

# Egalitarian Family Values?

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## Abstract

*Family Values* seeks to offer a compelling defence of the family in the face of concerns that the institution of the family disrupts fair equality of opportunity. Brighouse and Swift endorse the concern but think that the great value of family relationship goods is nonetheless sufficient to vindicate the existence of the family. This response applauds Brighouse and Swift's insistence on the interests of parents in raising children and on the loving and intimate character of the parent-child relationship. However, it suggests that Brighouse and Swift's egalitarian framework prevents them from taking the full measure of the above salutary commitments.

**Keywords:** family, parent-child relationship, love, egalitarianism, relationship goods, parents' interests, equality of opportunity, intrinsic goods, positional goods

Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift are our leading theorists of the family.<sup>1</sup> Their previous joint papers have greatly advanced our understanding of the ethics and politics of relations between parents and children. Their work exemplifies a rare combination of qualities: it is bold, path-breaking, and yet rigorous and attentive to nuance. For this reason, we already owe a number of game-changing insights and argumentative strategies to Brighouse and Swift. I would number among the most significant of these a) their insistence on adults' interests in parenting as an indispensable factor in the moral and political equation; b) their emphasis on the value of *the parent-child relationship* in particular; and c) their use of the latter to work out in a systematic and principled way the rights and privileges which attend, or ought to attend, parenthood.

The above insights and strategy also drive the new book, *Family Values*. Readers already familiar with Brighouse and Swift's joint articles will not

1 Following Brighouse and Swift, I will always mean by "the family" a "nuclear" family consisting of at least one parent and at least one child.

find the authors taking a radically new approach here. Instead, the elaboration at book length of their basic line of thought has given Brighouse and Swift the space to embed their core argument within a larger and more explicit overall argumentative architectonic. My remarks here will focus on the shape of that structure and the route it offers to the conclusions Brighouse and Swift are already well known for endorsing. But I want to begin by lingering over and underlining the significant insights their work has already brought to the table, and which continue to play a prominent role in this new book.

To start with a), we owe Brighouse and Swift a great debt of gratitude for expanding the discourse around the family by highlighting the interests of (would-be) *parents* as well as those of children. I find much of the pre-Brighouse and Swift literature on the family excessively, or too exclusively, child-centred; in much of this literature families and parents are treated essentially as devices to serve children's interests. Surely, however, as Brighouse and Swift emphasize, this is only part of the story. Taking care of and raising children is a hugely rewarding and meaningful activity for many adults, one to which they freely choose to devote a substantial portion of their time and energy, and one which they may view as a central contributor to their own personal flourishing. Parenting is, quite simply, what they want to do (or among the things they want to do) with their life (Brighouse and Swift 2014: 22). Brighouse and Swift insist (their word) on the importance of this fact, maintaining that "adults' interest in parenting (and not only children's interest in being parented) helps us to understand the moral basis of the family" (2014: 176). Thus, to neglect these parent-centred factors in discussing the ethics of the family would be to omit a significant piece of the equation. I wholeheartedly agree; I will question only whether this insight and the shift in perspective which it induces receive their full due in *Family Values*.

We also owe to Brighouse and Swift a more precise specification of the *content* of the adult interest in parenting just mooted. As per insight b), Brighouse and Swift propose that parents (and those who desire to be parents) have a strong interest, specifically, in establishing and participating in a *parent-child relationship*. This is shorthand for an intimate, loving relationship with a child in which the parent has both considerable responsibilities toward the child and considerable decisional authority over the child. Brighouse and Swift argue that relationships of this distinctive kind are of great value to both parents *and* children, and (as we shall see under c)) they use this value as the linchpin for deriving further ethical and political conclusions about the family. To place a valuable relationship so explicitly at the core of family

ethics was a major conceptual advance,<sup>2</sup> and one which fits in especially well with an influential strand in recent moral philosophy.<sup>3</sup> Again I think Brighthouse and Swift are right to put the emphasis on the relationship between parent and child as the, or at least a, central ethical element when considering the family.<sup>4</sup> I will again question, however, whether they have taken the full measure of the implications of this commitment.

