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Introduction

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1 Neighbours, neighbouring and neighbourhood care; the significance of the work of Philip Abrams

Everyone, even in the remotest rural area, has neighbours. Social relations between neighbours are a significant form of social exchange. In addition to sociable contact, neighbours may provide tangible assistance for each other in the form of tasks performed or services rendered. For certain social minorities neighbours may be a source of social support and provide some types of social care. And in recent years there have been a number of attempts to foster more organised neighbourhood care by capitalising on such neighbourly feelings and the existence of neighbourliness as a social phenomenon. This book presents the results of empirical research and theoretical reflection on these topics to provide a picture of neighbours and neighbouring in contemporary Britain. Informal care – care provided by neighbours, friends and relatives – is a particular focus, and one of the threads that runs throughout. The frames of reference used are predominantly but not exclusively those of sociology and of social policy, with contributions from history, social anthropology and economics. The book both analyses how relations between neighbours are changing at the present day, and highlights the main problems facing policy-makers in trying to mobilise informal care and make it a meaningful complement to, or substitute for, statutory care paid for by government.

The study of neighbours, neighbouring and neighbourhood care is important for several reasons. 'We can do without our friends, but we cannot do without our neighbours', goes the popular saying. Certain groups in society – notably the infirm elderly – depend on various forms of support and care in order to maintain an independent existence and not enter institutional care. That only one in twenty old people in Britain live in institutions shows the importance of support networks in which neighbours may play a significant role. The growing proportion of 'old' elderly people, aged 75 and over, makes such support of even greater importance for the future (cf. Goldberg and Connelly 1982). For the politics of social policy, neighbourhood care provides an illuminating case study of the potential for community care and of the merits of shifting attention and resources from statutory services to the family and the community. If such policies are to be pursued, what can one expect the informal sector to provide, and how will the boundary between statutory responsibility and voluntary and informal care be drawn? Sociologically, the study of neighbours is rewarding because it focusses upon social relationships intermediate between the macro and the micro levels, between the political, economic and value systems of society as a whole, and the level of interpersonal relations where two or more people interact in settings such as the family, the workplace or the pub. To what

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extent, and for which sections of the population, does the neighbourhood provide a basis for significant social relationships?

It will be helpful at the outset to make some basic distinctions, although definitions are discussed more fully in chapter 2. As Philip Abrams pointed out to the Downing conference in 1977, 'social care' refers to 'all forms of care and treatment in institutions and elsewhere other than medical care and direct cash support' (1978a:78). It includes various activities along a continuum from visiting, providing transport, doing shopping and befriending to washing, lifting and taking to the toilet. The psychological dimension of support is important in addition to practical help. It may be provided in a variety of ways: by government through Local Authority Social Services Departments (referred to here as statutory care); privately on a commercial basis, for example, in homes for the elderly; by volunteers working for voluntary organisations such as Age Concern or the Women's Royal Voluntary Service (WRVS); and informally by relatives, friends and neighbours helping people known to them on a personal basis. A basic difference, reflected in the structure of this book, is between care in the informal sector, which is personal and particularistic and unorganised, and on the other hand voluntary, commercial or statutory care which is usually care provided universalistically by people who are initially strangers and who work within a formal organisation of some kind (cf. Wolfenden Report 1978:22–9). Part I of the book is concerned with neighbours and neighbouring and with informal care in this context. Part II of the book discusses Neighbourhood Care schemes which are more formally organised, although trying to bridge the gap between voluntary and informal care, and to harness the strengths of informal caring among neighbours and friends on a broader basis. One of the questions it seeks to answer is whether such aims can be achieved.

