

# Why the Family?<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

Among the most pressing philosophical questions occupying those interested in the ethics of the family is why should parents, as opposed to charity workers or state officials, raise children? In their recent *Family Values*, Brighouse and Swift have further articulated and strengthen their own justification of the parent-child relationship by appealing to its crucial role in enabling the child's proper development and in allowing parents to play a valuable fiduciary role in the lives of children. In this paper, I argue that the set of interests Brighouse and Swift identify as necessary for the justification of the family fails to account for the different stages and the different cultural settings that mark the parent-child relationship. In particular, I argue that their justification of the family fails to satisfy the following two desiderata: (i) that the justification for the parent-child relationship should ideally track the good-making feature(s) of the relationship that extend across its entire history, and (ii) such justification should ideally explain what is valuable about the parent-child relationship in both liberal and non-liberal family contexts. In light of my critique, I sketch an alternative account of family values, one that appeals directly to the special mode of caring we see in the parent-child relationship, a form of caring that is certainly present in non-liberal societies and that typically extends across a lifetime.

**Keywords:** family, children, parents, paternalism, autonomy, love, Brighouse, Swift

*“Ser mãe é padecer no paraíso”<sup>2</sup>*

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2 Popular Brazilian Expression: “Being a mother is like suffering in paradise” (My translation from Portuguese).

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Among the most challenging philosophical questions concerning the ethics of the family is why parents, rather than charity workers, or state officials, say, should raise children. What justifies the family as the best arrangement for the rearing of citizens who are not yet in a position to secure their own current and future interests?

One answer to this question is that the parent-child relationship is justified by some fundamental interest that adults have with regard to their biological children, such as the interest in the product of their gestational labor or genetic investment.<sup>3</sup> Another approach to this question starts from the assumption that children are extremely vulnerable and dependent and that their interests should exhaust any theory attempting to justify what is, at its core, a coercive, and therefore morally suspect, type of intimate relationship.<sup>4</sup> This child centred view of family relationships is based on the contention that the parent-child relationship can only be justified on the assumption that no other social arrangement could do a better job at securing the core interests of children. Were this empirical assumption to become unsustainable, adults would cease to have a *prima facie* right to parent.

An alternative to both these views is the “dual-interest” account of child rearing.<sup>5</sup> Those articulating this position have appealed to both the interests of children in being raised by parents and the interests of parents in raising children. The fundamental commitment of the dual-interest view is that the interests on both sides have to be balanced out and that good enough parents retain their right to parent even if it turns out that other social arrangements would do a better job at protecting and promoting the interests of children. Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift have recently further articulated and strengthened their own version of the dual interest account by defending the position that the parent-child relationship is justified by its crucial role in securing the child’s proper development and in enabling the flourishing of many adults (Brighouse and Swift 2014).<sup>6</sup>

In this essay, I argue that the specific set of interests Brighouse and Swift identify as grounds for the justification of the parent-child relationship fail to account for the different stages and the different cultural settings that mark the family. In particular, I argue that their account of family values

3 For a genetic account, see Hall (1999). For a gestational account, see Narayan (1999).

4 The coercive aspect of the relationship here is a result of the fact that due to the lack of a sufficient degree of autonomy, children cannot typically consent to partaking in the relationship. For child-centred views, see Blustein (1982); Vallentyne (2003).

5 See Brighouse and Swift (2006); Clayton (2006); MacLeod (2010); Gheaus (2012).

6 See also Rawls (1999: 265).

fails to satisfy the following two desiderata: (i) that the justification for the parent-child relationship should ideally track the good-making feature(s) of the relationship that extend across its entire history, and (ii) such justification should ideally explain what is valuable about the parent-child relationship in both liberal and non-liberal family contexts. In light of my critique, I sketch an alternative account of what is special about the family, one that appeals directly to the special mode of caring we see in the parent-child relationship, a form of caring that is certainly present in non-liberal families and that typically extends across a lifetime.

The discussion will be structured as follows. In section 2, I briefly rehearse Brighouse and Swift's arguments for their dual-interest account of child rearing. In section 3, I motivate two desiderata for a successful theory of what justifies the parent-child relationship and argue that Brighouse and Swift's account, as it stands, cannot meet them. In sections 4 and 5, I sketch an alternative justification for the parent-child relationship that overcomes the challenges raised in the previous section, and briefly discuss some of its implications.

