Moving Beyond Care and/or Trust: An Ethic of Social Flesh

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A proliferation of theoretical analyses and government discourses advocate the development of social virtues, either care or trust, as ways past a perceived contemporary crisis around the maintenance of social connectedness. There are references to a 'crisis in trust' (Hudson 2004: 76) or a 'crisis in civic engagement' (Szreter 2002: 589), as well as references to a 'crisis of care' (Daly and Lewis 2000: 288) or a crisis due to a 'care gap' (Sevenhuijsen 2003: 189). While many of these accounts focus on the internal dynamics of nation-states, others, including Zygmunt Bauman (2001) and Emmanuel Levinas (Bernasconi and Critchley 1991), raise the significance of these issues for an emerging global community. A shared concern is 'atomistic individualism', identified as a threat to stable, effective government and/or humane, tolerant human relations.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. In the first instance, we intend to map the political visions associated with the languages of care and trust, identifying problematic premises. Additionally, we offer 'social flesh' as an alternative ethico-political starting place for thinking critically about politics and community. Our engagement in these debates does not indicate an uncritical acceptance of diagnoses of 'crisis'. In fact we challenge the way in which 'crisis talk' tends to locate the 'problem' in the character of citizens. Our target, by way of contrast, is the hegemonic social and political imaginary that constructs citizens as independent, self-reliant and solely responsible for social outcomes. Social flesh is put forward as an alternative paradigm, a new imaginary, grounded in recognition of human intersubjective embodiment. The political vision it inspires is democratic, emphasizing the need to create institutions where diverse bodily experiences are given voice and recognition. The paper presumes a role for theory in political praxis. It takes its inspiration from Clare Colebrook's (2000: 90-91) argument that thought and theory are not distanced points 'of observation on the real', but

'activities of imaging bodies' and 'an anticipation of the future' -- 'the real's way of folding back upon itself through a multiplicity of becomings.'

In the first part of the paper we argue that early care ethicists and most trust theorists focus their attention on the need to produce particular kinds of citizens, either caring or trusting people. Important distinctions between care and trust perspectives will be identified, along with attention to significant divisions within the 'trust' camp. Overriding these distinctions we identify a disturbing agreement among trust theorists that something is amiss in citizen behaviour, a position that, in our view, produces citizens as responsible for the inadequacies of current political regimes and as the ones needing to change. There appears to be a near consensus that citizens lack trust and therefore need to be encouraged to become trusting. The major disagreements are over the means to this end and over the kind of trust to be encouraged.

A more recent generation of care ethicists (Sevenhuijsen 1997, 1998, 2003; Tronto 1993, 2001; Kittay 1998; Folbre 2001) move past the focus on one-to-one caring and care as a moral disposition to insist that caring be considered a collective responsibility. These theorists become the focus in the second part of the paper. In their work, the nature of institutional supports for caring practices, rather than the behaviour of citizens, becomes the problem. We find the focus on the ubiquity of caring practices and the shift from moral disposition to the form and function of institutions useful but remain concerned about several aspects of care ethics. The ambiguity surrounding the meaning of care, in our view, undermines its usefulness as a guiding ethic. Moreover, its highly normative character leaves it open to political manipulation. In particular, the asymmetrical relationship presumed between 'carers' and 'cared for' inscribes hierarchy and hence the potential for paternalism at the core of these relationships.

In the third part of the paper, we offer an ethic of social flesh as a more equitable and less normatively prescriptive starting place for re-imagining social and political life.

Making Citizens Behave

It is useful to deal in this initial section with both early care theorists and with those who privilege trust as the basis of ethical connectedness because, as we shall see, there are important overlaps in the arguments. Indeed, the languages are not strictly separate, which in itself is telling. Many who proffer trust as foundational to healthier community talk at times about the ways in which trust will lead to sympathy for others and a willingness to help others. According to Putnam (1993: 88-89), 'Virtuous citizens are helpful, respectful, and trustful toward one another, even when they differ on matters of substance'. The attributes listed as accompanying trust commonly include sympathy, reciprocity, altruism and care (Metlay 1999: 101-102).[1] On the other side some care ethicists retain a special place for trust. For example, Selma Sevenhuijsen (2003: 185), a contemporary leading proponent of care ethics, declares that 'an ethic of care presupposes an ethic of trust.' In both cases we consider the focus on social virtues as the key to healthy social relations inadequate and even retrograde.

