

Title: Social justice and children in care
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Abstract:

This thesis is concerned with justice in social work. Specifically, it looks at ways in which children are admitted to care, both compulsorily and with the consent of their parents. It tries to expose the philosophical ideas underlying these processes, so that recent statements about parents' and children's rights may be seen in a fuller context. The approach I have used draws heavily on moral practice theory. The notion of moral practice, in the sense used, is parasitic on another one – the notion of a community within which there exists a shared moral language. Social work provides such a community. In Section III of the thesis, which reports the results of an empirical study into the use of voluntary care in different cases, close attention is paid to the language which social workers use – not simply in describing the details of case-decisions and outcomes, but in giving reasons and justifications for their own actions. What emerges from this is a picture of 'social justice' in which some legal and some social elements are combined. In the final analysis, the dimensions of social and legal justice are charted in a way which may contribute to general understanding of these issues – and some suggestions are offered about how social work may move forward in response to legitimate criticism.