## 2. BRIGHOUSE AND SWIFT ON FAMILY VALUES

Let us start our inquiry by briefly rehearsing Brighouse and Swift's argument in favor of taking the family to be the best institutional setting for the rearing of children.<sup>7</sup> According to the authors, there are a number of interests on the part of children that ground their right to be raised by at least one parent.<sup>8</sup> First, children are highly dependent on adults for their most basic emotional and biological needs. Second, children are profoundly vulnerable to the quality of other people's decisions, and the sort of paternalistic treatment they are subjected to in childhood can significantly impact how well their lives go as a whole. Third, children are capable of eventually developing a capacity for autonomy and so are significantly different from other vulnerable individuals who will never become capable of attending to their own interests. Brighouse and Swift believe that, when taken together, these interests give children an overarching interest to be 'manipulated' and 'coerced' into doing what is good for them, or what will prepare them for becoming autonomous later on in their lives (Brighouse and Swift 2014: 62-70).

<sup>7</sup> Like Brighouse and Swift (2014: XI), I will employ the concept of "the family" to refer to the parent-child relationship in the context of this discussion. Note that I do not take a stand on whether or not other intimate relationships should also be picked out by this concept.

<sup>8</sup> For Brighouse and Swift (2014: 53-54), A has a right to X, when A's interest in doing X or having X is weighty enough that it gives rise to a duty on the part of others that they allow A to do X or that they provide A with X. Moreover, whether an interest in doing X or having X is weighty enough to give rise to a duty on others will depend on the importance of X and the costs that come with the provision of X.

It is certainly true that children's lack of autonomy and vulnerability makes it appropriate that others act paternalistically towards them, but there is still a further question as to why such paternalism should come primarily from adults acting within the context of a private and intimate family relationship.<sup>9</sup> For Brighouse and Swift, the answer lies in the fact that such relationships are typically marked by love and that love renders the exercise of paternalism more effective (Brighouse and Swift 2014: 71). The underlying empirical assumption here is that a loving relationship between a child and a competent parent allows the latter to exercise authority with knowledge of the former's unique dispositions, and with the sort of spontaneity and care that encourages the child to see the parent as her central disciplinary model (Brighouse and Swift 2014: 73). For the authors, the quality time which parent and child typically spend together, and the intimacy that develops as a result, are so central to the effective exercise of paternalism, that there cannot be many of these relationships in a child's life (Brighouse and Swift 2014: 73).<sup>10</sup>

If Brighouse and Swift are correct, we now have the beginning of a story that purports to explain what is so special about the parent-child relationship:

- I. Children need paternalistic treatment to enjoy the goods of childhood and to develop the capacities they need later on in adulthood.
- II. Such paternalistic treatment will be more effective or successful if exercised in a context of an intimate loving relationship.
- III. Competent parents can typically exercise paternalism in a context of an intimate loving relationship.

Conclusion: Children have a basic interest in being cared for by at least one, but not too many, competent parents.

So far, so good, but this does not yet give us a dual-interest account. In order to explain why it is good for adults to parent children even when children could conceivably fare better under alternative arrangements, we need to say something about the interest *parents* have in playing their own role in the relationship. For Brighouse and Swift, adults have a strong interest in playing the *fiduciary* role that secures the child's present and future well-being. That is, the interest that some adults have in parenting is precisely to be in a loving relationship where they can act paternalistically towards a child, guaranteeing her basic needs and seeing to it that she develops the cognitive, emotional, physical, and moral resources she needs to become an autonomous person later on in her life (Brighouse and Swift 2014: 86-90).

<sup>9</sup> Brighouse and Swift (2014: 67) write that "paternalism involves manipulating or coercing another person with the purpose of serving her good".

<sup>10</sup> Note that Brighouse and Swift (2014: 70) also recognize that the exercise of paternalism should be constrained by the child's stage of development.

