

Culture and Welfare State

Values and Social Policy in Comparative
Perspective

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Cheltenham, UK • Northampton, MA, USA

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Published by
Edward Elgar Publishing Limited
Glensanda House
Montpellier Parade
Cheltenham
Glos GL50 1UA
UK

Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc.
William Pratt House
9 Dewey Court
Northampton
Massachusetts 01060
USA

A catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Culture and welfare state: values and social policy in comparative perspective / edited by Wim van Oorschot, Michael Opielka, Birgit Pfau-Effinger.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Welfare state—Europe. 2. Welfare state—Cross-cultural studies. I. Oorschot, Wim van. II. Opielka, Michael, 1956– III. Pfau-Effinger, Birgit. IV. Title

HN373.5.C83 2008
361.6'5094—dc22

2007030405

ISBN 978 1 84542 389 6

Printed and bound in Great Britain by MPG Books Ltd, Bodmin, Cornwall

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4. Conservatism and the welfare state: intervening to preserve

Kees van Kersbergen and Monique Kremer

INTRODUCTION

Conservatism, whether understood as a cultural trait of norms and attitudes, a disposition (Oakeshott, 1981 [1962]), or a political ideology, is intimately related to the welfare state. The latter historically can be seen as an answer to two problems of development: 'the formation of national states and their transformation into mass democracies after the French Revolution, and the growth of capitalism that became the dominant mode of production after the Industrial Revolution' (Flora and Heidenheimer, 1981: 22). This immediately clarifies why conservatism is related to the welfare state: its set of political ideas and cultural disposition has the origin in the political critique of the French Revolution of 1789 and the social critique of the capitalist industrial revolution.

The main characteristics of the conservative social model are authoritarianism, paternalism, an organic and hierarchical view of politics and society, corporatism, familism, and a stress on the importance of status reproduction in social policy. Does this add up to any coherent vision of the 'good society'? Associating a utopian vision of a future good society with conservatism seems to be at odds with what we understand as the meaning of conservatism. Conservatism is a set of ideas and attitudes that has its basis in a central conviction about the fundamental limits of the human condition, and that opposes ideologies that do not take into account human imperfection and fundamental social differences and tensions, such as between men and women (second section).

Historically, conservatism in its critique of the French Revolution developed a political theory that ultimately embraced democracy and in its critique of industrial capitalism elaborated a corporatist and familist theory of social protection. In the third section, we describe how the conservative welfare-state regime came about and how it can best be interpreted. In the fourth section, the central question is how change is possible in conservative familist regimes. Our thesis is that conservative social

intervention aims at preserving what is natural and therefore worth preserving. We chose to look at Flemish and Dutch childcare policies to exemplify this point: what appears to be a radical transformation of women's work, and the modernization of two conservative welfare states. The rate of employment for Dutch mothers is nowadays nearly as high as the Scandinavian one, while many Flemish mothers have always worked. Yet, both welfare regimes are 'typically' conservative, also in their familialist features. How, then, does change, for instance in the position of women on the labour market, combine with the conservative culture within such welfare regimes? We show how the conservative elements preserving traditional family life – whether in terms of an intergenerational extended family as in Flanders or the gender care-sharing nuclear family in the Netherlands – determine the contents of social policy. In policy *change* one still clearly recognizes the conservative disposition *to preserve*.

IS THERE A CONSERVATIVE IDEAL OF THE 'GOOD SOCIETY'?

The very word 'conservative' stems from the Latin word *conservare* which means 'to preserve'. So, if anything, the 'good society' that conservatives seek to establish cannot be some romanticized yet possible world of the future, but must refer either to an ideal society that once existed in the past or to those institutions in the present world that together form a legacy that is worth preserving. However, since a fundamental conservative conviction is that some institutions show a capacity to survive over time and space, thus proving their worth, the type of institutions conservatives have defended has also varied greatly over time and space (see Muller, 1997). It is not specific institutions that conservatives seek to preserve. Moreover, neither are conservatives against change as such. So, what is it that conservatives wish to change and conserve, or change in order to preserve?

Conservatism has its basis in a central conviction about the fundamental limits of the human condition, limits that the heritage of the Enlightenment, in both liberal and socialist forms, denies. The Enlightenment ideologies offer projects for the good society that are doomed to failure because they involve denying or overcoming the basic tensions that are characteristic of the human condition. These modernist ideologies are unrealistic and utopian and necessarily lead to disaster. The hubris of trying to eliminate human imperfection had forcefully come to the fore in the French Revolution. The conservative critique of the French Revolution was that the revolutionaries attempted to destroy precisely those institutions – the church, the family, absolutism – that were built to guarantee order and social integration and

that had historically proven themselves capable of organizing and moderating the fundamental tensions inherent in the human condition.

