

Glossary entry: the politics of care

Published: January 15, 2026, 7:12 am

I said yesterday that the team here has decided that the focus of our work must now be on the creation of a politics of care, and the necessary economics that will support and help deliver a programme that is focused upon the well-being of people, and not on the delivery of growth for its own sake, profit for the sake of corporations, wealth increases for a few, and the despoilation of our planet.

That said, as James pointed out, I have never created a glossary entry for the politics of care, and he asked that I do so, as he felt it would make his part of our work easier to manage.

Based on previous work I have produced, including a book plan I wrote on this topic in 2025, I produced the following glossary entry.

Comments are welcome, but please do understand that this is an outline. Detailed policy proposals will follow, and we will aim to assemble them into a single publication for download. If thought useful, we could also produce them individually. Do let me know.

The Politics of Care

Introduction

The Politics of Care represents a fundamental reimagining of the purpose and practice of democratic government.

At its core, the politics of care asserts that the primary obligation of any government is to meet the needs of those entrusted to its care, with particular attention to those who are most vulnerable and have nowhere else to turn for support.

This philosophy stands in direct opposition to the neoliberal orthodoxy that has

dominated Western political thinking for the past 45 years, which has prioritised government financing, market efficiency, and economic growth over the well-being of citizens.

The background

The politics of care has emerged as a response to a profound crisis in democratic politics. Across Western democracies, people are rejecting the solutions offered by traditional political parties that have dominated their countries' politics for decades.

This alienation manifests in several ways, including in the belief that:

- * Political parties no longer care about ordinary people.
- * Politicians are motivated primarily by personal gain.
- * Mainstream parties fail to understand the cost-of-living challenges facing most citizens, and
- * Globalisation, as promoted by these parties, has demonstrably failed.

The result is a widespread sense of political homelessness, particularly among those who have traditionally supported centre-ground politics, social democracy, and left-wing agendas.

The stimulus for action

The vacuum that this alienation has created has, in part, been occupied by far-right populism. This offers simplistic solutions based on the racist vilification of immigrants and ethnic minorities, coupled with eugenic thinking that presumes a natural hierarchy within society, itself based on the false presumption of hierarchies of power implicit in the profoundly imbalanced structuring of wealth endorsed by antisocial neoliberal thinking.

While deeply unappealing to many, far-right movements are making significant political progress because they acknowledge people's alienation, linked to their lack of agency in a political hierarchy that has deliberately left most behind by concentrating both income and wealth in the hands of a few, and then promises change, even if that change is ultimately harmful because it is always based on the exploitation of prejudice.

Meanwhile, traditional centrist parties, in a desperate attempt to retain the power they sense is slipping from them as a result of their own failure to consider alternatives to neoliberalism, have increasingly copied far-right policies on immigration, government spending, and social benefits, thereby alienating even more voters from a political system that once embraced them, or their parents.

The failure of neoliberalism

The politics of care offers an alternative path. It diagnoses the current crisis as fundamentally rooted in the failure of neoliberal thinking, which has dominated politics since the late 1970s. Neoliberalism's core tenets are that:

- * Markets are inherently efficient.
- * Government intervention always distorts optimal outcomes in society.
- * Economic growth benefits all through trickle-down effects, and
- * Individual responsibility should replace collective provision.

Every one of these has been systematically undermined by real-world outcomes. The 2008 financial crisis, growing inequality, the climate emergency, and the recent cost-of-living crisis all demonstrate the bankruptcy of neoliberal solutions.

The problem that the politics of care addresses is that, despite these failings, those political parties that have embraced neoliberalism (which almost all those parties accustomed to power in the world's richest countries have done) have failed to develop any viable alternatives to neoliberal political and economic thinking, let alone attempt to implement them.

The politics of care

The politics of care proposes three foundational pillars:

- * A new political framework.
- * A reimagined role for the state, and
- * A transformed economics of care.

Politically, it requires acknowledging that existing democratic structures have failed to deliver on their promise of government for the people.