Here then is the final justificatory step taken by Brighouse and Swift in favor of their dual-interest account of child rearing:

- IV. Some competent adults are not only capable of exercising paternalism, but have an interest in playing such a fiduciary role within the context of a loving relationship.<sup>11</sup>

Conclusion: All children have a strong interest in being cared for by at least one, but not many competent parents, and some adults have a strong interest in parenting. These interests are sufficiently weighty, and the costs involved in securing them are sufficiently reasonable, so as to ground the right of children to have at least one parent, and the right of competent adults to parent. The balancing of these interests also justifies the family as the best socio-institutional arrangement for the rearing of children.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. TWO DESIDERATA: CONTINUITY AND PLURALISM

In the previous section, we learnt that for Brighouse and Swift, the need for paternalism within the context of a loving relationship ultimately grounds the right of children to have at least one parent and that the same paternalism grounds a (conditional, limited) right of adults to parent children. The aim of this section is to take a step back and think about what we want a theory of family values to deliver, as well as evaluate how Brighouse and Swift's dual-interest account fares with regards to such theoretical aims.

To begin with, Brighouse and Swift's fiduciary account certainly points in the right direction by starting with the recognition that children typically fare better if they can count on at least one competent adult to actively attend to their well being. The account also seems to capture something important about how there can be a weighty interest on the part of adults to be in a relationship with children that cannot be replaced by other kinds of intimate relationships, such as relationship with a pet, or a friend. But do Brighouse and Swift really get to the heart of the matter when they point to the interest of children in being subjected to this sort of loving paternalism and the interests of parents in exercising loving authority as part of the parental role? That is, do they succeed in identifying the most basic property or set of properties that justify the existence of the family even in a context where other actual and conceivable arrangements could do a better job at securing the interests of children?

11 As Brighouse and Swift (2014: 86) put it, "[i]t cannot be substituted by other forms of relationship, and it contributes to the parent's well-being so substantially, and in a manner so congruent with the interests of children, that it grounds (a conditional, limited) right to parent".

12 For the rights theory endorsed by the authors, see *supra-note* 8.

In the remainder of this section, I argue that although Brighouse and Swift's fiduciary account helps us make much progress on the ethics of the family, it does not, as it stands, meet two important desiderata. First, their account fails to explain what is special about the parent-child relationship once the child is capable of attending to her own present and future well-being. It therefore fails to explain what is good or valuable about children having parents and parents having children across a lifetime. Let us call this the "continuity desideratum". Second, by arguing that part of what justifies the fiduciary role of the parent is its ability to secure the child's future autonomy, their account fails to justify the parent-child relationship outside a liberal family context, where parents might lack the disposition in seeing to it that their adult child becomes capable of forming and pursuing her own conception of the good. Let us call this the "pluralism desideratum". I will discuss each desideratum in turn.

### *3.1. Continuity*

Let me begin by motivating the continuity desideratum, which is that, all else being equal, a successful justification for the child-parent relationship should also be able to explain why it is good that parents have children and children have parents not only during the former's childhood but also across a lifetime. To make sense of this idea, let us imagine a world that is very similar to ours but where society has structured procreation and parenting differently, and where only elderly members of society become parents and where children are conceived and gestated in high-tech government laboratories. Let us also imagine that the rationale for this arrangement is efficiency since citizens are more productive if they spend their adult lives fully engaged in the workforce and then later in life, once they have retired, they will have more time to invest in their parental role. Finally, let us assume that quality of life and life expectancy are such that children typically have at least one sufficiently healthy parent during childhood and adolescence, but typically not during their adulthood.

As becomes clear, this society is one in which both parent's and children's interests, as identified by Brighouse and Swift, are fully met but where it seems that something deeply valuable is lost. What is lost, I take it, is the value for both parent and child in enjoying an intimate and loving relationship that typically extends across different phases of their lives, and that provides the child with the on-going benefit of being subjected to an intense and robust mode of caring by the parent (I will defend this claim in more detail in the following section). If I am right that the parent-child relationship retains its value even when there is no more need for the exercise of paternalism on the part of the parent, then we should ideally aim for a justification of the family

that does not depend on features that are only present in childhood, but that can explain what is valuable about the parent-child relationship as it extends across time.<sup>13</sup>

At this stage, a proponent of Brighouse and Swift's fiduciary account might endorse the continuity desideratum, but deny that the authors fail to meet it in their own justification of the family. The response here would be to appeal to the fact that Brighouse and Swift also give a lot of weight to the role of love in their discussion, and that as a result of love's continuity, their fiduciary account will hold no matter which developmental stage or life phase parties find themselves in.