Conservative thinking searches for principled realism by taking into account conflicting dualities such as those 'between spirit and matter; between us and nature; between the individual and society; between governors and the governed; between free enterprise and state regulation; between different groups within society; and between different states' (O'Sullivan, 1993: 51), and between men and women. The error of the Enlightenment projects was that they denied that there were deeply embedded limits to the extent to which such tensions could be overcome. The imperfection of the human condition is that we simply have to live with these fundamental tensions, and conservatism, to protect society, resists all the ill-conceived utopian attempts to ban them. This conviction explains why conservatives are such passionate defenders of the limited state: for them the worst thing is for state power to be exploited to impose a utopian 'good society'.

The protection of traditional gender relations is one of the icons of the conservative societal view. Conservative thinking starts from a conviction about the natural differences and tensions between women's and men's destiny and character. Attempts to change the natural gender roles can disrupt the equilibrium in society. In this 'two-sphere ideology' women and men are predestined for different and separate societal tasks, for which they each have special talents. As a biological gift from Nature or God, men are more active and rational and therefore their destiny is the public arena, as workers, soldiers or citizens. Women's gift is that they are more emotional and passive. Women are defined by their ability to bear and raise children, and their destiny is therefore the household and marriage, as mothers and wives. This does not imply however that 'two-sphere' conservative thinking has necessarily led in every conservative welfare-state regime to women's limited labour-market participation, or the low-level provision of public childcare. In France, for instance, the struggle between secularists and the Catholic Church in the late 1900s 'spilled over into programs for the care and socialization of young children. The scramble to bring children into the Catholic or secular system as early as possible spurred the creation of services for young children that previously had been viewed as the responsibility of the family' (Morgan, 2002: 140; see also below).

For conservative politicians change was not only undesirable but also impossible and – if nevertheless attempted – ultimately dangerous. Abraham Kuyper for instance, the founding father of the Dutch Protestant Anti-Revolutionary Party, wrote, in 1914, *De eerepositie der vrouw* (The honourable position of women). This essay was not presented as a pamphlet but as a 'scientific' analysis of the existing gender order. It reminds us

not to interfere in the natural harmonious order given by God. Kuyper: 'And it is on the basis of this state of affairs – which we ourselves did not invent, but which was dictated by God – that women in the public domain are not equal to men (in Plantenga, 1993: 15, our translation).

For conservatives, women and men are not necessarily seen as 'better' or 'worse': they are different yet equal. Together they form a harmonious relationship, as they are complementary. This peculiar form of 'equality in difference' does not preclude, of course, a hierarchical view of gender relations as such, because the male public sphere can be – and usually is – seen as more important than the female private sphere. Still, the relationship *within* the private sphere is seen as harmonious, while the outside world is viewed as a hostile one. The homely sphere is a source of love and peace compared to the outside world (Plantenga, 1993). The 'two-sphere ideology' is the basis of another natural given: the family as a bulwark against the capitalist, cruel, lonely and exhausting outside world.

The critique of capitalism that contributed to the conservative attitude had at its kernel a fierce anti-modernity (Berlin, 1979: 20). It attacked the Enlightenment for its ideas of rational solutions to human problems and the unshakable trust in progress, both of which denied the realities of the human condition. The emerging industrial society became the enemy of conservatism and conservative ideas on social policy were influential well into the nineteenth and twentieth century (Moody, 1953; Rüther, 1986). The social critique had as its central object the impoverished masses. It wished to replace the contemporary 'atomized society' by a society classified, arranged and divided by 'estate' in order to restore the supposed unity of feudal society (Bowen, 1971; Görner, 1986). This basic conviction resulted in an attempt to force upon the newly establishing industrial and social reality the order of bygone times (Gottschalch et al., 1969: 336). In the eyes of conservatives, the new spirit of rationalist individualism, the erosion of traditional bonds and the predominance of the pursuit of self-interest constituted the root cause of the 'social question'.

The contents of the conservative social critique varied considerably. There existed no coherent set of ideas constituting a doctrine. Nevertheless, some binding elements can be distinguished. The conservatives initially favoured an 'organic' order of society, in which the estates are arranged and function equally as parts of a larger living organism to whose survival they all contribute. Social problems would find communal solutions without the risk of the state becoming all-powerful and omnipresent.

