

Between dystopias and alternative ideas of caring

Introduction

An inherent problem of capitalist societies has ever been that their primary orientation – towards maximisation of profit and self-interested utility, towards optimisation of value and pursuit of particular interests, towards rationalisation and efficiency – is in conflict with ideas of a good life not just for a few members of society, but for all. Although as modern societies they embody a promise of equal participation in material and ideational goods and associated opportunities for all members of society to engage in effective self-care and caring, their self-conception as performance societies means that this is in fact meritocratically framed. The emphasis is on the individual as autonomous and capable of self-care, while caring is at odds with this, and can best be realised in connection with participatory and need-based justice, i.e. in a framework that deems care requirements to be legitimate.

In this constellation, self-care and reciprocal care, and hence also care work, are directly linked with questions of justice and democracy. By duly accommodating the care requirements that are prerequisites for a functioning life and coexistence, they foster social integration and cohesion. Conversely, people's ways and means of caring for themselves and others and obtaining care from society play a part in determining how and to what extent they can participate economically, politically, socially and culturally in society's goods and values. Therefore, questions of justice and democracy have a place at the core of the care debate and international care research.

Joan Tronto's discussion of the "caring democracy" is well-nigh programmatic for the debate when it comes to sounding out the democratic relevance of caring (Tronto, 2016, 842ff.); in her view, care is not democratic *per se*. First, she argues, it is not enough to urge societal responsibility for care without linking this to questions of equality and justice. Capitalist societies, for example, make top-quality care services available but generally only for those who can afford them. Second, caring will not become democratic practice *per se* but necessitates reflection on its intrinsic risks. The author talks about the "paternalism" that results when asymmetrical care relationships are bound up with the exercise of power whereby the caring party asserts its own perspectives as the societally relevant ones vs those of the cared-for party. And she addresses the "parochialism" when the care needs perceived as urgent are primarily those playing out nearby; for example, when the scandal of "neglected care" (Becker-Schmidt, 2011) is perceived in "our" but not in "other" societies or even on a global scale. If the democratising potential of care is to be unleashed and democracy changed so as to do justice to care concerns, what matters is the equal distribution of care responsibility within society and giving all those who bear it a voice when it comes to shaping the politics of coexistence. In the logic of the equal distribution of care responsibility, articulated by Nancy Fraser (1996) in the term "universal care giver", this means that ultimately all people will have a say in the shaping of society, although the social inequalities that exist for historical reasons need to be acknowledged in order to be able to change them (Tronto, 2016, 845f.).

Concepts like "caring democracy" are inspired by the ethics of care or moral-philosophical discussions (Tronto, 2011) and at the same time build a bridge to the analysis of capitalism and to perspectives for social change by turning capitalist thinking upside-down. They think about society from the viewpoint of the care services that are overlooked by capitalist economics in its intrinsic "structural carelessness", whereby it proceeds to



ignore, suppress or threaten the interests of life (Aulenbacher and Dammayr, 2014). All other oppositions and inconsistencies notwithstanding, this radical change of perspective – adopting care requirements as the starting point for the analysis of society – ties in these ethically inspired concepts with approaches in care research which are more indebted to political economy perspectives yet which, like Gabriele Winker (2015) for example, identify transformative potential from an economic, political, social and cultural perspective in the societal reorganisation of care.

Debates about care, justice and democracy have so far touched more closely on social policy and social state research than on politico-economic discussions or labour research, even though this is another tradition of substantial significance in care research (Mahon and Robinson, 2011; Plonz *et al.*, 2011). For some long time, conversely, the semantics of care had no space in labour research and capitalism theory. This weighting of social policy themes is a reflection of societal development in the second half of the last century, and hence during the period in which care research came into being as a discipline. The “social property” which, particularly in Western Europe, accompanies the expansion of the social state (Castel, 2000) also and in no small measure comprised infrastructure and care services, which ensured more need-based and participatory justice as well as gender equity in care ranging from childcare to elderly care (Riegraf, 2013). Notwithstanding the establishment of the care theme in this historical and socio-spatial context, above all the ethics of care have played a major part in ensuring that – as in the discussion about justice – the perspective has not been confined to the Global North, but rather, the critique of people having to live without care or with inadequate care has included other global regions. Care research is a global research strand that focuses its attention not only on intra-societal but also on inter-societal care gaps, and on questions of justice and democracy in this context (Kofman and Raghuram, 2015; Mahon and Robinson, 2011).