Formal care is provided within the ambit of bureaucratically structured agencies; it is a matter of tasks to be performed by specified persons whose work it is to carry out such tasks, within an overt hierarchy of accountability. By contrast, informal care is rooted not in commitment to tasks but in attachment to persons; it is a property of relationship, not of jobs; its dispositional base is involvement with other people, not the conscientious performance of a role. It is personal involvement that gets the contracts enforced – indeed a major problem about informal care from the point of formal caring agencies is just that so many contracts (between spouses, parents and children and so forth) are persistently not fulfilled. It is the dispositional base (of involvement with other persons) and the social context (relationships perceived as chosen or natural) that matter, not any specific form of care. Among informal carers there are further distinctions to be made between kin on the one hand and friends and neighbours on the other. Relatives in general assume the main burden of informal caring, but friends and neighbours also perform important tasks. One purpose of the research was to establish what help and support neighbours do provide, and what are the limits to the help they can be expected to offer.

These distinctions may be clearer from a brief history of the Durham research directed by Philip Abrams. The projects had three phases. The first project on The Social Contexts of Neighbouring, was supported financially by the Joseph

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More information

Rowntree Memorial Trust and ran from 1976 to 1978. Fred Robinson, Sheila Abrams and Janice Davinson were the research staff. The first aim of the project was to explore patterns of neighbouring, the nature of mutual help in different types of local community, and the second to determine the circumstances under which more sustained and substantial types of neighbourly help were provided. The earliest product was a literature review, *What We Know About the Neighbours* (Robinson and Abrams 1977; see also Robinson and Robinson 1982). Empirical research focussed upon six contrasting streets, with different characteristics, in different parts of the country, in which an attempt was made to interview all residents to study patterns of contact between neighbours. The results are reported in chapter 4.

As the first phase developed, the research team became increasingly aware of the significance of efforts being made by a number of voluntary and statutory agencies to develop systems of neighbourhood care by exploiting the informal neighbouring presumed to be latent in different localities. Grass-roots Neighbourhood Care projects of many kinds were coming to be an increasingly favoured form of community action and were increasingly being seen as a possible means of linking and coordinating formal and informal caring systems. One particular stimulus came from the political arena. David Ennals, Secretary of State for Social Services, launched in the autumn of 1976 a national Be A Good Neighbour campaign, with exhortations to individuals to 'pluck up your courage and be a good neighbour'. The campaign gave direct encouragement to local residents to form organisations in order to promote mutual help and care, and equally direct encouragement to Social Service Departments and voluntary organisations to support such efforts. 'Within the larger movement to cultivate neighbourhood care, it gave an explicit role to grass-roots helping and caring, to direct action by local residents within their localities' (Abrams *et al.* 1981a:10).

The Good Neighbour research began in 1977 with two case studies of a Durham mining village and a prosperous middle class area in a Yorkshire city, together with a national survey by postal questionnaire of Good Neighbour schemes. Starting with a list of about 3,000 schemes, most though not all of which included 'good neighbour' or 'neighbourhood care' in their title, the Durham team obtained information about 1,000 schemes in some detail.

The second phase of the Durham research, between 1978 and 1981, into Patterns of Neighbourhood Care, shifted the focus to these semi-organised Neighbourhood Care schemes. It was supported financially by the Department of Health and Social Security. Sheila Abrams, Robin Humphrey and Ray Snaith were the research staff. Their first task was to analyse the data about the 1,000 Good Neighbour schemes, the results of which appeared in *Action For Care* (Abrams *et al.* 1981a). The following year, a *Handbook* of such schemes appeared (Abrams *et al.* 1982. See also Humphrey and Snaith 1982.)

Philip Abrams and his team had been developing hypotheses (set out in chapter 8) about the social sources of informal care and about the sorts of relationship between formal and informal care which might be expected to be conducive to mobilisation of the latter at a neighbourhood level. Many different types of project were being set up under many different auspices and apparently with widely differing results. But it was clear that rather little was known about

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these ventures in general terms – that, for example, no one seemed to know which type of scheme might be best suited to what type of situation, locality or need. The main empirical research at this phase, reported in chapters 8 and 9 (and in more detail in Abrams, Abrams, Humphrey and Snaith, forthcoming) focussed in depth upon ten particular schemes in different parts of England, to assess their effectiveness as forms of community care and as possible means of linking and coordinating formal and informal care. They were selected in terms of a number of theoretical criteria related to degrees of statutory intervention and the basis of the scheme. Prior to this, five other case studies were carried out (of Sunniside, Alphaville, Hope Green, Riverside and Task Force Greenwich) which were reported in *Action For Care* (Abrams *et al.* 1981a). In all, including the six Street studies at the first phase, 21 localities were investigated. These are set out in alphabetical order in the glossary on p. xii.

