first is about the nature of reciprocity and solidarity in society. The political right have looked to families and family values as a way of preserving individualism and self-interest - 'looking after one's own'. The more collectively minded left have sought to maintain kin ties as the building block to social cohesion; strong kin ties are assumed to lead to strong communities, and strong communities to equal a strong and stable society. In each case, any weakening or changing of kin ties is seen as portending social disintegration. But both views fail to grasp that connectedness operates in more various ways than simply through conjugality, sexual intimacy and blood, and that the affective boundaries of reciprocity are fluid and are not fixed by kinship alone. The solidaristic base of society lies less in 'the family' and more in the practices of care and support that go on inside *and outside* of families. These constitute an important moral sentience - one that receives scant political recognition, for it is usually only as workers and consumers that politicians attempt to appeal to voters.

A second implication of the research is that when people look to give and receive support from others, they want it to involve mutual respect, trust and non-judgmentalism. I shall come back later in the article to what this might mean for political thinking, and how we organise care and support in society. But first, how have New Labour framed their policies around family lives and personal relationships?

New Labour's policies

There have been three main themes in New Labour's policies affecting family lives and personal relationships: support for 'hardworking families'; investment

in children, especially through education; and emphasising parental responsibilities. In many ways, this has been the first time that Britain has had an explicit family policy, with the recognition that child care for working parents is a public and not simply an individual responsibility. The government's policies have included a commitment to abolish child poverty by 2020; a National Childcare Strategy guaranteeing a nursery place for every three or four year old; a National Carers' Strategy; the development of Sure Start to support families with young children in deprived areas; a range of tax credits to help working families on low incomes and for working parents to pay for child care; extended maternity leave and pay and paid paternity leave; and the right for parents to work part-time and to take unpaid time off to care for children. At the liberal end of their policy spectrum, New Labour has promoted measures to equalise legal and social conditions for lesbians and gay men; at the disciplinary end, they have introduced the enforcement of parental obligations in relation to children's behaviour. A new normative family is emerging, which appears, in some respects but not all, to leave the male breadwinner society behind. It revolves around the adult couple whose relationship is based on their parenting responsibilities, and whose priorities are rooted in work, economic self-sufficiency, education and good behaviour.

'Hardworking parents'

These policies are unprecedented, and they are not without tensions. The political principles which underpin this set of measures owe more to a commitment to reinforce the moral and economic imperative of the work ethic than to notions of gender equality. Paid work is said to make good parents, encourage self sufficient families, and enable men and women to make provision for themselves in the housing and pensions markets; and it makes for a competitive economy. Children's educational opportunities are less about children as participating citizens-of-the-present and more about them as worker-citizens of the future. Child care provision is the necessary corollary that enables mothers to work. The tax credit system which allows financial support for parents, also encourages the provision of child care through low-waged care in the private sector; and this kind of provision is often not affordable for low income families (unless they have access to Sure Start), as well as being less open to quality control. (The DayCare Trust found that private

nurseries were less likely to institute anti-racist policies and that minority ethnic parents were less likely to use them). In addition, the policy slogan to 'make work pay' misses the point when it comes to the dilemmas that parents - and mothers especially - face in taking up paid work. These dilemmas have more to do with concerns about the affective quality of care for their children than with cost-benefit analyses. In Britain, public trust in good quality nursery care has yet to be established - many mothers prefer informal one-to-one care for their very young children to nursery care. In such a situation a focus on the moral and economic benefits of paid work is unlikely to improve matters. Furthermore, although the new 'adult worker' model is replacing the male breadwinner model, male working practices and long working hours still characterise many industries, limiting opportunities for improving mothers' opportunities either in the home or at work.

Children: citizens of the present or the future?

Tensions exist too in the focus on children. Margaret Hodge, the first ever Minister of State for Children, Young People and Families, stated that: 'we shall put children at the heart of everything we do', and this was reflected in the publication of the Green Paper *Every Child Matters* in 2003, which put forward far more universal and child-centred policies than had hitherto been proposed. The Green Paper sets out structures of accountability to protect children, to recognise their needs, and to create educational opportunities to enable them to become productive future citizens. Yet its key outcomes are more about becoming an adult than fostering the active enjoyment and negotiation of childhood. The focus on education sees children's educability as the pre-cursor to work, self-sufficiency and independence.