In other work (Beasley and Bacchi 2000; Beasley and Bacchi, forthcoming 2004; Bacchi and Beasley, forthcoming 2005) we have highlighted the ways in which early care ethicists (Gilligan 1982; Held 1987, 1993, 2001) describe the ability to 'care' as a moral attribute and have discussed the problems this creates for their argument. There is a tendency among these early care ethicists to assume that, if a person learns to care in one-to-one relationships, this will translate into a humane concern for distant others and into humane social arrangements generally — locally, nationally and even

internationally. Mothering is put forward as the best nursery for producing caring citizens (Ruddick 1990). The mechanisms by which an ethic derived from interactions between particular others may be transferred to the public and international domains are taken for granted rather than explained. In addition the hierarchical nature of many caring relationships, including mothering, goes almost unnoticed (Shakespeare 2000). Equally disturbing is the tendency to distance ethical theorizing from political practice. Annette Baier (1987: 50 in Held 1993: 86), for example, sets at odds 'the male fixation on the special skill of drafting legislation' and attention to relations of care and trust. The implication in the work of early care ethicists is that care ethics has its own domain, separate from law and legalistic interventions. Such an approach indicates a limited engagement with or interest in political processes, not just in the strict traditional sense of governance but in the sense most feminists employ -- that is, these writers display an oddly restricted concern with power relations in society.

While those who position 'trust' as central to cooperative, collaborative relationships are a diverse group, the work of the most prominent and best known theorists (Putnam 1993, 2000; Fukuyama 1995) shares the limitations we observe in early care theory. Such writings promote trust as a desirable moral quality, are ambiguous about the means of transmission from 'lower' to 'higher' levels of sociality, and neglect the relationship between power and trust. Beyond this group, trust theorists in general tend to recommend the generation of trust as a desirable goal, implicitly constituting citizens who 'lack' trust as deficient. Importantly, the turn to trust loses the focus on bodily interconnection found in care theory, leaving citizens to perform trust negotiations in oddly disembodied ways.

The language of trust has a long heritage in Western political theory but has experienced something of a renaissance in the last twenty years. The expressed concern

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[1] Many politicians in the West have begun to take on a language which links trust and care. For example, Mark Latham (1998: 205), leader of the Australian Labor Party, advocates an increased 'preparedness of

among those who want to privilege trust as a key element in successful collective life is a perceived declining public interest in politics. Low voter turnout in the United States sparked the trust revival. 'Why', trust theorists want to know, 'are citizens turning away from civic participation and what can be done about it?' The key concern appears to be with the *kinds of* people that will sustain a democratic political culture and institutions (see Sullivan and Transue 1999). These considerations have generated a plethora of studies around the concepts of trust, social capital and civil society.

Social capital theorists embrace a variety of political visions. There are at least three distinct positions:

- the Putnam-Fukuyama camp who claim that 'psychic engagement' (Szreter 2002: 582) in close-up relationships and activities produces the sentiments required to facilitate cooperation and economic exchange – the 'social glue' necessary for national cohesion;
- those who prefer 'cool' to 'hot' trust, 'trust as social lubricant' rather than trust as 'social glue';
- those who insist that the government has an important role to play in generating social capital by providing services which reduce inequalities between citizens.

Despite their differences, we suggest that all three positions, albeit to different degrees, direct attention to the behaviours of citizens as the key to viable democratic politics. Each position will be discussed in turn, with a closer examination of the first, given its prominence in popular and political discourse.

The Putnam-Fukuyama camp is most explicit in focussing on the desirability of certain kinds of character traits among citizens. The crucial issues motivating the analysis are 'poor behaviour', evinced in crime rates and family breakdown, and 'excessive judicial pleas for particular rights' (Helly 2003: 21), behaviour described as excessively

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... citizens to trust in and care for each other'.

individualistic and self-serving (Fukuyama 1995: 284).[2] We are witnessing in this view a 'downward spiral of contemporary societies into multiple communities and atomized individuals' (Helly 2003: 20).[3] To counter this trend there is a call for a 'retraditionalizing of civil society' (Cohen 1999: 232), the invocation of pre-modern bonds of social solidarity. Fukuyama (1995: 351) states that 'political liberalism ... needs the support of aspects of traditional culture.'

There are different routes to this goal, however. Fukuyama, like James Coleman (1988), an early progenitor of social capital theory, emphasizes the importance of socialization in close family structures. Putnam by contrast privileges social relationships in secondary associations. Participation in secondary groups, he argues, establishes social bonds and teaches civic skills such as 'self-discipline, moderation and appreciation of successful collaboration' (Misztal 1996: 14). From habits of cooperation and mutual trust emerge citizens willing to shoulder obligation, loyal citizens (Pixley 1998; Barbalet 2000), deferential citizens (Janoski 1998), and/or compliant citizens (Costello 2003: 5). The ultimate goal is social cohesion, with trust providing the 'social glue'. In this account trust is not, or at least not simply, an innate psychological disposition, a view that would put severe limits on the usefulness of trying to *shape* character.[4] Rather trust emerges as a characteristic that can be *generated* through association with those who share core values. Putnam (1993: 177) notes:

> [t]rust itself is an emergent property of the social system as much as a personal attribute. Individuals are able to be trusting (and not merely gullible) because of the social norms and networks within which their actions are embedded.