Conservatives opposed all types of experiments with state-led social policy to moderate the excesses of developing capitalism. Since the goal was the replacement of the economic and social order of liberal capitalism by an organic society, social policy organized and implemented by the state

within the limits of liberal society could only strengthen this objectionable order. Social policy simply obstructed the smooth transition to an organic society (ibid.: 387).

Conservatives loathed the evolving bitter class struggle in capitalism. The reaction consisted of attacking capitalism as a morally revolting social system. Capitalism, moreover, had brought about the equally appalling and objectionable idea of socialism. As an alternative, the reorganization of the estates could produce the capacity to transcend the chaos of capitalism and provide a viable barrier to the lure of socialism. The conservatives were both anti-socialist and anti-liberal (ibid.: 388).

Well into the second half of the nineteenth century conservatives tended to understand the social effects of modernization as a problem of religion and morality. The disruption brought about by capitalism was seen as an effect of a society that had given up its values and had let 'egotism', one of the characteristics of the human condition, rule (see Görner, 1986: 159). The 'social question' was essentially a moral (religious) question. Since moral decadence and the de-Christianization of the masses were the cause of social misery, it was the task of the morally righteous and the church to provide the solution through charity and moral teaching. This solution should consist in the renewal and deepening of the moral spirit, because the suffering of the masses was caused by the absence of right spirit and conviction. The proposed solution naturally reflected this perception. Conservatism's early approach was to aim at the root of the problem: the spiritual betterment of man (Gottschalch et al., 1969: 344).

However, in line with the conservative disposition, it gradually became clear that capitalism was a new historical order with a capacity to endure, and feudalism and the guild system were not supra-historical forms. Moral appeal did little to put a halt to the capitalist advance. Moderate conservatives came to understand that they were making the same mistake as the liberals and socialists, namely pursuing utopian ideals that did not take into account human imperfection. The result was a reorientation that reversed the causal relationship between moral degeneration and industrial capitalism. Corporatist ideas were modernized and a possible new role for state intervention became feasible, and these combined produced the idea of compulsory insurance under the leadership of employers. If moral and religious decay were not the cause but an effect of the excesses of capitalism, then social policy could provide material relief. This, in turn, would have the beneficial effect of restoring traditional relations of authority in the economy and revitalize the family.

In conclusion, conservatism does not have an ideal of the good society. But the conservative welfare model does embody a criticism of the ideal society of social democracy and liberalism. Conservative social policies

must be in accordance with the human condition of imperfection. Moderate conservatism wishes a limited state (otherwise state power becomes too dangerous in the hands of imperfect men) and a social policy in accordance with the real facts of human nature and natural differences (such as between employers and workers, and between men and women). Social policies that aim to transform natural aspects of human life are opposed, as is direct state intervention.

MODERNIZATION, INDUSTRIALISM AND THE CONSERVATIVE WELFARE STATE

The welfare state and its development are effects of modernization (Flora and Heidenheimer, 1981). The welfare state catered to the demands for socioeconomic security in a system of industrial capitalism that dislodged masses of people and made them dependent on the whims of the labour market, thus rapidly destroying traditional forms of social security. Welfare-state development was related to the single most important concern for conservatives, namely the problems of social order and integration created by modernization (Flora and Alber, 1981: 38).

Modernization caused social disintegration and reinforced the necessity for intervention by social organizations and the state. Modernization generated pressing social problems: rapidly changing working conditions, the emergence of the free labour contract, the loss of income security among weak groups in the market, and unemployment. The market did not provide the collective goods needed to cope with these problems. At the same time, large parts of the population were mobilized and organized as a consequence of the increasing concentration of people in factories and cities and the extended means of communication. Mobilization was expressed in public protest and violence and in social and political organization, thus making the spectre of disorder and disintegration directly visible and perceptible to conservatives. In addition there emerged a pressure generated by the power of organization itself, especially the organization of workers.

How did conservatives respond? Crucial is that the conservatives abhorred the commodification of labour power. Workers in capitalism have nothing else to sell but their labour power and therefore depend for their subsistence entirely on the labour market. Social protection is essentially protection against the market, by making labour less dependent (decommodification). Conservatism employed four strategies to counter the commodification of workers. The first strategy was reminiscent of feudalism, referring to the paternalistic and clientelistic arrangements of quasi-reciprocal obligations

of workers and patrons found in early employer-led insurances. The second strategy was an updated version of the logic of pre-capitalist, pre-commodified corporate societies of guilds and fraternal associations – status organizations existing for the welfare of their members. This logic was transferred to the mutual societies. The corporatist model was a ready-made strategy for conservatives because they ‘perceived it as a way to uphold traditional society in the unfolding capitalist economy; as a means to integrate the individual into an organic entity, protected from the individualization and competitiveness of the market, and removed from the logic of class opposition’ (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 40).