The 'responsibilisation' agenda

The child focus of policies has emphasised protection, yet at the same time there has been little success in reducing Britain's ranking as the most punitive country in Europe as far as children are concerned. New Labour was unresponsive to pressure to increase the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12; to condemn the use of custodial sentences for 12-14 year olds; and to abandon the right of parents to use 'reasonable chastisement' on their children. And they have introduced measures whereby parents can be fined and

imprisoned for having a truanting child, which has helped to fuel the national anxiety about children's behaviour and 'parenting skills'. Behind much of the 'responsibilisation' discourse lies a deficit model of family life and parenting capacity. Yet amongst the parents we interviewed, it was not punishment or being told what to do that they valued; they wanted the right sort of support to carry out their parenting responsibilities.

The compassionate realism of 'good-enough' care

How do we cut through these pressures and tensions - between work and care, between investing in, protecting and punishing children, and between regulating and supporting parents? The answer lies, I believe, in developing a politics that gives value to the meaning and practices of care, love and support in people's lives. Overall we found in our research that moral reasoning based on *care* informed the way people attempted to balance their own sense of self and the needs of others. What it means to be a good mother, father, grandparent, partner, ex-partner, lover, son, daughter or friend is crucial to the way people negotiate the proper thing to do. These meanings are shaped by identities and resources wrought through class, gender, ethnicity, local practices and social networks. Of course this does not mean everyone behaves well or is successful in negotiating these things; nevertheless we found that in working through their dilemmas, certain practical ethics emerge for adults and children: an ethics that enables resilience and facilitates commitment, and lies at the heart of people's interdependency. Such an ethic includes notions of fairness, attentiveness to the needs of others, mutual respect, trust, reparation, being non-judgmental, adapting to new identities, being prepared to be accommodating, and being open to communication. These constitute the compassionate realism of 'good-enough' care.

To put this in a broader context: when we interviewed senior representatives from 24 national voluntary organisations who campaign and advise on parenting and partnering issues, the majority looked to an ethos of welfare which emphasises holistic, accessible, affordable and user-centred support for parents and children; and they advocated forms of support which place value on care as an activity, on interdependence, and on state support for financial adequacy. Such an ethos is underpinned by notions of social justice - a justice based on the promotion of anti-discriminatory policies,

recognition and respect for diversity, and resistance to widening inequalities. In this these representatives placed special emphasis on valuing care and respecting childhood.

What is lacking in the current policy debate is a recognition of these ethical approaches, and of their importance in people's lives. The emphasis on work overshadows care; interdependency is the poor relation of economic self-sufficiency; and educational achievement frames child-centredness. New thinking from different quarters points to the limits of such an approach. For example, Karl Sigmund's work on the necessity of reciprocity, and recent research on happiness from Richard Layard and from Paul Martin, combine economics, psychology and philosophy to argue that connectedness and the quality of personal relationships lie at the heart of social well-being. Layard proposes that we need a 'clear concept of a common good that we can all accept and work for', and that this has to be based on what people themselves feel.[2] Happiness constitutes such a policy goal, and one whose understanding and measurement is as important - if not more so - than that of GNP. Our research on family lives leads me to a very similar conclusion, although I find Layard's proposals around family life to be too uniform to fit with the diversity of living that now exists, and the understandings of it that we have from in-depth qualitative research. He assumes, for example, that marriage is a pre-requisite for good child-rearing, and that divorce and single parenthood are intrinsically problematic. Rather than happiness, my focus is on the ethics of care.[3] My argument is that, though these practical ethics of fairness, attentiveness and so on cannot simply be transposed into the political arena, we can use them to develop a wider political ethic of care.