[2] A recent article in the *Melbourne Age* on violence in the workplace (Robinson 2004) captured this concern. It quoted from organisational psychologist, Dr. Peter Cotton, who suggested that people have become more aggressive because they have a more acute awareness of their rights. This 'rights culture' is set against 'collective or community behaviour': 'It's a lack of spirituality and the pursuit of individual goals which seems to be motivating people — but that is also a route to unhappiness in the long term.'

[3] The Australian Productivity Commission (2003: viii) Report on Social Capital mentions as a key point the possible adverse effects of 'strong internal group cohesion', referring here to sub-groups within the polity.

[4] A number of studies have identified the psychological underpinnings of trust and tolerance. For example, Marcus et al. (1995 in Sullivan and Transue 1999: 635) and Costa and McCrae (1992 in

The *learning* of 'trust' requires direct participation in one-to-one 'trusting' or in associational life. The goal is to create the conditions which will produce 'trusting' citizens.

The focus on family/associations as the source of beneficial learning environments for 'virtuous citizens' lies behind the declared concern that, if the government provides too many services, trust-building activities will be 'crowded out'. This explains the popularity of volunteerism and devolution in much social capital theory (Costello 2003: 7). In Australia, for example, there are also direct links with the endorsement of 'mutual obligation' by the political Right and 'mutual responsibility' by the political Left. The argument here is that direct engagement by people in the performance of labour is necessary to produce responsible citizens. We have here a 'nonstatist form of communitarianism' (Fukuyama 1995: 279).

Care issues are relegated in this agenda to a responsibility of the domestic sphere. The Australian Productivity Commission's Report (2003: ix) on Social Capital specifies that home based care 'can be a more desirable and practical option than nursing home care'. This is because democratic citizens are considered to need particular attributes and skills, and these are seen to be produced though engagement in close-up activities such as caring. The social bonding which takes place in these activities will, it is argued, produce active citizens, countering the supposed apathy displayed in low voter turnout.[5] There is an assumption here that close-up relationships produce characteristics which transmit to the larger public sphere. A curious tension emerges in the argument. Citizens will learn to trust government, but this trust cannot mean that

Sullivan and Transue 1999: 635) found that neuroticism, extroversion and openness to experiences all predict levels of political tolerance fairly accurately.

[5] We say 'supposed apathy' because we challenge the common view that low voter turn-out indicates the kind of sluggish disinterest implied by the word 'apathy'. We prefer to characterise the growing aversion to forms of political participation like voting as 'disaffection', capturing feelings of alienation and discontent. This point is picked up later in the paper.

they will want the government to provide basic services because citizens need to provide these services themselves in order to develop 'trust' in government.

Social capital theory of this ilk marks a shift within liberalism from a wariness regarding trust to an endorsement of trust as an imperative. In Locke citizens *could* trust government if government proved worthy of trust. Now citizens are told that they *should*, indeed, *must* trust government, or be found wanting in their performance as citizens (Hardin 1999: 23). Fukuyama (1995: 7) declares: 'a nation's well-being, as well as its ability to compete, is conditioned by a single, pervasive cultural characteristic, the level of trust inherent in a society'. This trust depends upon the expression of common traditions and norms, imposing cultural coherence on diverse 'others'.

The imperative 'to trust' produces trust as a form of governmentality (Mckay 2000: 2). Nikolas Rose (1999: Chapter 5) traces the paradoxical development of a focus on community in a period dominated by visions of independent economic actors. This paradox is resolved, he argues, in the decision to govern through community/ies. Communities and their constituents are to be held responsible for their own fate and for the fate of the nation. It follows that citizens who do not trust are characterized as deficient. An early study by Eckstein (1984 in Damico et al. 2000: 378) attributes the failure of the poor to participate in politics or the workplace to 'the authoritarian culture of the poor'. In contrast, Fukuyama (1995: 10) attributes the low trust evinced among Afro-Americans to their *lack* of strong community. In these analyses outgroups cannot win. They are described either as having too much or too little community.

Numerous authors question the assumption in Fukuyama and Putnam that 'virtues' learned at home or in secondary associations translate into effective citizen participation (Newton 2001: 173; Damico et al. 2000: 377; Misztal 1996: 199-200). This concern regarding transmission parallels our challenge to early care ethicists who anticipated a generalisation of caring sentiments from mothers to broad social arrangements.

Going further, some trust theorists argue that — *contra* the claim of upward transmission — close-up relationships, commonly referred to as generating *bonding* social capital, can and do produce *conflict*, not cooperation, at higher political levels (Sennett 1974). These trust theorists prefer a less intense, more 'civil' kind of trust, though there are sharp disagreements among them about the kind of political order 'cool trust' involves. On the one side are those who praise 'cool' trust as creating just sufficient lubrication for free and rational citizens to interact, with the role of government limited to the provision of legal infrastructure (Silver 1985; Krygier 1996). On the other side there are those who endorse forms of bridging and linking social capital, based on cooperation among unequals, with a central role for the equalizing policies of government (Szreter 2002; Fattore et al. 2003).