The third strategy was to develop familialistic policies. Due to the social question – the capitalist modernization of the industrial world – the preservation of family life gained more rather than less attention. Conservative notions about the family and women’s pivotal role within it (for instance for properly raising children) were emphasized. It is no accident that labour legislation in the early twentieth century aimed at the protection of women and children. Later, for instance in Germany and the Netherlands in the 1930s, active policies were introduced to discourage women’s work, to sustain the natural order of the family and to stress women’s natural task: to build a haven, a warm bulwark against the vagaries of the market and the public arena outside. In both countries laws were proposed to prohibit women from working. In the Netherlands, however, this failed, but in Germany the National Socialist regime did place direct barriers to women’s employment, that is, until women were forced to be employed in the war economy. Active intervention to preserve family life re-emerged and continued in the 1950s and 1960s, when the family was seen as a bulwark against rapid social change (Plantenga, 1993; Pott-Buter, 1993; Ostner, 1993). Making sure women could stay at home was seen as a necessary intervention to preserve the natural division of labour and family life.

Women were thus included in social policy as protectors of family life. They were to preserve the natural, biological, God-given family relation through their maternalism, but also on the basis of new specific rights and duties to preserve the family. This was not only the dominant mode of thinking in typical conservative welfare regimes, but also in the UK. ‘She has other duties’ was the pivotal sentence in the Beveridge report, legitimating the fact that in social security, women were not obliged to pay for the unemployment benefit (the so-called Married Women’s Option). In many European welfare states the ‘two-sphere ideology’ was reproduced in the ‘two-channel’ welfare state, in which insurances were aimed at men (as workers’ compensation) and women could opt for widow’s pensions. Their rights were based on the absence of men, while men’s rights were based on the absence of work (Bussemaker, 1993). This ‘two spheres’ approach – or

the difference principle – is nowadays seen as discriminatory or unfair, but it was often the women's movements in Europe (and the USA) itself that put forward such 'maternal thinking', so as to gain social rights (Skocpol, 1992; Koven and Michel, 1993; O'Connor et al., 1999).

The fourth strategy was the etatist approach of direct state intervention to grant social rights in order to enhance the integration of hierarchical society, forge a bond between workers and the state, maintain traditional relations of authority, and provide an opposing power to the modernist forces of liberalism and socialism. This led to the principle of 'monarchical socialism': 'an absolutist model of paternal-authoritarian obligation for the welfare of its subjects' (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 40).

However, the etatism, as found in Bismarck's anti-socialist policies, in the political intention of his social policies and in his proposal for a centralized state administration of the social schemes, may be viewed as somewhat at odds with the preferred corporatist and familialist solution of the conservatives and the conservative commitment to a limited state. As Esping-Andersen correctly noted:

When Bismarck promoted his first social-insurance schemes, he had to battle on two fronts: on one side against the liberals, who preferred market solutions, and on the other side against conservatives who sponsored the guild-model or familism. Bismarck desired the primacy of etatism. By insisting on direct state financing and distribution of social benefits, Bismarck's aim was to chain the workers directly to the paternal authority of the monarchy rather than to either the occupational funds, or to the cash nexus. (1990: 59)

Etatism was strongly linked with the state-building efforts of conservatives, such as Bismarck in Germany. The pioneering Bismarckian social policies, the major model for other countries on the European Continent, were explicitly designed to stop democratization (still a dangerous utopia in conservative eyes at the time) and to attach the politically alienated working class directly to the state in order to tone down its revolutionary potential. Social policy was crucially linked to the process of national state-building through unification, repression (as in the case of Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* and anti-socialist laws) and political integration.

The idea was that once the security of a worker's income depended on the stability of the state, he would recognize that revolutionary action was in fact contrary to his own real interests. This demanded state compulsory insurance and state subsidy so that a worker would realize where the money came from (Rimlinger, 1968, 1971; Beck, 1995). Bismarck saw a real political danger in a corporatist path, because he was convinced that to safeguard social order and control the working class, it was necessary to let the state's presence be felt in the workers' life in a direct and clearly recognizable way.