This last point brings us to c), Brighthouse and Swift's distinctive argumentative strategy for resolving questions about the rights and privileges that ought to attend parenthood. Their simple but innovative idea is to deploy the aforementioned value of the parent-child relationship as the *sine qua non* in assessing the merits of putative parental rights. If *failing* to accord parents a certain right or privilege would *prevent* the development of a valuable parent-child relationship, then that creates a strong moral and political case for granting parents that right or privilege, even in the face of possible moral counter-arguments.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, if *disallowing* parents a certain right or privilege would *not* impede the development of a flourishing parent-child relationship, then that putative right or privilege stands exposed and undefended against any arguments that could be raised against it. This double-edged criterion allows us to adjudicate questions about legitimate parental rights or parental partiality in a principled way, taking us beyond mere reliance on intuition to discern their scope or limits.

As mentioned earlier, in *Family Values* Brighthouse and Swift embed these key insights within a larger argumentative superstructure, to which I will now turn. I will try to bring out some points where resistance to their conclusions can plausibly be traced back to unease with something more basic, namely their vision of the dialectical situation: their conception, for instance, of what kind of claim requires what kind of argument, or of where the burden of proof lies.

Job one, as Brighthouse and Swift see it, is to offer a “defense” (2014: xi, xii) or “justification” (2014: 5, 20, 51) of the family. And it soon becomes clear

2 They credit Schoeman (1980) with originally introducing this idea; but his account seems not to have had much influence on the subsequent literature in family ethics.

3 See for instance the work of Scheffler (2001), especially “Relationships and Responsibilities” and “Families, Nations, Strangers”, and Kolodny (2003).

4 I am pleased to see that word seems to be getting around that a parent's relationship with his child is more important to both than any financial advantages the parent might be able to procure for his child by working more (Brighthouse and Swift 2014: 136). From a recent entry in the Guardian's “My family values” series: “The people with the biggest stereotypes on boarding school were the ones who saw their parents the least... You cannot cover up for a loss of time with money” (Hassell, 2015).

5 “Parents have the right to engage in those activities and interactions with their children that facilitate the realization of the extremely valuable goods that justify the family in the first place” (Brighthouse and Swift 2014:118).

that what they have in mind is a distinctively *consequentialist* defense or justification. Their aim, they tell us, is to demonstrate that and why it is “a good thing” (2014: i, 114) that the family exists: “to explain why it is good that children be raised by parents” (2014: 48). While Brighouse and Swift do not further explain the locutions “it is a good thing” or “it is good that”, such expressions are typically used to evoke a consequentialist conception of (impersonally or objectively) good states of affairs; and Brighouse and Swift’s approach to justifying the family confirms this interpretation. The task they set themselves is to show that and how the existence of the family realizes, or at least facilitates or makes possible, a distinctive set of desirable states of affairs: to prove, in short, that the world would be objectively poorer without families in it. The “familial relationship goods” alluded to earlier are the star players in this demonstration.

Some readers, however, may already be feeling uneasy with Brighouse and Swift’s felt need to provide a justification of this kind for the family. For one thing, it may well strike readers as rather an idle question whether it is “a good thing” that families exist. It is, I take it, *practically* idle to ask whether families should exist: as far as I know, no one anywhere is seriously advocating, let alone threatening to effect, the abolition of the family. There is thus no *actual* interlocutor demanding to be convinced that the existence of the family is preferable to its nonexistence, and in that sense no *actual* threat against which the family needs to be defended.