Martin Krygier (1996) typifies the first 'cool trust' camp. He argues that multi-member polities need just enough trust to facilitate 'routine social relations' among 'non-intimates'. This 'cool' trust is to be distinguished from more organic forms of trust based on love or 'deep connection', trust which he sees as 'inimical to civil society'. Cool trust, according to Krygier, produces a 'moderately inclusive' civility. This restrained civility is preferable because it involves

> multitudes of independent actors, going about their individual or freely chosen affairs … able to choose to associate and participate (or not) in an independent public realm, with an economy of dispersed economic actors and markets, undergirded by a socially embedded legal order which grants and enforces legal rights. (Krygier 1996:8).

The role of government is limited to upholding this legal order. Cool trust, it is argued, relies on common traditions and norms and produces tolerance of 'weakly expressed communal identities'.

In this account trust is compatible with economic rationalism. Indeed, the subject of this model of social relations is the rational, disembodied self-interested actor of the current hegemonic economic paradigm. While there is some suggestion of a tempering of atomistic individualism, it is no more than this. In addition Krygier's approach indicates an antagonism to interconnection. He asserts that cool distancing from particularities produces tolerance, and hence he endorses broad commonalities and weakly identified communal identities. This implies that sub-national identities are considered to be problematic and should therefore be discouraged.

The second challenge to 'hot' associational trust offers a dramatically different vision of social relations and the role of the state. In this version of social capital, Bourdieu-inspired theorists identify close-up or bonding social capital as a resource employed in the reproduction of social class. Newton (1999: 185), for example, makes the point that 'generalized interpersonal trust' is most strongly expressed 'not by members of voluntary organizations ... but by the winners in society, insofar as it correlates most strongly with education, satisfaction with life, income, class and race'. Because of a commitment to a more egalitarian social vision, these theorists describe an important role for the state in generating bridging and linking social capital by breaking down boundaries between unequals. There is still a commitment to make the poor 'more trusting', but the problem is no longer represented to be their *lack* of community or their *excess* of community (see above), but their exclusion from full social participation. The government is allocated a key role in evening out the social disparities which alienate the poor and in creating a 'socially inclusive' society. In this scenario state and civil society are interdependent. Trust flows downward from integrative social structures. Fattore et al. (2003: 171) offer evidence that people who have confidence in social institutions are more trusting generally.

Significantly, Szreter (2002), a keen supporter of state-generated social capital, insists that social relations must be 'respectful' *before* they can generate trust. Respect as a

virtue marks his commitment to egalitarian values and a democratic polity. We see this as a significant step forward in conceptualizing ethical social relations. Richard Sennett (2004) pursues the importance of respect as a starting place for egalitarian politics. However, in our view, the emphasis in Sennett on cultivating this 'virtue' in relations between 'weak' and 'strong' citizens underplays human interdependence and interconnection across the board, leaving in place an inegalitarian ethic of protectionism.[6] As we argue later, assumptions that the 'strong' must 'take care' of the 'weak' provide limited starting places for imagining truly ethical community.

The dangers inherent in this model of social relations are clear in Szreter. Disturbingly, in his view 'social capital can only flourish where a society sufficiently embraces the values of egalitarianism combined with order and *hierarchy*' (Szreter 2002: 595. Emphasis added.). More disturbing still are the different roles marked out for the rich and poor in the social drama Szreter describes. The rich, according to Szreter, must learn to recognize the plight of the poor and to react sensitively. If they do not do this, they bear responsibility for the alienation of those less well-off. 'At least some among the elite must have their imagination enthused' and

> if none among the wealthy and powerful in society will countenance this ... they cannot be surprised if the poor draw their own defensive conclusions about the nature of respect, reciprocity, and trust in their society. (Szreter 2002: 587, 613)

Szreter's heroes are turn-of-the-century Progressives, in particular reformers involved in social experiments like Hull House. The paternalistic nature of relations between

[6] There are links here with Iris Marion Young's (2003) critique of protectionist social relations that constitute some groups as *needing* protection and other groups as able to deliver it.

reformers and the poor in these experiments goes unremarked.[7] If this is the best social capital egalitarians can deliver, it is sadly inadequate.[8]

Other Bourdieu-inspired social capital theorists recognize with Szreter that more powerful groups are usually in command of more social capital, and that trust as a public good is unevenly distributed (Evers 2003; Fattore et al. 2003). Hence, unlike Putnam, Fukuyama and Costello, who warn about the 'crowding out' effects of government intervention, they see a role for government in 'social capital building' (Evers 2003: 18). In different accounts this role is described as 'giving citizens a say and a co-responsibility in designing future welfare states' and 'opinion building' (Evers 2003: 18), or providing more social resources, 'opportunities, income and welfare — that make people willing and able to participate in their communities' (Fattore et al. 2003: 174). These versions of social capital provide a necessary corrective to 'civil society determinism' (Evers 2003: 17), the impression that all else follows from associational participation with no explanation of the mechanisms for transmission. However, these accounts remain part of a project geared to producing 'trusting citizens' as the key to social order and social cohesion, a project we consider misguided and even dangerous.