Unlike Bismarck, the upper bourgeoisie favoured stateless corporatism, as this offered the perfect moral model: social policies would not alter the status or income differentials and would at the same time reaffirm the hierarchical relationship between employers and employees within one institution under the control of the employers. Faced with opposition from his closest allies, Bismarck understood that his pure etatist set-up would never receive enough support. The model was then adjusted somewhat in the corporatist direction. Employers were given the right to administer the social insurance schemes, but the state was to supervise. In the case of pensions, Bismarck managed to introduce his politically crucial state subsidy (Rimlinger, 1968: 414).

Conservatism emerged as a general cultural attitude that embodied a critique of capitalist class relations and developed anti-utopian ideas that revolved around the preservation of hierarchy, corporatism and the family as the smallest unit in an organic society. What these models had in common was their stress on the need to uphold or restore traditional relations of authority and status, starting in the family, via the 'corpora', and all the way up to the national state. It is for this reason that the importance of insurance in Bismarck's social policies so obviously fitted the conservative ideal, for it helped reproduce existing status differentials and relations of authority. Eventually, a typical and recognizable model evolved that we label the corporatist-etatist or conservative welfare-state regime type, a model found in Austria, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy and (with some nuances) the Netherlands (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 27).

In sum, the central problem for conservatives was the problem of social order and integration that resulted from modernization. Conservatism opposed the political movements associated with modernity: liberalism and socialism. With regard to the conservative welfare model, we need to distinguish between corporatism and etatism. The former was directly linked to the conservative attitude, while the latter was more an aspect of the state-building of conservatives. Both aspects, however, became typical elements in the existing corporatist-etatist model as it historically developed in continental Europe. The main general features of conservative thinking on social policy were paternalism, an organic and hierarchical view of gender and class relations, a theory of different spheres for men and women, and a stress on the importance of status and sphere reproduction in social policy.

INTERVENING TO PRESERVE: CHANGE IN CONSERVATIVE POST-WAR WELFARE STATES

Conservatism has been a crucial inspiration in the past and has had an important impact on the welfare regimes in continental Europe. But is

conservatism still strong in Europe? And is it still helpful to look at conservatism to understand change in social policy? In practice, class and especially gender relations seem to have changed drastically. Path dependency is still important – in the sense of historical *institutional* legacies – but can we also speak about a path dependency of culture and ideology? In other words: does the conservative disposition still have an impact on today's modern welfare states? And can we still speak about conservative models now that welfare states are undergoing rapid change?

Among the many issues that have been raised in the literature, a critical case relating to our questions is the drastic increase in women's employment in continental welfare states. All European governments are bidding farewell to the once-popular ideal of full-time motherhood. Except for in Scandinavia, this model has sat firmly in the welfare-state saddle since the Second World War. But in the new millennium, the governments of Europe no longer expect women to be full-time mothers. The icon of the happy housewife is fading. Two countries are especially interesting in this respect: the Netherlands and Belgium. Both welfare regimes are typically conservative, especially in terms of gender relations (see Bussemaker and Kersbergen, 1994; Knijn, 1994; Cantillon, 1999). The Dutch welfare state is characterized by a lack of childcare provision and a tax and social security scheme that encouraged housewives to stay at home. While in the 1980s the Dutch employment rates for mothers were among the lowest in Europe, they are nowadays high in the European employment figures: 70 per cent of mothers with children (aged 0–2) work. This is similar to Scandinavian rates. However, nearly all mothers do so on a part-time basis (Eurostat, 2005).

In Belgium, mothers' employment rates have been moderate, although much higher than in the Netherlands (Pott-Buter, 1993). Belgium is holding a middle position with 63 per cent of mothers (children aged 0–2) at work in 2003. Many of them work full-time, although part-time work is becoming more popular. Unlike in the Netherlands, Belgian state intervention in childcare was early and developed well. The Flanders region occupies a high place in the childcare ranking. In 1988, 23 per cent of children under 3 were attending state-subsidized childcare; by 1993 this number had risen to 31 per cent, and by 1999, to over 40 per cent. These Flemish rates (as well as those for Belgium in general) are also much higher than rates in France (23 per cent in 1995, 39 per cent in 2000). In fact, the Belgian level in general and the Flemish level in particular is nearly as high as the level in Sweden (ECNC, 1996; Kind en Gezin, 2001).

In both the Netherlands and Belgium state policy is nowadays aimed at promoting women's work. Does this mean that there has been a radical break with the conservatism of the regimes, both in terms of policies and

in culture? Have conservatives changed their conviction that stress the limits of the human condition? Or to put it differently: how is change possible in regimes with strong conservative legacies?