There are two further, more theoretical reasons why a reader might doubt that there is really a question here which needs dialectically to be answered. Brighouse and Swift’s self-appointed task is to adumbrate the distinctive values and goods which the existence of the family makes possible. But one might doubt whether parents raising children requires a *sui generis* justification in terms of the distinctive values it realizes, as opposed to simply falling under a more general and less demanding moral schema. As we noted earlier, being a parent is something that a great many adults very much want to do with their life. If someone very much wants to do *x* with her life, one might think that alone creates a significant moral presumption in favour of allowing her to do *x*—regardless, it would seem, of *x*’s specific content, or of whether her (or anyone’s) doing *x* would realize important objective values.<sup>6</sup> As a significant (but not all-consuming) life activity, parenting could perhaps be compared with the choice of a particular career. If someone very much wants to be a tax lawyer (for instance), would we

6 This presumptive permission could be defeated, e.g. if *x*ing caused severe harm to the participants or to others. But this is a weaker standard of vindication than needing to establish that “it is a good thing” that the world contains people who *x*, or that people’s *x*ing realizes a distinctive set of objective values.

require proof that the universe would be objectively worse off without tax lawyers in order to think it would be presumptively wrong to prohibit her from pursuing that career?<sup>7</sup> In asking for a justification in terms of adding distinctive value to the universe, Brighthouse and Swift set a high standard; but that is to place a burden of proof on the family which some will feel the family need not bear.

To emphasize in this way the desires and choices of individual adults points toward a further reason one might be ill at ease with the way Brighthouse and Swift frame the issue. They write (2014: xi-xii) as if we as a society faced a question whose answer is to be decided collectively, namely, how we ought to arrange the bringing up of children. “In families” is of course one possible answer; but there are also other possible answers (such as “in state-run institutions”). As Brighthouse and Swift see it, if we are to select the former option we should be sure it is the right choice, i.e. that it is better than the alternatives; whence the need to demonstrate the superiority of the family to other possible arrangements. But I find this way of describing the issue puzzling. At the risk of sounding Thatcherite, I would have ventured that there is no issue facing us as a society, to be settled collectively, about how to bring up children: there are only individual adults who want to parent children.<sup>8</sup>

I have expressed skepticism about whether the family really requires a “defense” or a “justification” of the consequentialist kind that Brighthouse and Swift have in mind. But one might think it is at worst harmless to subject the family to such a test, since Brighthouse and Swift make such a convincing case that it passes. As per insight b) noted earlier, Brighthouse and Swift argue that the existence of the family *does* make possible certain distinctive goods, namely valuable parent-child relationships. A world which lacked families would be a world without those relationships, and thereby very much the poorer in at least one important respect. As it happens, Brighthouse and Swift believe that the family is also the arrangement which best meets *children’s* needs and interests. For that reason alone, “if the family did not exist, it would be necessary to invent it; its invention would be morally required” (Brighthouse and Swift 2014: xii), and the world is indeed in a better state

7 One might argue that this case is not analogous, because being a parent essentially requires the existence (and the participation in the parent’s project) of nonconsenting partners with separate interests of their own, something not true of being a tax lawyer. However, the above general schema about *x* would seem also to hold of being, say, a dairy farmer. If what someone really wants to do with her life is to look after and interact with cows—nonconsenting partners in her project who have separate interests of their own—then surely that fact alone creates a presumptive moral case for allowing her to do just that. See the previous footnote for a gesture toward when that presumption could be overridden.

8 Compare: there is no issue facing us as a society, to be settled collectively, about how to look after cows: there are only individuals who want to be dairy farmers.

with families than it would be without. By contrast, could one say that it would have been necessary to invent tax law, or dairy farming, had no one spontaneously come forward wishing to engage in those activities? We do not normally demand this of activities in order to conclude that it would be *prima facie* wrong to prevent someone from engaging in them.

Even if the family can easily be shown to meet Brighouse and Swift's high standard for justification, however, it is *not* harmless to ask for, and then to provide, such a justification. For there is a sting in the tail of Brighouse and Swift's positive argument for the family: that argument is later used to *limit* the rights and privileges which parents can be said to enjoy. As we shall see, Brighouse and Swift accept only parental rights and privileges *which must be granted if the distinctive values cited in the justification of the family are to be realized*. Any putative right or privilege which is *not* essential to the realization of those values is stricken from the list.