We do not wish to downplay the significance of the distinctive social visions among social capital theorists. Analyses like Szreter's (and we could add the work of Eva Cox 2000) show that it is much too simple to claim that social capital theory is necessarily anti-state. Indeed, Szreter (2002) makes it easier to identify those social capital theorists

[7] Hull House was established by Jane Addams in Chicago in 1889. It formed part of what was called the 'settlement movement', a movement prompted by the desire to teach middle-class values to slum dwellers. The settlement movement formed part of a wider reform approach commonly called 'progressivism', in which reformers saw themselves as members of a competent ruling elite who could create a cradle-to-grave blueprint for a new, better-ordered society (Bacchi 1983: 11).

[8] Social inclusion analyses commonly display the problems just identified in Szreter. They tend to assume that the 'poor' are a distinct group (the lower 30%) who need to be assisted by the benevolent to integrate (Levitas 1996: 17; 1998). Denise Helly (2003: 21) describes the image of society in social inclusion analyses as 'a society made up of a central locus of individuals and a margin of failures'. A social inclusion response is to define 'populations at risk, those considered unfit of (sic) an economic and social performance without social assistance', and convince them to 'change their behavior and become more qualified.'

who *are* anti-state. It follows that people who believe that the state has an important role to play in providing collective services may well find the kind of analyses offered here a convincing defense of social capital and trust (or respect) as useful ways to talk about collective social relationships.

However, there are disturbing commonalities in social capital theory that we think need to be highlighted. In particular there is a shared belief that 'trust' is a good thing, that citizens *lack* trust, and that ways must be found to encourage citizens to trust one another and the government. Despite important disagreements about the conditions needed to produce 'trust' and about the best kind of 'trust' to encourage, the conviction is that the fate of liberal democracy is bound up, at the last, with the 'quality of citizens' (Berkowitz 1999: Preface in Wallach 2000: 169).

Social capital theorists of whatever ilk thus appear to accept that there is a crisis in civic engagement, a 'problem' of citizen 'apathy', and this belief drives their commitment to find ways to 'motivate' 'trust'. This grounding assumption is readily challenged. As Dennis Altman (2001) has indicated in his comments on Putnam's thesis concerning the decline of American social and communal ties, mobilization around AIDS at least raises doubts about the scope of Putnam's claims. Moreover, it is possible to argue, as does Ronald Inglehart (1999: 236), that elite-forms of participation like voting are declining while other forms of citizen activism are flourishing.[9] There is also evidence that people can declare their distrust of government all the while expressing a desire for government to play a significant role in the provision of collective services (Fattore et al. 2003). Distrust of government most often correlates with distrust of *specific* political regimes, not of government in general (Damico et al. 2000). Given this, in some circumstances, distrust would have to be considered a sign of a *healthy*, not a *languishing*, polity.

[9] Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995 in Brewer 2003: 7) found evidence that decreased voting is not accompanied by a general decrease in citizen activism or campaign related activities.

In our view, the language of crisis around trust and 'civic engagement' creates the conditions for sheeting home responsibility for these 'problems' to citizens themselves. Sociality is seen to depend upon the inculcation of desired character traits, as in early care theory, or of desirable citizen behaviours. An ethical sociality depends in these accounts on creating ‘caring citizens’ or 'trusting citizens' or 'respecting citizens'. The assumption here is that people are *not* caring or trusting, and need to be encouraged to become so. This ignores the practices that maintain people in their embodied social relations on a daily basis. Recognizing that caring is an on-going human practice directs attention away from the feared 'limitations' of citizen character/behaviour to the shape and form of those practices. This agenda, pursued by second generation care ethicists, marks a significant shift in perspective in the pursuit of ethical community.

Care as a Collective Responsibility

Political theorists Joan Tronto (1993, 2001) and Selma Sevenhuijsen (1997, 1998a, 1998b) have attempted to deal directly with the limitations of a moral philosophy version of an ethic of care. They insist that feminists need to stop thinking about care as a *moral disposition.* Rather care ought to be seen as an important *social practice* which should be considered in political deliberations about institutional responses to need. This move shifts the discussion from one-to-one caring relationships to institutional caring arrangements (see also Engster 2004). It draws attention to the already existing caring practices of citizens, rather than presuming, as trust theorists tend to, that citizens *need to learn* to trust and to care.

