

Book Review / Compte rendu

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Kathleen Lynch. *Care and Capitalism*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2022.

The book *Care and Capitalism* is an articulate exposé of the ways that neoliberal capitalism is “care-less”, exploitative, and inherently violent. The author, Kathleen Lynch, is a feminist sociologist, professor emeritus of equality studies at University College Dublin, and currently sits on the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. In direct conversation with Joan Tronto’s moral ethic of care (1993; 2013) and calls from Nancy Folbre for social justice in care (2001; 2021), Lynch draws on her own work on affective relations to disturb dominant and harmful ideologies of neoliberal capitalism, showing instead the ways that care and affective relations provide a viable alternative as an ethical centre for political priorities.

The book begins with an introduction to neoliberal capitalism and an overview of Lynch’s theoretical foundations. The next three chapters form Part I, which explores various matters of care in relation to capitalism. Part II contains three chapters that examine the problems that neoliberal capitalism poses for care and social justice. Part III, comprising two chapters, expands the analysis to non-human animals and the natural environment. The concluding chapter forms Part IV.

Chapter 1 defines affective relations, which refer to humans as relational and interdependent at multiple levels – primary intimate relations such as romance and the family; secondary relations of community and professional connections; tertiary relations signifying national and international political concerns; and human relation factors outside society such as other species and the environment. Chapter 2 shows how neoliberalism has made care and love abject, relegating both as subjects unworthy of consideration, and outlines how intersecting oppressions of gender, class, and race are reinforced by mechanisms of capital. Chapter 3 discusses affect, arguing that “love labouring” – the work of creating humans and humanity – is non-commodifiable and offers a key location of resistance to capital’s impersonal disregard. Chapter 4 outlines the competing logics of care and capitalism in relation to time – for *home economicus* (the rational human), time is money and must be used cost-effectively; for *homo curans* (the caring human), time is spent according to need.

Chapter 5 condemns the dichotomy between public and private concerns as anathematic to relationality, as care is a core principle within families and for public welfare. Chapter 6 moves on to examine the valorization of the self-sufficient individual and the expanding commercialization of social life, discussing capitalism’s colonization of care itself evidenced by the explosion of for-profit, long-term care services. Chapter 7 closes this part with a critique of the corporate (and academic) tendency to count, measure, rank, compare, and judge. Lynch insists that such metrics enable competition but disable cooperation, creating a culture of meritocracy that supports inequality and undermines all that is immeasurable, including values of care.

Chapter 8 outlines a social justice call-to-action for animal welfare, discusses the merits of veganism, and expresses concern for the suffering of those counted as “goods” under massive-scale capitalist food production. Chapter 9 charts the ways that profiteering frequently results in violation and exploitation and ends with the argument that a political ethic of care could help mitigate the abuses of capitalism at all levels.

Chapter 10 concludes the book with the position that care and relationality are fundamental to human nature and necessary for human life. Lynch powerfully argues that, for our own survival, the care-less logic of neoliberal capitalism must not remain dominant in the popular imagination. Acknowledging the challenge of creating an ideological shift, Lynch provides a blueprint for social change including funding, education, and the consolidated mobilization of progressive social movements. Closing out the book, a brief post-script considers lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lynch notes that the high proportion of older people dying and neglected in long-term residential care around the globe has led to a long-overdue discourse about concerns with the corporatization of care.

I appreciated the way Lynch wrote through a historical lens, never claiming that capitalism is the root cause of all that is wrong in the world, as patriarchy, inequality, prejudice, and violence existed long before capitalism. Yet, the ways that capitalism and neoliberal ideologies support, reinforce, and intensify multiple social injustices were clearly delineated. Distinctly absent in the book, unfortunately, is a clear explication of care. Lynch fully describes affective relations but does not explicitly define what is meant by “care” itself.


A major addition of this work is its call for social justice for non-human animals. Existing work in care ethics indicates that care is a concern extending to the environment, and Lynch further articulates how and why this is so. It is my view, however, that Lynch appears to be responsabilizing consumers to change their behaviour through the promotion of veganism,

when the onus should not be on individuals. There could have been a stronger call for care ethics to be foundational for farming and pasturage of captive-bred meat animals and to be more respectful of hunting cultures such as Canada's First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. Despite this small critique, this book amplifies existing scholarship on care through the addition of concern for the welfare of non-human beings, broadening the scope of how care ethics matter and where such ethics can be applied.

This book would be of great interest to social gerontologists, scholars of care systems and care policy, and practitioners engaged in care work. Lynch provides a clear indictment of capitalism as heartless, but, more importantly, shows how an ideology of care, relationality, solidarity, and interdependency has the potential to replace the fear and othering caused by the carelessness of capitalism.

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