This is the basis for many of Brighouse and Swift's controversial conclusions, of which I will focus here on just one: that parents do not have the right to bequeath substantial wealth to their children.<sup>9</sup> Before examining how exactly they reach this conclusion, I must first, in the spirit of full disclosure, confess significant antipathy to it. I simply cannot bring myself to believe it! I am writing the first draft of this piece at my country house: an old Vermont farmhouse surrounded by pasture and fields which my family was able to purchase this past spring only thanks to an inheritance my husband received from his late mother. (We would never have been able to buy a country house on my philosopher's salary.) We are very sorry she is not getting to see her son plant fruit trees, her grandson learn the names of wildflowers, or her granddaughter pick blackberries and make preserves. But she loved her son, and the rest of us, and we know she would be deeply gratified by all the new horizons her bequest has opened up for us. Faced with this vivid awareness of what her bequest has made possible for her son and my family, I find it simply impossible to accept that my mother-in-law ought not to have been able to leave my husband that money, or that it would violate nobody's rights to prevent or prohibit people from doing any such thing.

Let us look at the argument supporting this (to me) unwelcome conclusion. I reconstruct it as follows:

- (1) "The family is justified because it produces certain goods that would otherwise not be available or ... would be much more difficult to produce" (Brighouse and Swift 2014: 56), viz., familial relationship goods, which are "hugely valuable for many adults and

9 By "substantial" I mean wealth that exceeds what would be required in order to meet the child's basic needs or to satisfy the parent's duty of care toward the child.

all children” (Brighouse and Swift 2014: 20). (justification of the family)

- (2) The scope and limits of parental rights and privileges should—indeed must (Brighouse and Swift 2014: ix, x, 5, 54, 115)—be derived from the justification of the family. (methodological premise)
- (3) More specifically, genuine parental rights and privileges are limited to the *smallest set necessary* for the realization of the goods cited in the justification of the family.
- (4) Therefore (from (1) and (3)), any supposed parental rights or privileges the *withholding* of which would *not* jeopardize the realization of familial relationship goods—otherwise put, the granting of which is not critical to establishing or participating in a valuable parent-child relationship—are not genuine parental rights.
- (5) The freedom to bequeath significant wealth to your child is not essential to establishing or participating in a valuable parent-child relationship. Such a freedom is largely *exogenous* rather than *endogenous*, to the parent-child relationship and to its value; withholding this privilege from parents would therefore not jeopardize the realization of familial relationship goods (Brighouse and Swift 2014: chapter 5; see 119 for the internal-external contrast).
- (6) Therefore (from (4) and (5)), parents do not have a right to bequeath significant wealth to their children.

Before delving more deeply into this “master” argument, I should note that Brighouse and Swift also offer what I consider to be an ill-advised narrower specification of their methodological premise:

- (2') The scope and limits of parental rights and privileges should—indeed must—be derived *solely from that portion of the justification of the family which appeals to children's interests* (2'), however, seems clearly inconsistent with the conjunction of (1) and (2), and for that reason I propose to set it aside in the remainder of the discussion. If we are assuming that the correct account of parental rights is to be derived from the justification we offered for the family, and parents' interests were an important element in that justification, then surely parents' interests should not drop out of the picture as irrelevant when it is time to limn

parental rights.<sup>10</sup> If “it would be wrong to think that the well-being of children should be the sole criterion by which to assess child-rearing arrangements”, why should “the rights and duties of parenthood” be “identified entirely by consideration of *children’s* interests”? (Brighouse and Swift 2014: 121, with added emphasis and some words rearranged).