This would indeed be a charitable reading of their discussion, and later I sketch an account that does appeal to the role of love in explaining what is so special about the parent-child relationship. However, as it stands, it is not clear that this interpretation is available to Brighouse and Swift because their account of why adults have an interest in parenting appeals to the interest that parents have in exercising loving *authority* over the lives of children. Indeed, for Brighouse and Swift, love comes in by playing an important, yet supportive role, in the effective exercise of paternalism.<sup>14</sup> As they explain:

“The fiduciary aspect remains central. Grandparents, or parent's friends, or nannies, can have close relationships with children, and when they go well, those relationships will be conducive to the child's interests and valuable to the adults too. Reading bedtime stories, providing meals, and so on, will be contributing to the well-being of both. Still, there's something distinctively valuable about being the person who not only does those things oneself but has the responsibility to make sure they get done, sometimes by others, and the authority to decide quite how they get done” (Brighouse and Swift 2014: 93).

But even if the above passage was somewhat misleading and it was true that Brighouse and Swift were primarily interested in love itself, they would still need a further argument to justify the interest that adults have in parenting given that adults can enjoy relationships of love and intimacy with people other than their children. The challenge here is that love *per se* cannot get a dual-interest account off the ground because such an account is aimed at explaining what is special about the parent-child relationship in particular, not loving relationships more generally.

13 To be sure, as the child goes through different developmental stages, there are contingent features of each stage that will provide distinct sources of *pleasure* to the parent. However, it does not follow from this fact that the identity of the relationship changes so dramatically that what made it valuable when the child was a toddler is no longer present when she is middle-aged.

14 As Brighouse and Swift (2014: 92) put it, “[t]he relationship as a whole, with its particular intimate character and the responsibility to play the specific fiduciary role for the person with whom one is intimate in that way, is what adults have an interest in”.

Before I move on to the second desideratum, let me dispel one potential concern with the discussion so far. The concern might be that the continuity desideratum does not apply to Brighouse and Swift's fiduciary account because theirs is an exercise in political philosophy, not value theory. Perhaps what these authors are ultimately interested in doing, so the concern goes, is justifying a relationship where one party lacks exit options and is wholly dependent on the other party for having her basic interests protected and promoted. What motivates the concern here is that the authors might not be answering the question of what is valuable about the parent-child relationship *tout ensemble*, but rather explaining why it is permissible for adults to enter and maintain intimate relationships with non-consenting children.

One reason why this response is unsatisfactory is that the inability of the child to exit a parent-child relationship is not a necessary feature of this sort of relationship and that it is possible for there to be intimate relationships where the child actually enjoys exit options. These are, for instance, relationships where a parent lacks custody rights over the child and decides to give the child a lot of space to choose whether or not, and to what extent, to partake in the relationship. One might think that the enjoyment of exit options on the part of the child dispels the need for justification in such cases, but I take it that the degree of intimacy involved at all stages of the relationship, and the mere possibility that society could be arranged differently, suffice for making the parent-child relationship, at its most general level, proper subject of philosophical justification. It would therefore be unsatisfying if Brighouse and Swift were solely in the business of explaining why it is permissible for there to be relationships between competent parents and children where the latter have no prospect of exiting the relationship.

### 3.2. *Pluralism*

Let me now turn to the second desideratum, which is the claim that a successful justification for the parent-child relationship must also be able to justify such relationships in non-liberal family contexts. As mentioned earlier, Brighouse and Swift believe that one of the reasons children need parents is that within the context of an intimate loving relationship, parents have an interest to ensure that children acquire the skills they need in order to become autonomous later on in their lives. For them, this privileged position on the part of parents goes as far as to give parents "a duty to try and ensure that the child will become an autonomous agent, someone capable of judging, and acting on her judgement, about her own interests" (Brighouse and Swift 2014: 90).