Feminists have a contested relationship to care, however. Carol Thomas (1993) notes a divide between those who direct attention to the care that women provide in domestic arrangements and who demand that this care be socially recognized, as against those who insist that it is no longer adequate to call upon women to meet society's caring

needs. Increasingly this tension is being resolved in the direction of the latter position as a response to what is commonly identified as a growing 'care gap'. This deficit in care is attributed in large part to the increased participation of women in paid labour and their consequent inability to provide as much personal care as they provided previously (Sevenhuijsen 2003: 181). The focus increasingly in feminist analyses is upon finding ways to meet this 'care deficit' (Misra 2003).

Despite this shared goal it is possible to identify serious disagreements about how this need should be met. Sevenhuijsen, for example, in keeping with early care ethicists, is concerned to delineate carefully a restricted role for the state. She refers disparagingly to 'cockpit notions of government', echoing British PM Tony Blair when he rejects a view of government as actively ‘rowing’ in favour of one which merely 'steers' (Blair and Schroeder 1999). Despite expressed concerns about a 'de-caring of the welfare state', her focus is explicitly on the importance of civil society. In this vision the role of public policy is to create 'social spaces in which people can practice care, responsibility and trust' (Sevenhuijsen 2003: 187). Sevenhuijsen's commitment to active citizenship and 'trust as social practice' (Severhuijsen 1998b) reiterates aspects of social capital theory, specifically the insistance that 'citizen activities' provide the basis of social ties and commitment. Like the early care ethicists Sevenhuijsen seems more than a little uncertain about possible links between an ethic of care and state policy making. In contrast, Nel Noddings (2002 in Engster 2004: 119) and Eva Feder Kittay (1999 in Engster 2004: 120) use care ethics to ground a defense of a *stronger* welfare state.[10]

The fact that care ethics can produce such contrasting political visions indicates that, with 'care' as our yardstick of ethical practice, we remain very much in the realm of interpretation. Sevenhuijsen is well aware of this but contends that it is useful, nonetheless, to try and create 'rhetorical and discursive space for moral narratives of

[10] A good deal of recent feminist policy analysis (see Misra 2003) wishes to establish 'carework' as a public responsibility.

care, which are marginalized in dominant discourses' (Sevenhuijsen 1998: 60). We accept the importance of expanding the universe of political discourse as a means to invigorating ethico-political debate and indeed wish to make a contribution to this project, but we have serious reservations about 'care' as an ideal.[11] In our view, care is both too ambiguous and too normative, leaving it open to abuse.

In other work (Beasley and Bacchi, forthcoming 2004; Bacchi and Beasley, forthcoming 2005) we note the alignment of endorsements of an ethic of care with traditional conceptions of heterosexual family and sexuality, signalling a limit to the claim that an ethic of care fosters sensitivity to difference and context. In addition, despite expressed desires to avoid paternalism, an asymmetrical relationship is constructed between those *needing* care and those *delivering* care, undermining the egalitarian potential of the analysis. Sevenhuijsen (1998b: 7), for example, follows in the footsteps of early care ethicists with her detailed exploration of one-to-one caring arrangements which presuppose relations of dependence and vulnerability.[12] Even in accounts like Szreter's (2002) that insist on institutional provision of care, however, 'recipients' of care are positioned as *other than* 'donors', as 'in need' in ways that 'donors' are presumed not to be.

This kind of distinction appears also in some postmodern attempts to ground a new ethical sociality. Levinas' reflections on ethical responsibility, for example, assume a 'radical asymmetry' in the 'apprehension of the Other', where the 'suffering of the one before me' calls me 'out of my own insular subjectivity' (Dunphy 2004: 3). Relatedly, Margrit Shildrick (2001: 238) notes how Iris Marion Young draws upon Levinas to 'theorize her reflections on public address and political inclusion.' Once again, the

[11] Important feminist theorists like Iris Marion Young (1997: 82-3 in Sybylla 2001: 75) would like to see the ethics of care extended to 'serve as a general ethical theory to ground a normative conception of politics and policy.'

[12] Roe Sybylla (2001: 72) identifies the ways in which caring can create weakness and dependence, patronizing or diminishing the recipient. In her view, to counter this tendency, respect must come first and there must be a refusal to speak for others.

emphasis is on the ways in which the 'bodily need and possibility for suffering' of the other 'makes an unavoidable claim on me' (Young 1999: 107 in Shildrick 2001: 238). While postcolonial theorist Ghassan Hage (2003a, 2003b) enunciates an account of care that is clearly about political caring based upon a notion of interconnection as social practice, he conceives of the nurturing welfare state generating caring in individual citizens, such that they will be able to care for 'others', especially those in need. In other words the caring 'exchange' is still viewed as a form of reciprocated altruism.