What then of the original “master” argument? We should start by noting that (2) is questionable. It is not obvious that the same considerations used to justify the very existence of the family ought to be expected to settle the parameters of parental rights—let alone that that is the *only* way properly to settle those parameters (as their “must” implies). Perhaps, having offered a consequentialist justification for the family—having established that it is “a good thing” for there to be families—we would go on to resolve questions about the scope of parental rights within such families in a completely different way. We might for example offer a *non*-consequentialist account of parental rights and privileges founded in the liberties it is proper to extend to autonomous agents as a function of their status and moral powers.<sup>11</sup> Second, (3) seems *ad hoc* even if we accept (2). Why should parental rights be limited to the *smallest set necessary for*, rather than the *largest set consistent with*, the values cited in the justification of the family? Let us grant that it’s very important that any rights or privileges accorded to parents be *consistent with* the realization of those goods. This would mean that any putative parental rights *inconsistent* with valuable parent-child relationships would need to be stricken from the list. But why strike putative parental rights that are perfectly consistent with the realization of such values?

Here I would expect Brighouse and Swift to cite the possibility that *other* considerations might militate against the granting of such rights.<sup>12</sup> If there is an independent objection to parents’ having a certain right or privilege, then we should accept the latter as a genuine right only if we need to: only if we *must* accord parents such a right in order for families to realize the values that justify their existence. Brighouse and Swift press just this possibility against the putative right to bequeath wealth to your children. There *is* a powerful objection to parents’ having such a right, in their view: *such bequests*

10 Brighouse and Swift may be assuming that any parental right that went beyond what is *required* by children’s interests would be *against* children’s interests. But this is unwarranted.

11 Frances Kamm has been a pioneer in seeing rights as expressive of the moral status of rightsholders. See Kamm (2013) for an accessible treatment.

12 In that case, (4) should strictly speaking be reworded so as to refer only to supposed parental rights or privileges *to which objections could be raised*, and (5) should make explicit that objections could indeed be raised to the putative freedom to bequeath significant wealth to your child.

*disrupt equality of opportunity.*

Let me set out the argument for that conclusion, as I see it:

- (A) All people are of equal moral worth, equally valuable (Brighouse and Swift 2014: 23).
- (B) “The fact that people’s lives are equally important has distributive implications—implications about the distribution of opportunities to flourish” (Brighouse and Swift 2014: 27). In particular, it implies that those opportunities should be distributed *fairly*.
- (C) It is *prima facie* unfair for one person to have a greater prospect of getting a desirable job or other socially produced reward than a second person of equal abilities and equal willingness to use them.
- (D) Therefore, there is a well-founded objection to, and thus a reason to prevent or prohibit, any action which results in the state of affairs described in (C).
- (E) Bequeathing significant wealth to your children *is* such an action. Therefore there is a well-founded objection to, and thus a reason to prohibit or prevent, such bequests.

If this argument is sound, then there is a morally considerable objection to granting parents a general permission to make such bequests. And if (5) in the “master” argument is also true, we cannot rebut that objection—as we might in certain other cases—by claiming that parents’ having such a permission is essential to the realization of familial relationship goods.<sup>13</sup> The alleged right to bequeath significant wealth to your children would stand silent in the dock, unable to make any (sufficiently compelling) answer to the prosecution’s case. An indictment would appear forthcoming.

Without seeking to directly assess the soundness of the argument in (A)-(E) above, I do want to comment that it seems to prove an awful lot. If there is a strong case for prohibiting or preventing parents from *bequeathing* significant wealth to their children, then there ought to be a similar prohibition on parents’ *gifting* significant wealth to their children while they (the parents) are still alive. (Otherwise I guarantee rich people will switch to the latter method.) And if parents are prohibited from bequeathing or gifting significant wealth to their children, then surely they ought to be prevented from bequeathing or gifting significant wealth to anyone else either. After all, the wealth they bequeath or gift would presumably have

<sup>13</sup> An appeal to familial relationship goods, were it permitted, would not undercut the legitimacy of the objection but would suggest that it outweighed is by something more important, and thus does not prevail all things considered. “Simply put, familial relationship goods are more important than fair equality of opportunity” (Brighouse and Swift 2014: 143).