The politics of care demands:

- * Accountability
- * Transparency
- * Genuine representation, and
- * Constitutional reforms that ensure that a government serves the interests of all citizens, and not just economic elites.

This includes rethinking how:

- * Power is distributed.
- * Decisions are made, and
- * Citizens participate in governance.

The caring state, as envisioned in the politics of care framework, rejects the neoliberal assumption that government is inherently inefficient and should be minimised. Instead, it recognises that only the government can provide certain essential services and protections that markets will never deliver. The state, in this view, should actively manage:

- * The economy to ensure full employment.
- * Comprehensive social safety nets, and
- * Public infrastructure and services.

It should also:

- * Regulates markets to prevent exploitation and environmental destruction, and
- * Use taxation not merely to raise revenue but to shape economic behaviour and reduce inequality.

This caring state is not paternalistic but enabling, creating conditions in which all citizens can flourish.

The economics of care

The consequent economics of care fundamentally challenges conventional economic thinking. It rejects GDP growth as the primary measure of success, instead focusing on wellbeing, sustainability, and the equitable distribution of resources. In addition, it recognises that much valuable work, and particularly care work, is systematically undervalued or invisible in conventional economic accounting.

As a result, this economics requires new approaches to:

- * Understanding money's role in the economy.
- * How government spending actually works (drawing on modern monetary theory insights).
- * The purpose of taxation.
- * The control of monopolies and rent-seeking behaviour, and

- * How business organisations should be regulated and held accountable.

Central to the economics of care is recognition that economies exist to serve human needs, and not the other way around. This means:

- * Accounting for environmental externalities.
- * Valuing care work appropriately.
- * Ensuring that capital serves productive rather than purely extractive purposes, and
- * Regulating finance to prevent the kind of speculation that led to the 2008 crisis.

It also requires:

- * Reimagining corporate governance to include multiple stakeholders rather than prioritising shareholder value exclusively, and
- * Using tax policy not just for revenue but to discourage harmful activities and reduce extreme inequality.

The transition to a politics of care requires dismantling existing power structures that perpetuate inequality and exclusion. This includes:

- * Addressing wealth inequality through progressive taxation and possibly wealth taxes.
- * Ending the capture of pension funds for the benefit of the wealthy.
- * Challenging the outsized power of the financial services sector.
- * Reducing dependency on private equity funding.
- * Reclaiming savings for savers' and society's benefit, and
- * Fundamentally changing corporate obligations to include social and environmental responsibilities alongside financial ones.

It requires rebalancing economic rewards away from rent-seeking, monopoly profits, and financial speculation toward productive labour and genuine social contribution.

Climate change

Crucially, the Politics of Care embraces the challenges posed by climate change rather than treating environmental concerns as obstacles to economic growth. It recognises that addressing the climate emergency requires massive public investment, fundamental changes to how we organise production and consumption, and a shift away from fossil fuel dependency. This transition creates opportunities for meaningful

employment, improved quality of life, and a more sustainable economic model.

The practicalities of care

The politics of care is not utopian, but practical. It draws on real-world examples and proven policies, adapted to contemporary challenges. It acknowledges that change will face fierce resistance from those who benefit from current arrangements, but argues that the alternative, including a continued drift toward authoritarianism, oligarchy, and fascism, is totally unacceptable. By offering a coherent alternative to both failed neoliberalism and dangerous populism, the politics of care provides a roadmap for democratic renewal.

Ultimately, this framework represents a return to fundamental questions about the purpose of government and economics. It insists that democracy must deliver tangible improvements in people's lives to retain legitimacy. It argues that we have the resources, knowledge, and technology to ensure everyone's basic needs are met while respecting planetary boundaries.

What the politics of care argues is that what has been lacking is the political will and imagination to challenge the neoliberal consensus.

The politics of care provides both the philosophical foundation and practical policies needed to build a more just, sustainable, and genuinely democratic future, and it is, in essence, a cure for the populism that threatens to destroy democratic governance by addressing the legitimate grievances that populism exploits while rejecting the scapegoating and authoritarianism that populist movements promote.