The point we wish to make here is that those who want to promote institutional responsibility for caring practices fail to identity the way in which their accounts retain a hierarchical relationship between 'givers' and 'receivers'. Sennett's (2004) insistence on the need for a respectful character to the interchange between 'weak' and 'strong' provides a useful corrective here (see also Szreter 2002). However, so long as our ethical starting place is benevolence, or compassion, or gift giving, or altruism, we reinstate aspects of hierarchy which undermine egalitarian social relations (see Minow 1990; Bacchi 2001; 2004). Iris Marion Young is acutely sensitive to the problematic aspects of dependency relationships. She notes (2003: 16) that 'rights and dignity of individuals should not be diminished just because they need help and support'. To this end she points out the importance of challenging the assumption that 'a need for support or care is more exceptional than normal'. Along similar lines Margrit Shildrick (2002) suggests 'a new mode of ethics that holds at its centre the vulnerability of being' (Clough 2003: 111). These insights are crucial for our argument and we pursue them below in our reflections on embodied interconnection.

Social Flesh: a new political ethic

Second generation care ethicists mark a significant advance on earlier care theory by shifting the focus from moral disposition to caring practices. Recognizing that caring practices *already take place* highlights the limitations of theory that starts from a premise

that citizens have to be *motivated* to 'trust' or 'care' in order to *generate* integrative sociality. However, caring practices are only one part of the complex and interweaving layers of interconnection that characterise contemporary social relations. Our necessarily *embodied* intersubjective existence involves caring but goes beyond caring relationships to include shared occupation of geographical space, shared usage of infrastructure and ongoing social interdependence within and across borders. Recognition of these relationships, we suggest, marks a new point of departure for re-imagining social and political life.

This line of thought involves conceptualizing citizens as embodied. As mentioned earlier, the subject of trust theory is decidedly disembodied, marking a serious limitation in its scope and usefulness. Notably second generation care ethicists put embodiment on the political agenda but they deal only with quite specific aspects of embodiment — those to do with bodily maintenance and nurturance, such as elder care and child care (Beasley and Bacchi, forthcoming 2004; Bacchi and Beasley, forthcoming 2005). This limited focus emphasizes the dichotomy between those who care and those cared for, highlighting the asymmetry we find so disturbing. Visions of ethical community require, in our view, a broader conception of embodied intersubjectivity.

On this subject feminist body theory offers important advances on conventional views about the 'relationship between' body and self. However, much of this theory remains thinly physical, abstract and representational (Beasley and Bacchi 2000: 347). A key limitation is the lack of attention to a critical aspect of bodily materiality — that is, its formation and location within a political sociality as a body among bodies. There is a neglect of the social space within which embodied subjects operate and a neglect of inter-subject relations. On this point it is disappointing that Young's (2002) work on the lived body pays insufficient attention to the necessarily social nature of bodily interactions. This explains, we would suggest, the ease with which Young separates the formation of identity from social structural factors: 'The person ... is an actor; she has an

ontological freedom to construct herself in relation to this facticity' (Young 2002: 415). Young's insight in other work (2003) that we *all* need care and support seems to disappear from her analysis of identity formation.[13]

Some postmodern reflections on dominant Western conceptions of embodiment are useful here. Lara Merlin (2003:165) points out that the 'Western body is constituted through a fear of lack and of loss'. This subject attempts to 'defend itself against their dual threats by folding in on itself, thereby precluding any relation with the other'. The prominent place of acquisitive individualism in contemporary social theory confirms this account, as do public policies predicated on rationalist decision-making or cognition. Levinas (Wyschogrod 2003: 62) offers a different starting place for reflecting on embodied subjectivity. He interprets sensation as 'depending on two distinct functions of bodily existence: first, vulnerability and susceptibility, sensation's passive side, and second, aesthetic ... articulation in its active dimension.' This leads to the observation that corporeality is susceptible to pain and wounding, to sickness and ageing: 'Pain penetrates to the heart of the active cognitive self and calls it to order. Thus the ethical body in its susceptibility to wounding, to outrage and hurt ... challenges the structure of the self as an egology' (Wyschogrod 2003: 63).[14]

Despite the value of these insights, as noted earlier, this analysis retains a focus on 'the fragility of the other' and the 'radical generosity of altruistic existence' (Wyschogrod 2003: 63), reinstating asymmetry at the core of the relationship. We suggest that recognition of our common intersubjective embodiment marks a different ethical moment. It shifts the focus from those constituted as dependent to human *inter*connection. As Damico et al. (2000: 379) point out: '[M]any social interactions take

[13] Roe Sybylla (2001: 73) notes perceptively that, while Young (1997: 83) speaks against paternalism, she comes 'dangerously close to it herself when she writes in reference to pregnant drug users, "The privileged and the powerful have a duty to ... protect the vulnerable from the consequences of their compromised situation".' There are echoes here of Szreter's desire to 'enthuse' the imaginations of the 'elite'.

place with people at a great distance from us. This distance does not lessen our dependence on them: Indeed, our interdependence increases.' In this vein Kittay (1998: 133) remarks that there are no self-reliant workers and that 'self-sufficiency is a conceptual chimera in a capitalist economy'. The challenge theoretically is to maintain this insight and not lapse into versions of sociality that construct some groups as needy and others as beneficent.