the same disruptive effect on fair equality of opportunity whether it went to their child or to someone else;<sup>14</sup> and it would be very peculiar if parents were prohibited from giving to their children but perfectly at liberty to confer significant wealth on anyone other than their children. Finally, even the restriction to *significant* wealth appears *ad hoc* if we are concerned with disruptions to fair equality of opportunity as such. Even giving someone \$100 for a nice shirt and tie, or a good haircut, will give him a better prospect of obtaining a desirable job than he had before. According to Brighthouse and Swift's reasoning, such a gift unfairly harms all those of similar abilities (and willingness to use them) whose chances of getting that desirable job just went down.

In sum, if we are prepared to object to any action which produces a more unequal distribution of opportunities and prospects (across those of similar abilities, etc.) than the distribution which held prior to that action, there seems to be no limit to what we would have to stamp out. I suspect Brighthouse and Swift would reply by underlining that they, too, are on record as being against "pursu[ing] fair equality of opportunity wholeheartedly" (2014: 36) or "all the way" (2014: 44). Perhaps they agree that it would be ridiculous, if not intolerable, to forbid people ever to give anyone \$100. But the moral I take from this is, I suspect, different from theirs. They see an admirable ideal whose moral force is sometimes outweighed by even more powerful considerations, such as the great value of familial relationship goods (see for instance 2014:33). I, on the other hand, see a plausible-sounding principle ((C) plus (D)) whose implications on closer inspection suggest that it is *not* an attractive ideal after all.<sup>15</sup>

I would also like to take issue with (5) in the "master" argument. There is of course some sense in which bequeathing significant wealth to your child is "external" to the parent-child relationship, simply in that such bequests necessarily take place after one party to the relationship has died. Insofar as they literally postdate the person-to-person interactions which constitute a parent-child relationship, bequests take place *outside* rather than *within* the course of that relationship in a temporal sense. However, this very literal sense of "external" is not the one which is appropriate to the argument, and I think bequests cannot be so easily set aside from what is valuable in a parent-child relationship. Let me explain why.

14 You might think disadvantaged recipients would be an exception to this rule; but in fact a large gift to a disadvantaged recipient advantages him relative to what used to be his disadvantaged confrères, and thus "contravene[s] ... fair equality of opportunity" (Brighthouse and Swift 2014: 132).

15 See Stroud (2013) for more on principles which sound appealing as slogans but whose implications (ought to) cause us ultimately to reject them.

A central component of the valuable parent-child relationship is that it is a *loving* relationship. In particular, the parent in such a relationship loves her child. It is a near-truism, and one that Brighthouse and Swift endorse, that when you love someone you very much want him to flourish (2014: 123, 124, 132). (Indeed, it is typical of love that you want to play some positive causal role in his flourishing.) Suppose, then, that you are in a position to expose someone you love to something that you take to be an *intrinsic* good—that is, to a potential intrinsic contributor to his well-being or flourishing. It would seem to be part of love—and thereby part of the valuable parent-child relationship—that you will want (all else being equal) to do so. As a loving parent, you will naturally seek to expose your children to music, animals, nature, and whatever else you think is non-fungible valuable. Such behaviour is *internal* or *endogenous* to love, not external to and cleanly separable from the latter.

Note that I am not speaking of wanting to *confer advantage* on your loved one, where advantage is an essentially comparative notion. (I am not claiming that it is part of love to want your loved one to be in the top decile.) I actually think—and I take this to be broadly in the spirit of Brighthouse and Swift’s egalitarian ethos—that there is something disreputable about wishing for, and pursuing, *purely positional* goods for your loved ones, although it is an interesting question (which I will not take up here) whether and how this could be defended within moral theory.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, it is hard to see anything objectionable in someone’s wanting to expose her children to *intrinsic* goods: what mistake could such a person be accused of making, and what grounds could there possibly be for seeking to restrict such conduct?<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately Brighthouse and Swift think there *are* grounds for restricting it. For even exposing your children to what you take to be *intrinsic* goods may have *instrumental* effects which push your children ahead of others in the competition for socially produced rewards. This will inevitably occur if interacting with intrinsic, non-fungible goods tends to enhance skills, abilities, and character traits whose benefits are transferable to other, competitive contexts. (I would rather hope such interaction *does* tend in this way to improve your character.) When this happens, however, that will suffice to put your action under the disapproving purview of principle (D), which frowns on any action which results (even adventitiously) in a more unequal distribution of opportunities across those of similar ability, etc. than was the case prior to that action’s being performed. (D) will disapprove even if