Flemish Gender Policy

In Flanders, the state started to provide childcare early in history and there has never been any thought of preventing women from working. Still, conservative gender notions were very much in place. What explains this paradox? The people and state were simply not rich enough to bear the costs of implementing policies based on the conservative position. Belgian families were relatively poor, especially in urban areas (Plantenga, 1993; Pott-Buter, 1993). The first state-funded childcare organization was set up in 1918 to assist women who had to work to save their families from poverty. This organization wrote in 1940: 'The kribbe (kindergarten) is just a real necessity. Many mothers work outside the home, but we hope that this situation will improve and in the future they will not have to leave the homely hearth' (Lambrechts and de Dewispelaere, 1980: 38). But the situation did not change. The subsidizing of childcare has increased continuously since the 1960s. Daycare was still considered bad for children but legitimate for parents on a low income (Deven, 1998). The microeconomics of households forced the state to intervene.

This shows that the Catholic concept of subsidiarity does not by definition oppose intervention: it also indicates when the state has to intervene (Kersbergen, 1995). Salemink (1991), a Flemish theologian, points out that many Catholic politicians and thinkers have argued that, according to *Quadragesimo anno* (1931), the state has the duty to support low-income families to protect them from poverty. In other words, the ideology of the separate spheres has been temporally given up to preserve another institution cherished by conservatives: the family.

By the 1970s and 1980s, most women no longer financially needed to work, but rather, wanted to work: they wished to be part of the public sphere (Pauwels, 1978). Two other alternatives to home-based mothers' care were put forward. Both had strong conservative features: intergenerational care, and surrogate motherhood. Until the 1970s, the dominant type of state-subsidized childcare in Flanders was the child daycare centre. These centres were mostly an urban phenomenon, catering to working-class families, and part of a medical-hygienic regime. The institutions were large, the staffs were nurses, and the places in them were labelled 'beds' (Hermans, 1984). Not surprisingly, they were seen as cold and formal. As an alternative, organizations of daycare mothers developed, and the Catholic Agrarian Women's Movement (KVLV) was the first of these to

call for childminding services, and they became the 'founding mothers' of this system.

These mothers argued powerfully that organized daycare mothers would energize family and neighbourhood life rather than diminishing it, and the KVLV women stressed that this particular type of childcare would strengthen it (KVLV, 1977). Moreover, daycare mothers were an attractive bargain. The state intervened only to make sure that people would support each other. The KVLV cleverly aligned itself with Christian Democratic interests by pointing out the advantage of low costs and social cohesion, while at the same time expressing concern for the quality of children's care. This ideological alliance was rewarded in 1975 when the government decided to subsidize daycare mothers and set up a service. The mothers were paid fees and thus did not have to pay taxes or social security premiums. They were not employees, let alone professionals, but neither were they protected by social security (KVLV, 1977).

From then on, daycare mothers were embraced by the Christian Democratic Party and the ministers in charge of childcare. This state-subsidized childminding is now a widespread practice in Flanders and is no longer a Christian Democratic phenomenon only. Since the 1980s, the bulk of Flemish state subsidies has gone to family daycare (Kind en Gezin, 1997). Around the year 2000 more than 11 000 children were in daycare centres and 19 000 in family day-care: 35 per cent of the children thus stay with daycare mothers who are associated with services for family daycare, while 24 per cent go to public childcare centres (Vanpée et al., 2000).

This intervention has also conservative features, as it is stressed that caring is still done best by a mother, even if she is not the mother of the children. These childminders can be seen as surrogate mothers and they are called '*onthaalmoeiders*' (referring to a 'warm welcome'). This kind of transformation stresses the importance of home-based, family-like care and does not attack the idea that women have different qualities, talents and characters to men. Women – the childminders – also received fewer rights (and did not have to pay social security premiums) because they were supposed to be financially dependent on their husbands, and received derived rights via their husbands.

Flemish welfare-state change also stresses intergenerational care as an alternative to the traditional male breadwinner model. The basic idea is that the first generation (grandmothers) cares for the third generation (children). In return, the second generation (the daughters who are now mothers) will care for the grandparents when they become frail (Van Haegendoren and Bawin-Legros, 1996). This is not just a calculated system of family exchange. It also guarantees good childcare, because who could care better than the mother's mother? She is not only experienced and can

be trusted more than anyone else, but will also love the children the most. The ties that bind are familial and the extended family is regarded as a haven that protects its members from having to seek care in the outside world, whether through the market or the state. The ideal of intergenerational care is not only built on the natural qualities of women, but also on the importance of family life.

