



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Book Review Justice, Care and the Welfare State (Engster) and Family Policy and Disability (Rimmerman)

Citation for published version:

Gulland, J 2017, 'Book Review Justice, Care and the Welfare State (Engster) and Family Policy and Disability (Rimmerman)', *European Journal of Social Security*, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 324-327.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/138826271601800307>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1177/138826271601800307](https://doi.org/10.1177/138826271601800307)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

European Journal of Social Security

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Gulland (2016) Review of Justice, Care and the Welfare State (Engster) and Family Policy and Disability (Rimmerman) published in *European Journal of Social Security* 2016/3 - Author final version

Engster, D. (2015) *Justice, Care and the Welfare State*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. 287pp
ISBN 978-0919-871956-4

Rimmerman, A. (2015) *Family Policy and Disability* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 212pp
ISBN 978-1—107-04917-8

These two books approach the question of the role of welfare states in supporting people who are often excluded from mainstream discussions of welfare state provision. In the case of Engster's book, this means people who are not currently in the labour market: children, retired people, disabled people, while, for Rimmerman, the focus is specifically on disabled children and their families. This means that the books should both appeal to similar readers, particularly those who have an interest in disability, children and family policies. Both books use comparative data to consider policies across a range of European and other OECD countries. However the approach of the two books is rather different. Engster attempts an overall philosophy of welfare, using his notion of 'care ethics' to assess both the theory and practice of welfare across a range of countries, highlighting the issues affecting particular disadvantaged groups. This is a comprehensive theory of welfare, where the different pieces of the puzzle must all be in place for the system to work. Rimmerman's book, on the other hand, has a much closer focus on the specific needs of disabled children and their families. In this sense the books are very different. One has a comprehensive approach while the other pays close attention to the concerns of a small but important group.

In *Justice, Care and the Welfare State*, Daniel Engster sets out to explore the relationship between political philosophy on the nature of justice and empirical evidence on the implementation of welfare in practice. This approach enables the welfare state scholar to look further than the minutiae of individual or comparative welfare state policies and to think about why we have welfare states in the first place. It also provides some starting points for how we might assess their value and how we might advocate for change. Engster's claim to move beyond established welfare state scholars such as Rawls, Esping-Andersen and Nozick, starts with an assumption of the 'non-ideal' citizen. Instead of starting with the assumption of a non-disabled, working age, usually male, adult, whom a welfare state might protect from threats to earning capacity, Engster begins by recognising that many of us do not fit this 'ideal'. So he includes children, retired people and disabled people in his theory.

Engster's theory of 'care ethics' and proposed policy solutions are forthright and will find many critics. His views on family policy, for example, assertively maintain the need for the state to intervene more than it usually does in parenting practices, sacrificing 'family privacy and autonomy' for the benefit of children: parents (male and female) should be required to take parental leave for newborn children, should

Gulland (2016) Review of Justice, Care and the Welfare State (Engster) and Family Policy and Disability (Rimmerman) published in *European Journal of Social Security* 2016/3 - Author final version

be required to take parenting classes and send their children to state provided childcare/education from the age of three (p76).

Drawing on theories of 'care ethics' and a stress on the necessity for collective responsibility, Engster makes specific proposals on all areas of welfare provision, from childcare and education to out of work benefits and long term residential care and personal assistance. A criticism that might be levelled at Engster is a continuing 'othering' of older people, disabled people, children and 'the poor'. While his vision of society incorporates everyone, those who do not fit the ideal type of the adult worker are still considered as people in need of care by the rest of society. The structure of Engster's book also makes it rather difficult to consider issues of intersectionality. By separating out old people, disabled people, families with children and 'poor people', he risks overlooking the overlaps and connections between these groups. Yet, in his chapter on 'poverty', Engster notes that 80 percent of poor people in OECD countries live in families with children or are older or disabled people or care givers (p203). Recognising that for the remaining 20 percent, most of this poverty is also structural (p206). Engster therefore recommends decent paying regulated or state employed work, provision of child care and personal assistance, anti-discrimination legislation and support for disabled people in employment and in-work wage subsidies and conditional unemployment benefits for people who genuinely cannot find work. Gender inequalities are rather optimistically dealt with by his proposals for increased state funded child care and personal assistance services, with expectations that much of the 'care' work which is often carried out, unpaid or low paid, by women would be converted into decently paid labour or would free women up to work in the open labour market. His vision of a welfare state where everyone has a 'decent paying and meaningful job' or is recognised for their contribution in 'caring for others' (p236) is important but perhaps overly optimistic in anticipating the eradication of deep-rooted structural inequalities.