16 Brighthouse and Swift (2006) have themselves written eloquently on purely positional goods. For an argument that comparative judgements distract us from what is truly significant, see Frankfurt (1987).

17 Brighthouse and Swift seem to concede the force of this worry when they discuss the idea of equal opportunity *for well-being* (2014: 42).

the action was *aimed* only at bringing your children into contact with intrinsic goods, and not at all at procuring competitive advantage for them.

It must be said that it is not at all obvious how my son's having the opportunity to gaze at the night sky far from urban light pollution, or my daughter's learning to use a scythe, is really likely to give either of them a (further) competitive advantage in the modern economy. However, I am perfectly prepared to believe that it might, through some indirect route.<sup>18</sup> If their being exposed to these activities does have that effect, then—back to that country house again!—there is, as Brighouse and Swift see it, a moral case for keeping me from offering these goods to my children. And as we already underlined, this will be so even if the procuring of a competitive advantage for my children is not at all my *aim* in exposing them to these new experiences. For me this again casts doubt on the soundness of the essentially consequentialist egalitarian principle on which Brighouse and Swift rely.<sup>19</sup>

More broadly, I want to suggest that egalitarians like Brighouse and Swift are playing with fire in granting broad licence to loving parent-child relationships. From an egalitarian point of view, love is dangerous; it threatens to break out of the tight constraints on beneficence which Brighouse and Swift seek to erect in the name of equality of opportunity.<sup>20</sup> Brighouse and Swift might say they do not disagree that love tends to spill outside the boundaries they try to set, but in their view the balance of values favors putting a protective firewall only around the highly valuable “core” of the parent-child relationship—even though this means placing some actions taken out of love, and in the context of such a relationship, off limits.<sup>21</sup>

There is however an irony in Brighouse and Swift's judgement of relative value on this particular point. For by their own admission, the prohibition not just of bequests, but of *all* the various ways in which parents might seek to use their superior financial resources to benefit their children (think private schooling), would have only an insignificant effect on the unequal distribution of prospects for desirable jobs, etc. across children. That is, parents' direct use of *money* to benefit their children is—it turns out—a relatively minor contributor

18 Perhaps (for instance) the patience Francesca is forced to develop as she (slowly) learns how to swing a scythe will further advantage her for desirable jobs later on.

19 Consequentialist because the test which the principle articulates is concerned solely with what *results* from our actions.

20 A more fruitful, although more radical, approach for Brighouse and Swift's purposes might be to challenge standard understandings of love and in particular its supposed tie to wishing to benefit the loved one. See along these lines Ebels-Duggan (2008).

21 Brighouse and Swift seem to take this line at times (2014: chapter 5, 132-137). This more nuanced view effectively concedes that such actions are indeed “internal” to love, but it maintains that the value of giving parental love more freedom to operate does not measure up to the disvalue of the resulting disruptions of fair equality of opportunity.

to inequality of opportunity. (Brighouse and Swift allude to this at 2014: 31-32 and 125-127.) Brighouse and Swift thus seem overly optimistic when they say early on that they will “offer an account of ‘family values properly understood’ ... that mitigates—*massively mitigates*—the conflict with equality” (2014: 4; added emphasis). It would appear rather that the egalitarian value to be gained by decreeing some loving actions to be beyond the pale of interpersonal justification is unequal to its cost.

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