Developing a political ethic of care

Many recent welfare reforms - and election campaigns - have had as their basis an ethic of paid work, and the identity of consumer; but these notions are not broad enough to meet the aspirations which people have around time and the quality of their relationships. We need a political principle about care that is

2. Richard Layard, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*, Allen Lane 2005, p108.
3. See especially Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, Routledge 1993; and Selma Sevenhuijsen, *Citizenship and the Ethic of Care: Feminist Considerations on Justice, Morality and Politics*, Routledge 1998.

equivalent to the principle of paid work; and an understanding of reciprocity and interdependence which poses an alternative to individual consumption. I would suggest that care is as central to a notion of citizenship as paid work. Where the work ethic elevates the notion of independence and economic self-sufficiency, an ethic of care demands that *interdependence* be seen as the basis of human interaction. This does not deny the importance of autonomy: autonomy and independence are about the capacity for self-determination rather than simply an expectation of individual self-sufficiency.

A second point is that caring for yourself and for others is a meaningful activity in its own right. It is also a *universal* activity, and involves us all - men and women, old and young: we are all, at some level, the givers and receivers of care from others, it is an activity that binds us all. Thus, in particular, care is not an activity that is exclusive to women. But only through the public validation of care as a social good will it come to be perceived as an alternative to the breadwinner model for men and boys.

Thirdly, care contributes to social solidarity. Of course relationships can be unequal and oppressive, but in providing and receiving care and support in conditions of mutual respect, we learn and enact a practical ethics of care: attentiveness, responsibility, trust; being adaptable and accommodating to others' differences; tolerance for our own and others' human frailty; and ways of sustaining and repairing relationships. These are not just personal qualities, they are civic virtues, and therefore a part of what it means to be a citizen. In other words, care is part of citizenship.

The idea that care is a *universal* need and activity is important, because it places those with particular needs for care and support - because they are very young or disabled or frail - on a universal spectrum of needs, rather than setting them apart because of their dependency. It also recognises that those who are 'cared for' have the capacity for agency. In this way care is not just about the activity of caring for others but also about being able to care for the self. It is also about asking what support we need to 'care for the world'. By this I mean both the world outside our door - the world immediately beyond family and work - and the wider world; the politics of care implies recognition of global interdependence and inequality in issues such as migration and the environment. The political and policy questions that flow from this approach concern the *recognition* and valuing of care activities and their *redistribution* -

how should care be shared between the state, market, local communities and families, but also between individuals within (and without) families? And, in the light of migrant workers' role in providing care work, how is it shared globally? And what is 'good-enough' care?

A social environment of care

In practical terms, this approach implies that, instead of starting from the perspective of fitting care around work, policy-makers need to think much more along the lines of the parents we interviewed: how do we fit work around our care needs? We could apply the care ethic to three areas to begin with: creating time to care; creating time to be cared for; and financial and practical support for caring activities. Addressing the issue of time would involve, for example, work-related provisions of flexible hours; shorter full-time hours; paid maternity/paternity/carer leave; job-sharing; annualised hours; unpaid sabbaticals. Financial support for the costs of children could involve help to buy in care, or an allowance to cover loss of carer's wage, and would need to be tied up with anti-poverty measures such as a guaranteed minimum income and a decent state pension. There is nothing unusual in proposing these measures, but applying an ethic of care might take us further along these roads. For example, since our goals encompass social justice *and* giving care a public value, we might consider (as a number of Nordic countries have done) that there should be an element of compulsion to paternity leave. This would ensure both that caring becomes shared, and that employers recognise the entitlement of fathers to engage in caring activities. A care-ethic political approach could lead us to review the whole framework of the social security system: the distinction between being in work and out of work could become less fixed; and activities such as caring or volunteering could be recognised as contributions to society which require support. However, any moves in this direction would also have to ensure that caring does not become ghettoised as the paid activity of women who cannot compete elsewhere in the labour market.

