

Book Review

Barnes, M. (2012). *Care in everyday life: An ethic of care in practice*. Bristol, UK: The Policy Press

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The author continues her exploration of the concept of care in her second book on the subject. In her latest work, she examines care in three specific domains. First among these is thinking of care as “a way of conceptualizing personal and social relations.” In doing so, Barnes develops an expansive view of care that she summarizes as “being attentive to needs and making sure needs are met in order to enable people to flourish.” Second, Barnes looks at care through the lens of evaluation, noting that care is intrinsically linked with values and that people are often judged by their ability to provide care across a variety of social relationships and settings. Third, Barnes looks at care from the perspective of practice. While recognizing the work of feminist scholars on such issues as caregiving and unpaid and undervalued labor, she seeks to expand on previous research by including an examination of what care means in the workplace and in public policy deliberations. She argues that the development of an “ethic of care” is essential if we are to apply caring principles in personal, social, and workplace settings.

The strengths of Barnes’ work are the uniqueness of her conceptualization of care and the orderly and thorough manner in which she explicates and develops her thesis. This is a topic that is clearly important to social work practice, and Barnes makes a significant contribution by looking at care across systems – from personal, family and social relations, to the formulation of social policy. Thus, her work would be useful in classes spanning the entire spectrum of social work education, including practice and policy classes.

Finally, her linking of care with values and ethics makes this book especially relevant to social work educators and practitioners. As she states at the conclusion of her work, care “needs to be named as a distinct value and practice, rather than being ignored and undermined.”

The potential weakness in her work is inherent in taking an expansive look at a specific issue; that is, loss of focus and/or inability to thoroughly address each topic. Barnes avoids this possible pitfall through her concise and cogent writing and by organizing the book in a manner that makes it clear to the reader the ways in which she is developing her basic points. By beginning with a definition of “care” and then placing her own work within the context of existing research, she makes clear the specific ways in which her work both builds upon and adds to the body of knowledge on the subject.

Certainly the fact that Barnes has previously published a book and several articles on the issue of care, combined with her experience as a Professor of Social Policy at the University of Brighton, demonstrate that she has both the background and experience to present a well written and coherently presented work on a topic that is very timely for social work and for society in general.