Tax deductions reflect the promotion of intergenerational care. When in 1987 the childcare law was discussed, which offered tax relief for state-recognized childcare, the influential 'Organization for Big and Young Families' (BGJG) and other family-minded forces argued that this would discriminate against those families in which grandparents do the caring. The amount they eventually gained, however, was less than in the case of childminders or crèches, but has an important symbolic meaning. Belgium is one of the few countries that financially support intergenerational care for children directly. Related to this, 84 per cent of very young children are cared for by the grandparents, or more precisely, they are cared for by grandmothers – often those from the side of the mother. This is a very high percentage compared to that of other European welfare regimes. About 60 per cent of grandparents are regularly involved in caring for their grandchildren, on average for nearly 26 hours a week (Vanpée et al., 2000).

In sum, by making use of conservative notions which preserved the family and community, but also accommodated the demands of parents, and precisely because the childcare is gendered, the Flemish policy was one of the first and most successful in Europe and can continue to be so. The mammoth alliance of women in the Flemish welfare state indicates its conservative features. Alternative childcare policy came at the right time and in the right place because gender hierarchies as well as intergenerational relations could be perpetuated through it. By this kind of intervention institutions such as the family could be preserved and the natural qualities of women sustained. This may also explain the moderate level of women's employment today: gender relations are not undermined.

Dutch Gender Policy

In the Netherlands a change in the conservative care ideal only took place in the 1990s when women were asked to participate in the labour market for macroeconomic reasons: it became too expensive for the welfare state to support such a large inactive population (WRR, 1990). Another alternative emerged: women's participation in the labour market can best be supported when both fathers and mothers share the care at home. The substitute to full-time motherhood is thus parental sharing, labelled the 'combination scenario', in which men and women share the available paid and unpaid

work equally (Commissie Toekomstscenario, 1995). Parental sharing came to mean two things: part-time rather than full-time employment should be the norm; women should not reduce all their caring activities and men should become more involved in caring.

The Combination Model is an idea of women's organizations in alliance with women in academia, and was already put forward by the Emancipation Council in the late 1980s. It tries to find a balance between the Dutch culture of 'self care' and improving women's position in the labour market. It aims for gender equality outside and inside the home. To a certain extent, this is siding with strong anti-Scandinavian sentiments, stressing that parents should do the bulk of the parenting themselves. At the same time it is stressing the need of women's employment. Dutch policy is built on the assumption that if *he* does more in the home, *she* can work more outside the home.

The Combination Model is built on two legs. The first is that men should have the opportunity to be fathers. Since many studies show that Dutch men want to work less and care more, allowing time for fathers to care is seen as an important policy intervention. Hence the individual right to unpaid parental leave. The importance of part-time work is the second leg. In the 1990s, part-time work was embraced by individuals, state and trade unions. In 1990 trade unions argued for part-time employment and thereby backed the wishes of many female workers (but see Visser, 2002; Plantenga, 1996; Hakim, 2000).

The Combination Model is also based on the assumption that men are just as able to care for children as women are. Its advocates sometimes go as far as to argue that an increase in fathers' care would be better for children, who would then have another role model on top of the more feminine one. It may also be more just for women, who could now work outside the home too, if men also took up their responsibilities: thus it contributes to gender equality. In that sense this ideal is not conservative at all. It stresses that men's behaviour – if engaged only in the public domain – is not natural or God-given at all. Men and women have the same qualities inside and outside the home. The Combination Scenario is thus subversive in a sense, because it de-genders care-giving and working outside the home. What is still conservative is that good childcare is home- and (nuclear) family-based. It is best when children are not cared for too much by strangers. Parental sharing emphasizes the harmonious bond between men and women in private life. The nuclear family is the best place to be in and raise children.

This conservative dimension was necessary to force a breakthrough in the Dutch welfare state. But it also reinforces the notion that full-time work is not appropriate, and women are especially sensitive to this moral message. Women, not men, are more likely to work on a part-time basis.

And more recently a backlash in women's employment is visible: many mothers only want to spend a small number of hours at work (SCP, 2006). Men are less adaptive: they still usually work full-time in the Netherlands. Only a very small percentage of (mostly higher educated) couples – 9 per cent (Knijn and Wel, 2004) – really share work and care. The ideal of parental sharing has had difficulty coming into practice fully because it takes two to share – and men seem more difficult to change.