In the last two decades the discourse constellation has changed. Questions of political economy are increasingly drawing attention within the international sociology of care (Fine, 2007) and, vice versa, research strands like the sociology of work or theories of capitalism are beginning to “discover” the theme of care. This, too, is a reflection of developments in society. Since the 1980s a far-reaching reorganisation of the social state can be witnessed, in which economic principles have become dominant and care and care work are being commodified on a new scale (Aulenbacher *et al.*, 2014; Klenk and Pavolini, 2015). With both aspects, questions of justice and democracy are also being reframed, in the first case because the terrains of conflict have shifted or new conflicts have arisen, as numerous care protests show (Völker and Amacker, 2015), and in the second case because alternative (such as community-based) forms of care rooted in criticism of the prevailing conditions have regained significance (Karner and Weicht, 2016). The special issue takes up several of these societal developments and hopes to contribute to their analysis by including articles from the different strands of research which are only touched upon here.

Dystopias can sharpen awareness of what is happening or likely to happen if the capitalist priorities mentioned at the outset are pursued and no resistance is forthcoming. We therefore decided to open the special issue with this aspect. Next in the order of content are articles in which social-state development and the economisation of care are central. This immediately brings us on to questions of protest and resistance, and finally to the subject of alternative forms of care and work.

Cornelia Klinger, in “An essay on life, care and death in the *Brave New World* after 1984”, deals with the contemporary technological revolution. She takes the Foucaultian distinction between old dominance regimes and modern biopolitics and suggests a third stage of dominance: bioeconomics and cultural industry. Her approach is less about summoning up resistance and opposition and more about working with conservation and evolution. In her view this means that we must rethink the ways of resistance and criticism. With more

emphasis on the empirical paradigm, the next aspect is the increasing economisation of care in the context of justice and democracy. Emma Dowling, in her essay “Confronting capital’s care fix: care through the lens of democracy”, takes a look at the consequences of the economisation of care work in light of the “care fix” concept, and inquires into this development from a social-state perspective. The article “Capitalism goes care: elder and childcare between market, state, profession, and family and questions of justice and inequality”, by Brigitte Aulenbacher, Fabienne Décieux and Birgit Riegraf shows, with reference to a Polanyian, neo-institutionalist and pragmatic perspective, how care and care work are increasingly being economised, and combines this with a retrospective view of the development of the social state and a current look at the social organisation of elder and childcare, considering aspects of inequality and justice. The article “Counter-Landnahme? labour disputes in the care work-field” by Karina Becker, Klaus Dörre and Yalcin Kutlu shows, likewise drawing on Polanyi and making recourse to the Landnahme theorem, how care work’s subjugation to capitalist economic interests has, in a new way, turned it into a terrain of protest and opposition, in the form of strikes prompted by the violation of rights to care. After this look on the marketisation of care and on care protests the last step to be taken in the special issue is to discuss two forms of caring which are striving to reach more just, equal and democratic participation: Myrtle P. Bell and Daphne Berry, in “Worker cooperatives: alternative governance for caring and precarious work”, discuss the role of worker cooperatives in reducing inequality among healthcare workers in the USA. In “Women in rural South Africa: a post-wage existence and the role of the state”, Michelle Williams shows how women who are not included in the formal wage-labour economy are acting in solidarity in new and creative ways to develop resilient working and living relationships.

The editorial team of *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion* afforded us the opportunity to compile the “Professional Insights” section. Here, too, nothing seemed more appropriate than to stick with the theme of the special issue. We therefore decided to record two interviews. Under the heading “The crisis in Greece: questions of economy, state and democracy”, Maria Markantonatou tells us how the development taking place under the auspices of austerity is threatening democracy and detrimentally affecting people’s everyday lives. Under the heading “Care Revolution”, Gabriele Winker describes the protest initiative she helped to found as a coordinating activist, how it works, what her goals are, in view of the present threat to care, and how these are to be achieved.

After this *par-force* passage from dystopia via critique and protest to “real utopias” which, following Erik-Olin Wright (2017), can also be traced in the care field in current circumstances, Kristina Binner and Lara Jüssen introduce books that engage with current developments in care work.

From our first thoughts about this special issue to its publication, there have been four intervening years. During this time, many people have given us a great deal of support. First and foremost, our thanks go to the 12 colleagues versed in international care research who contributed their expertise for the review process; unfortunately, in a double-blind reviewed journal we are not allowed to mention them by name. Matthias Philipper supported us as reliably as ever with his technical competences, for which we very sincerely thank him. Last but not least, we are especially grateful to Regine Bendl for her receptiveness towards the theme, and to Ed Ng who supported our work as Editor-in-Chief.

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