Support for caring activities could involve a number of publicly provided services and forms of practical support: work-based and community based

childcare services, breakfast clubs, holiday clubs; home care services, cleaning, laundry, food services, domiciliary and residential services, and advice centres. These would need to be underpinned by principles of accessibility, affordability, variety, choice, quality, flexibility, respect and user involvement. However, such forms of provision require a more fundamental shift towards a social environment of care. They need to be based on the principles of removing disabling barriers (following the example of the disability movement) to the fulfilment of the needs of those who require particular caring support, such as children or older frail people, and their carers. Local authorities would be required to assess planning proposals, and the development of commercial and public space, in terms of the ways in which children and their parents, young people, older people, disabled people and carers define their needs. This would involve placing a premium on safe and accessible public spaces, with accessible and affordable transport; and the development of local strategies that integrate issues of work, time, care, space and welfare services (one example of the latter is the 'Time in the City' projects in Modena in Italy, where imaginative, user-centred initiatives have been adopted that integrate the delivery of services with commercial and school opening times). It might also include the encouragement of reciprocal activities in local communities, such as time-banking. Strategies to develop stronger local communities, and to build the kind of local democracy that could determine care needs, would require stable and long-term funding and support for local, rooted, community and self-help groups.

A social environment of care would shift the focus on children and young people away from the idea of 'investment', and towards to a respect for them as citizens of the present. The rationale that education is an investment in children provides no basis for attending to the needs of those who may not have an educational future - older people, disabled people and children with learning disabilities. A care orientated approach would involve reframing the testing and target-centred culture of education towards broader values of education as supporting children (or adults) in developing their emotional, physical, intellectual and creative capabilities. Public spaces would be seen as sites of engagement rather than containment. In the current anxiety over children's behaviour, especially towards those in authority, little has been said about the mutual dynamic of respect. Research by Stephen Frosh,

Ann Phoenix and Rob Pattman has demonstrated that teenage boys are acutely aware of being seen as socially and educationally problematic, and of being disparaged by adults; they thus continually invoke a demand for greater respect.[4]

As far as parenting responsibilities are concerned, the central question is not one of the state's enforcement of parents' obligations to care; on the contrary, the question should be *how far society supports a commitment to care*. Enforcing an obligation to care is irrelevant to the majority of parents, who already have a sense of their commitments. Furthermore, the notion that parents should be punished for any transgressions - for example by the withdrawal of their child benefit if their child truants - undermines the principle that child support is a social good. Benefits are there to compensate for the costs of childcare rather than to monitor the care itself. Policies around parenting, care, and work/life balance have to be framed in these terms: how do we cherish children? what do we need as individuals and collectivities to fulfil our commitments to others? and how do we enhance equality and respect? This would - crucially - involve measures to combat the gender imbalance in caring responsibilities, but it would also mean attending to the inequalities that arise from lack of access to services - minority ethnic families and those with disabled children are those least well served by family services. Enforcing the obligation on parents would become a secondary issue, and is in any case one that can only be properly developed once we have established the first (supporting the commitment to care).

We also need strategies to enhance paid care work in order to establish and formalise career paths into care work. This would involve developing training for care work that is person-centred rather than task-oriented; based on the practical ethics of everyday life, and on the experiences of those who require support (this would mean, for example, being attentive to people's needs, being non-judgmental; recognising human dignity). It would also involve user groups being more involved in monitoring courses and trainees.

The ethics of care should not simply be about care relations and services; it needs to influence the organisation and management of work, and even of markets, in the manner of ethical environmentalism. This could begin by

4. Stephen Frosh, Ann Phoenix and Rob Pattman, *Young Masculinities*, Palgrave 2002.

developing and showcasing 'care' cultures in high profile work, social and political organisations - such as Parliament, trade unions and large commercial organisations.

By elevating care I do not mean to imply that we simply reward, and therefore reinforce, women's responsibilities to care. With the demise of the male breadwinner and the encouragement of women into paid work we face new and old dilemmas about gender equality policies. One goal is to have a universal caregiver model which would encourage men and women to share care by taking up part-time paid work and part-time care. This would combine shorter and more flexible working hours with informal care and locally organised but publicly supported neighbourhood care centres. But we know that even in Sweden, which has some of these elements in place, the dominance of the male organisation of working time and careers has been difficult to shift, especially in the private sector. It is for this reason that we need to argue not only for policies around time, money and services, but also for a social environment of care seen as part of a long-term vision of universal citizenship. Such a vision would contribute to a more egalitarian, inclusive and interdependent society. Our struggles in the twentieth century were about work; now they have to be about care as well.