Before I explain why this focus on autonomy is problematic for the fiduciary account, let me endorse the more general claim that children have

a weighty interest in becoming self-determining in adulthood. Let me also note that such capacity for autonomy can be cashed out in different ways and elsewhere I have argued that children have a weighty interest in developing some basic agential skills, such as critical thinking, self-esteem and imagination precisely in order to make life choices that sufficiently track their own values and aspirations, as opposed to the values and aspirations of their parents, community leaders and religious authorities (Ferracioli 2015).<sup>15</sup> I am therefore in deep agreement with Brighouse and Swift in thinking that something goes wrong when children fail to acquire the skills they need to live adult lives that are genuinely their own.

However, as I see it, Brighouse and Swift are too quick in linking this particular interest on the part of children with the fiduciary role of parents. That is, they are too quick in assuming that parents are typically capable and willing to ensure that their child develop the agential skills needed to make their own life choices as opposed to choices that blindly follow religious tradition or cultural expectations (Ferracioli and Terlazzo 2014; Ferracioli 2015). Indeed, it is a well-known sociological fact that many parents in non-liberal cultural contexts do not value autonomy themselves and actually want their child to uncritically endorse what they take to be deep truths about the world. The result here is that Brighouse and Swift's inclusion of the capacity for autonomy in the list of interests that ground a dual-interest account makes it the case that only autonomy-promoting parents have a right to parent, because only they have the disposition to protect the interest that the child has in becoming autonomous, and so to protect one of the interests that, according to the fiduciary account, justify the family in the first place.

Proponents of the fiduciary account might respond by resisting the pluralism desideratum, and by arguing that in fact only parents who are committed to the development of autonomy have a right to parent because only they are genuinely in a position to secure the very weighty interest of children in becoming sufficiently self-determining. But this response would deny the obvious and morally relevant fact that outside liberal family contexts, parents still manage to enjoy a great degree of intimacy, love and affection with their children, and that the lives of all parties go much better as a result of partaking in such loving relationships.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, this response also fails to see that the right of children in becoming sufficiently

<sup>15</sup> See also Meyers (1987).

<sup>16</sup> Note that this position is compatible with the claim (which I do not make here) that, all else being equal, being raised by liberal parents is superior to being raised by authoritarian ones. These are compatible claims because all we need for justifying the parent-child relationship is that the relationship meets some sufficiency requirement. Outside the enterprise of justification, we can certainly rank styles of parenting according to some independent moral criteria.

autonomous can instead correlate with a duty on the part of the state to create a neutral system of compulsory public education where children acquire the agential skills required for the exercise of autonomy later on in their lives (I return to this point later).<sup>17</sup>

#### 4. PARENTAL LOVE AND THE GOOD LIFE

In the previous section, I argued that the best candidate for a theory of what justifies the family should not appeal solely to features of childhood but rather to features of the parent-child relationship that extend across the entirety of the relationship. I have also argued that such an account should explicitly include the interest of adults in entering into intimate and loving relationship with children irrespective of a lack of disposition on their part to see to it that their child becomes sufficiently self-determining. In this section, I sketch an account that can successfully meet these two desiderata.

So what is this valuable feature that both parents and children have an interest in? The answer is actually quite simple: a robust form of caring, or what is commonly (but mistakenly) known as “unconditional love”.

To begin with, let me make the obvious point that strictly unconditional love is neither feasible nor desirable. It is not feasible because there can be psychological limits on the human capacity to love when love is reciprocated with physical violence, abuse or complete disregard to one’s well being. Even a small child might stop loving a parent when the love she gives is reciprocated with extreme forms of violence and abuse. But even if it is possible for some people to love unconditionally, it still not something they have an interest in doing simply because unconditional love is not on the whole desirable. Indeed, it is important for person’s self-respect and self-esteem that they place certain minimum conditions on the giving of love, such as the condition that they be treated with some degree of respect and generosity, and that their beloved will, for instance, not offend against the most basic demands of morality. The thought here is that even a devoted parent should try hard to stop loving an adult child who turns out to be an unrepentant mass murderer.

So if unconditional love is neither feasible nor desirable, what kind of love do children and parents have an interest in? And what makes this love sufficiently distinct from other kinds of love that allows us to get a dual-interest account off the ground? The love both children and parents have an interest in is parental love, which is of such magnitude and robustness that it *typically* differs from other kinds of love.