We offer the concept of social flesh as a way forward in rethinking the complex nature of the interaction between subjectivity, embodiment, intimacy, social institutions and social interconnection. Social flesh generalizes the insight that caring practices already take place on an ongoing basis to recognition of the broad, complex sustenance of life that characterizes embodied intersubjective existence. There is no sense here of 'givers' and 'receivers'; rather we are all recognized as receivers of socially generated goods and services. Social flesh necessarily inhabits a specific geographical space, emphasizing the importance of environmentalist efforts to preserve that space (Macken 2004: 25). Social flesh also marks our diversity, challenging those who would privilege some bodies over others. We would also suggest that social flesh is less normatively prescriptive than care. It is not a directive to behave in any particular way. Rather it provides a new basis for thinking about the sorts of institutional arrangements necessary to acknowledge social fleshly existence. The effect is to 'open up the scope of what counts as relevant' (Shildrick 2001: 238). For example, it allows a challenge to current conceptualizations which construct attention to the 'private sphere' as compensatory rather than as necessary (Beasley and Bacchi 2000: 350).

We believe that this intervention, demanding a rethinking of the nature of embodied interconnection, is particularly important as current government policies already presume particular conceptions of bodies, often with undemocratic consequences. In

[14] G. Thomas Couser (1997 in Major 2002: 41) agrees that 'body dysfunction is perhaps the most common threat to the appealing belief that one controls one's destiny.'

other work (Bacchi and Beasley 2002) we identify a dichotomy operating in public policy between conceptions of bodies as controlled by citizens, and conceptions of citizens as controlled by their bodies. On the one side we find that the presumption of bodies controlled by citizens underpins policies which do not 'infringe' on rational body-controlling citizens, leaving in place structures that disenfranchise many. On the other side the assumption that some citizens cannot control their bodies provides the rationale for forms of often coercive regulation. Social flesh challenges the 'control over body'/'controlled by body' distinction, and hence provides a different starting place for institutional design.

Conclusion

In times like these, a new ethico-political ideal is required to contest the adequacy of dominant understandings of social interaction as matters of choice and rational decision-making.[15] Along with some trust and some care theorists, we wish to displace the current hegemonic status of atomistic individualism. *Contra* much of this theory, however, we consider the problem to lodge, not in the character deficiencies of citizens, but at the level of social imaginaries. Theory that describes citizens as uncaring or as lacking in trust leaves unchallenged the presumption that individuals shape their own futures. In some versions (Fukuyama 1995; Costello 2003), in fact, it reasserts exactly this belief. In our view, even those like Szreter and Hage who insist that political institutions ought to provide basic social supports and to take the lead in generating viable social relations, continue to insist that the outcome will be the production of 'trusting' or 'caring' citizens.

[15] Mitchell Dean (1997 in Larner 2002: 19) notes that neo-liberalism is 'more an ethos or an ethical ideal, than a set of completed or established institutions'. This highlights the need to offer contesting ethical ideals that allow us to imagine political alternatives. Here we offer the bare bones of an ethical ideal we call ‘social flesh’, an ideal that clearly requires elaboration in future work.

Our starting place, by way of contrast, is the insight offered by care ethics, that caring practices are *already ongoing*. We broaden this insight to include the full range of social practices that sustain *social fleshly* existence. This broadening removes the asymmetrical power relations lodged in descriptions of relations between 'carers' and 'cared for', between 'givers' and 'receivers'. It shifts the discussion from the need for compassion and open-hearted generosity to recognition of embodied interconnection. The focus becomes *mutual*, instead of *self-*, reliance.

As an ethico-*political* ideal, social flesh demands a political response. In this context, we do not consider characterizations of the political as 'always manipulation'[16] or as a 'male fixation' (Baier 1987: 50 in Held 1993: 86) to be adequate. Indeed, the ideal of social flesh is precisely about political sociality. However, this ideal does not presume that forms of social recognition that flow from it are predictable or laudable. Rather it creates a point of departure for imagining and debating appropriate forms of responsive interconnection. This requires democratic institutional spaces with a broad constituency empowered to share stories about social fleshly experience.

[16] Levinas asserts a 'hiatus' between ethics and politics due to the assumption that politics is always manipulation (Bell 2001).

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