Engster's theory and proposed policy solutions are based on extensive reviews of existing social policies across OECD countries. This wealth of data provides the reader with detailed examples to illustrate different policy options. These policy proposals are intended to work as whole system and so cherry picking from them would lead to policy outcomes and/or costs that would not necessarily achieve Engster's vision of an affordable caring welfare state. Readers will find much to argue with in this book but it undoubtedly provides much to think about. It is likely to fascinate and irritate in equal measure but provides new ways of thinking about some classic welfare state questions and answers these with specific policy proposals. As a source of discussion for policy makers, welfare state researchers and advanced students in social policy, the book has much to offer.

In *Family Policy and Disability* Arie Rimmerman's looks at the specific question of how welfare states support families with disabled children. As with Engster, Rimmerman takes a comparative approach, looking at policies for families with disabled children

Gulland (2016) Review of Justice, Care and the Welfare State (Engster) and Family Policy and Disability (Rimmerman) published in *European Journal of Social Security* 2016/3 - Author final version

in Europe and the United States. His focus however is empirical rather than philosophical. The book begins with a discussion of the meaning of 'family policy' a contested terrain and one which can be interpreted in many ways. This chapter ends with a question: whether generic family policies can include families with disabled children or whether specific policies need to be developed to include these groups. The book then considers the specific issues and needs of families with disabled children, looking specifically at family policies for disabled children in the United States, the UK, France and Sweden. A penultimate chapter considers the usefulness of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in assessing family policies, focussing on potential conflicts between the rights of individual disabled people and the rights and needs of the wider family.

The book's limitations lie in its structure. There is an element of repetition across chapters which makes it difficult to follow the overall argument. There is a patchy feel to the book as whole, perhaps reflecting the status of some of the chapters, which are based on previous lectures and conference papers. The final chapter in which Rimmerman sums up the key issues is perhaps the most interesting. Here he looks at key themes, including conceptual problems in the definitions of the family; the overwhelming importance of financial inequality for families with disabled children and the potentially conflicting interests of 'families' and individual disabled people. Framing the whole book more clearly in the debates raised in this chapter would have been helpful. There is some discussion of the definition of 'disability' but, I would argue, insufficient attention to the social model of disability. Rimmerman usually equates 'disability' with 'impairment' without interrogating this or using the concept of the disabling society to examine the web of competing 'family' needs.

These two books have common themes: how to meet the needs and aspirations of groups in society who are often excluded from welfare state discussion. They both include an abundance of detail and consider policies and legislation across a range of countries. Both address important issues of fairness, needs, rights and the role of the state. Both acknowledge the competing needs and rights of different groups and address the complex and often conflicting interests of 'family'. However, they are very different books. Rimmerman raises important issues about the needs and continued exclusion of disabled children and their families but does not attempt an overall theory of welfare state provision. It is also rather limited in its range of comparator countries. Engster's book is much more ambitious in scope, providing considerable opportunities for debate and discussion about the role of the welfare state. Engster's book is an engaging read and provides a firm foundation for discussion of these issues, suitable as starting point for debate on advanced social policy and welfare law courses.

Dr Jackie Gulland
School of Social and Political Science
University of Edinburgh

Gulland (2016) Review of Justice, Care and the Welfare State (Engster) and Family Policy and Disability (Rimmerman) published in *European Journal of Social Security* 2016/3 - Author final version

Dr Gulland has a PhD in social policy from the University of Edinburgh, where she is a lecturer in social work. Her research is broadly in the field of socio-legal studies and she has carried out work on citizens' grievances and social security policy, with a particular focus on disability and social care. Her current research concerns the history of the concept of 'incapacity for work' in social security from the early 20th century to the present day.