<sup>17</sup> For the role of compulsory public education in the fostering of autonomy, see Ferracioli and Terlazzo (2014); Ferracioli (2015).

Let me start with a rough definition of parental love: *a type of love whereby the agent cares so much about the good of her beloved, that she is robustly disposed to take on a great deal of personal cost in order to advance the good of her beloved.*

If I am right that parental love can be so defined, then children have an interest in being cared for by parents as opposed to charity workers or state officials because they have an interest in being at the receiving end of a mode of caring that is of significant magnitude and robustness (Ferracioli 2015). That is, children have an interest in an intimate relationship with an adult who cares so much that the child's life goes well, that she is disposed to take on a great deal of costs to advance the child's interests over the course of that relationship. Moreover, children have an interest that such disposition on the part of the parent remains robust across time and counter-factual worlds.<sup>18</sup> A child who enjoys parental love, so this view goes, will continue to enjoy it as she becomes older and even if the sacrifices involved become extraordinary.

To illustrate the point, we need only think of the hardships we might encounter in our adult lives, and the people most likely to continue advancing our interests should such hardships arise. If, for instance, we acquired a severe illness that made us incapable of attending to our own basic needs, or if we became so depressed that we could hardly respond to the world around us, the people most likely to continuously advance our interests would be our parents, not friends or lovers.

The same is true of childhood. Charity and orphanage workers might be able to adequately meet the basic needs of children under their care, but they will not move town or country in order to ensure that a sick child will get a special kind of medical treatment.<sup>19</sup> They are also unlikely to spend all of their discretionary time inventing games and activities so as to continuously stimulate a child who suffers from autism spectrum disorder, for instance. And in any case, they will certainly not spend their whole lives trying to find a child that has disappeared. Charity and orphanage workers will of course typically do what morality or their job description require—the trouble is that, at times, human beings, being the vulnerable creatures they are, need much more than that.<sup>20</sup>

If I am right that children have an interest in being the recipient of parental love so that across a lifetime, they will enjoy a caring relationship

18 For the notion of a modally demanding value, see Pettit (2008).

19 For a defence of the claim that children can have all their interests secured in an orphanage, see Cowden (2012).

20 For a more detailed discussion of this claim, see Ferracioli (2014).

robustly, then the next question is: why do parents have an interest in providing such robust mode of caring? That is, what do parents have to gain by being in a relationship where they are disposed to take on so much personal cost for the sake of someone else?

As I see it, the interest that parents have in the relationship is precisely to enjoy the moral value of loving someone so deeply that one becomes significantly disposed to advance her good in ways comparable to the advancement of their own good. Indeed, the interest in parenting is nothing above and beyond an interest in being in a relationship where one cares so deeply about how well someone else's life goes that one is disposed to take on the sort of costs that not even morality can demand from moral agents.<sup>21</sup> This sort of disposition for a deep mode of caring *within the context of* an intimate relationship is a great source of meaning—it enriches the lives of adults significantly, despite the fact (or perhaps even partly because) life often feels like “suffering in heaven”.

In the previous section, I noted that a general interest in love would not get us a dual-interest account off the ground because adults can partake in a myriad of loving relationships, such as the relationship one has with a friend or lover. And if I am right then, why think that friendships and romantic relationships cannot exhibit the sort of robust care we see with the parent-child relationship?

At this stage, it is important to clarify exactly what the shape of the claim is. I have not argued that parents *necessarily* feel parental love. We know all too well that some parents do not experience robust modes of caring. I have also not argued that other relationships *necessarily* fail to exhibit the features of parental love so far discussed. It is certainly conceivable that some romantic relationships and friendships might give rise to equally robust modes of caring—it is just that they are significantly less likely to do so. Indeed, while it is true that some extraordinary individuals might make all sorts of significant sacrifices to advance the good of a friend, friendships are typically marked by more reasonable forms of cost-taking and by less robust modes of caring. The same is true of romantic relationships. While some people would stick with a romantic partner under almost any circumstances, most romantic relationships are contingent on many facts remaining true, such as shared interests, physical attractiveness, financial stability, loyalty, and so and so forth. The modes of love we see in these other loving relationships are therefore not typically as robust as parental love. For those adults who want to *maximize* their chance of experiencing robust forms of caring, there

21 And of course, such disposition for caring needs to be expressed in the context of an intimate relationship because the relationship itself provides the necessary conditions for effectively acting on the disposition when the need arises.

will be an interest in parenting. A strong interest in caring about someone else robustly within the context of an intimate relationship then gets us a dual-interest off the ground.