Women's increase in employment rates can at first sight be seen as undermining the conservative welfare state: it debunks the idea of a duality of women and men, or the 'two-sphere ideology'. But a closer look shows that this transformation could only happen with the use of conservative notions, albeit more so in Flanders than in the Netherlands. In Flanders women's entrance into the labour market went along with a policy that preserved the intergenerational family as well as women's gift to society: their caring nature. In the Netherlands, modern gender policy undermines men's natural absence of care-giving features – although the practice still lags behind this policy notion – but stresses the importance of the family, the second dimension of conservative gender-policy. As a consequence, in Belgium mothers work less than in Scandinavia, while in the Netherlands, mothers do not want to work full-time.

CONCLUSION

In our analysis of conservatism we stress realism, pragmatism and the absence of an ideal of the good society. The conservative disposition is fear of the ideologically inspired attempts to impose upon society utopian images that do not take into account the natural order of things as expressed in relations of power and authority, in a social division of labour (between employers and employees, men and women), and in the enduring institutions of society in the public and private sphere. Moderate conservatism points to the danger of a too-powerful state precisely in order to preclude that imperfect man might force his utopia upon society. State intervention however is necessary to preserve what has been proven good. Social policy should therefore not try to alter basic facts of human nature and culture, but should take into account, yes reproduce, natural differences.

Conservatives have always been interested in social policy, because modernization, and nowadays a continuously and rapidly changing society, poses problems of social order and integration in the public and private sphere. The conservative welfare-state model reflects the main features of the conservative disposition, as it downplays the direct role of the state by promoting self-financing, self-administration and societal representation in

social security (corporatism), still promotes an organic and hierarchical view of gender and class relations, different spheres for men and women, and stresses the importance of status and sphere reproduction in social policy.

Social intervention is seen as necessary, precisely to preserve what is worth preserving. Our analysis of Flemish and Dutch childcare policies was presented to illustrate exactly this point. We note that Flemish childcare policy was one of the first to develop in Europe and that its ultimate goal was indeed a preservation of the gendered family and community. By promoting an intergenerational model the extended family could be supported and the natural qualities of women sustained. The Dutch envisage a caring role for men/fathers and a working role for women. This might seem to hollow out the conservative position, but conservatism is reaffirmed in the fact that childcare is realized fundamentally in the family at home, even though also men are encouraged to care and work part-time.

What lessons are implied? Continental welfare states emerged as the result of conservative projects of preservation. The conservative disposition was a crucial factor in the development of these welfare regimes, not so much because of any utopian view of a good society, but rather because of its critique of existing attempts to improve the world with dangerous ideological projects such as liberalism and social democracy. This explains why the core element of conservatism is its critique of any attempt to discard the natural order, natural differences, or the limitations of human behaviour. This does not mean that state intervention is unwanted. In fact, conservatism legitimates intervention by its intention to preserve the natural order. Of course, there is no single best way of doing this, because historical circumstances require different solutions, as is well illustrated in the various strategies that conservatives have employed, or in the different policy trajectories of the Netherlands and Flanders. The conservative disposition still has an impact on the welfare state.

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5. Christian foundations of the welfare state: strong cultural values in comparative perspective

Michael Opielka

The cultural analysis of the welfare state up to now has concentrated mainly on political values. It is highly elaborated in the theory of welfare regimes developed by Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1990). There, the value dimension of social policy is conceptualized on the classical left–right axis of social democracy (or socialism), liberalism, and conservatism, perpetuating the French Revolution's well-known value-triad of equality, freedom, and fraternity/solidarity. These 'basic principles' of welfare-state policies come combined with structural and institutional dimensions, for example, the role of the welfare state versus the market, or gender roles and the family.

However, a twofold, religiously-based reasoning about the process of modernization has accompanied the seeming limitation to the study of political values since the founding years of social policy. Therefore the questions followed in this chapter are: do Christian foundations of the welfare state exist; are, in a globally comparative perspective, other religious traditions relevant for social policies; and, how important is their influence, besides being political value-orientations? The two controversial perspectives on the influence of religion on the modern welfare state are the starting point for my analysis. First, on a more concrete, structural level, advocates of a 'natural' order have argued that the welfare state has contributed to the dissolution of the family by promoting individual rights and labor market integration of women: 'The family is the original and natural institution which provides basic provision' (Koslowski, 1997: 365). Religion, in this perspective, has been viewed as the true haven of a *Gemeinschaft* society, with the family as central part of religious lifestyle, despite contrary theoretical and empirical evidence (Opielka, 1997; Dobbelaere et al., 2003). Second, on a more ideational level, an important strand of secularization theory has made the point that the modern welfare state should be interpreted as the true heir of religious values. That