## 5. DISPERSED AUTHORITY AND THE GOOD OF CHILDREN

In the previous section I sketched an account that meets the two desiderata motivated earlier: it captures the vulnerability of childhood but it is not exhausted by it. It also makes sense of parent-child relationships in non-liberal family contexts, where parents might lack the willingness in seeing to it that their child becomes sufficiently autonomous but still have the disposition to take on a great deal of costs to advance many of her other interests. Before concluding, I shall briefly discuss some of the implications of justifying the parent-child relationship by appealing to the robust mode of caring constitutive of parental love.

One implication is that a parental love account can leave open how much authority parents can legitimately exercise in a context of the parent-child relationship. So while Brighouse and Swift vindicated the current model of parental authority by arguing that parents had *an interest* in exercising authority over children, the account sketched above would be compatible with a world where parents exercised much less authority over children, and where governments would exercise much more through the provision of a myriad of compulsory public services. For those who worry about growing levels of child obesity and the ill effects on children of the anti-vaccination movement, for instance, the parental love account comes with the benefit of not giving parental authority any justificatory role, and so being much more congenial to state interference in areas such as children's diet and immunization, for instance.<sup>22</sup>

A second, and related, implication is that a parental love account does not make the right to parent conditional on a parents' ability to foster a capacity for autonomy. It therefore endorses the claim that the right of children to become autonomous correlate instead with an obligation on the part of the state to create a neutral system of compulsory public education where children can develop the agential skills required for autonomy without being steered towards any particular conception of the good (Ferracioli and Terlazzo 2014; Ferracioli 2015). Now, of course, it is true that such an account

22 Indeed, whilst Brighouse and Swift discussion leads to the odd result that adults who do not value autonomy lack the right to parent, a parental love account can recognize that their interest in parenting is on a par with the interest of those who do value autonomy, while still limiting the ability of all parents to deny their children the opportunity to acquire the agential skills required for autonomy.

would still make the right to parent conditional on the parent not actively interfering with the fostering of autonomy by the state, and so there would still be a negative duty on the part of the parent not to deny one's child access to public education. The important point to recognize here, however, is that there is an important difference between expecting a parent to respect state interference in the family via a system of compulsory public education, and expecting her to foster herself a capacity she finds detrimental to the pursuit of the good life. The latter, but not the former, is simply overly demanding.

A third and final implication of appealing to the value of parental love when justifying the family is that such an account is, in principle, more liberal with regard to the number of parents a child can potentially have. Recall how Brighouse and Swift emphasize that their account can only support a small number of parents for each child (at some stage in the discussion, they even stipulate that there should be no more than four parents in a child's life (Brighouse and Swift 2014: 71)). As they explain, "intimate but authoritative relationships between children and a small number of particular adults, relationships in which the adults have considerable discretion over the details of how the children are raised, is the best arrangement for raising children, taking into account all the interests at stake" (Brighouse and Swift 2014: XII). A parental love account, on the other hand, allows for more dispersed authority among parties who care robustly for a child, and so, in principle, allows for more than four parents (but as Brighouse and Swift recognize, the question of which adults should parent each child is a separate and independent question (Brighouse and Swift 2014: 49)). And in fact, this is already taking place with modern family arrangements where children are loved deeply by their parents, stepparents, and godparents. Insofar as it is feasible and desirable for the child to enjoy a loving relationship with each one of them, it seems odd (if not somewhat disrespectful to the child) to artificially limit the size of the family just so that each adult can exercise more authority over her life.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In this essay I have engaged with the question of "why is it good for children to be raised by parents, and good for parents to raise children" (Brighouse and Swift 2014: IX). And in particular, I have asked whether Brighouse and Swift answer to this question delivers a successful justification of the parent-child relationship. While I have argued that their account fails on two desiderata and that an account in the vicinity might be superior, I believe the fiduciary account still stands out for helping us make significant progress on the foundational question of what is so special about the family.

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