Between 1977 and 1981, Philip Abrams developed close contacts with the Volunteer Centre, which was then involved in a five-year programme on neighbourhood care. His evolving ideas on the neighbourhood care policy were first presented to Volunteer Centre audiences in 1978 and 1979, and at the time of his death he was involved in planning a joint project in which a Durham team would have evaluated an information training programme for Neighbourhood Care schemes run from the Centre. The research element in this project was continued in a different form after 1981 by Michael Power at Bristol (Power, forthcoming). The very definite applied, policy-oriented, thrust to the programme of research on neighbours intensified as the years passed. The interest in neighbourhood care, already apparent in his writing, was reflected in the field research being carried out from an early date. Philip Abrams's continuing preoccupations with the relationship between formal and informal care are discussed in chapters 7 and 11, while the limitations of Neighbourhood Care schemes are considered in chapter 10.

Although the two phases of the research followed each other, to some extent there was a hiatus between them. The first was concerned with informal, unorganised, 'spontaneous' neighbouring (though Philip Abrams came to doubt whether it was useful to invoke spontaneity as an explanatory factor (cf. 1978a:80–2)). The second, focussing on organised Good Neighbour schemes, crossed the boundary into more formal provision, which properly speaking was outside the informal world of kin, friends and next-door neighbours. New issues appeared, such as what degree of accountability to expect of Organisers, whether Helpers should be paid, and if so how much (token amounts or real wages), and what relationship to establish with statutory services. To some extent, though not entirely, the first phase of the project was more sociological and the second phase more concerned with social policy. To reflect these differences, this book is arranged in two parts, grouping together chapters 2 to 5, and 7 to 11, with an introduction, a bridging chapter (6) and a conclusion (chapter 12).

When Philip Abrams died in 1981, a third phase of the research on neighbouring was beginning, funded by SSRC (now ESRC) with some further Rowntree Trust support. This work on 'The Caring Capacity of the Community' started from several findings from the first two phases. The caring capacity of the com-

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munity appeared to be severely limited. The provision of care by the community was not directly or adequately related to the incidence of need in the community but reflected the needs and interests of care-givers to a considerable extent. Nine-tenths of 'community' care was in fact given by kin, almost all of them women. Community care-givers themselves needed considerable and varied forms of support. For the 5% to 10% of local residents without available kin, most needs short of institutionalisation were met through the provision of 'surrogate kin' (fostering) or a package of care involving a fine division of labour between many helpers. This required mobilisation, and the basic problem of how to mobilise and sustain community involvement remained seriously under-researched. It was therefore proposed to carry out three projects: an exploratory study of problems and possibilities of mobilising and sustaining community involvement in social care activities; a study of the costs of community care in personal, relational and financial terms, focussing on daughters looking after their mothers who were living with them; and a contrasting study of the relationship between formal organisations and informal networks, specifically concerned with the extent to which the former could foster the latter among the elderly.

After Philip Abrams's death, these three projects continued until 1983 under the general guidance of Professor Alan Little. Ray Snaith worked on the first, Sheila Abrams on the second and Robin Humphrey on the third. The results are reported in Snaith (1985), S. Abrams (1985) and Humphrey (1984).

This, then, is the way in which the research reported here developed. The twin themes of this book are neighbours and neighbouring as sociological phenomena and neighbourhood care as an issue in social policy. These themes were apparent in the original research proposal to the Rowntree Trust, which emphasised both practical and academic objectives and implications. A better understanding of what sorts of people were willing to give what sorts of help in what circumstances would contribute appreciably to society's ability to develop alternatives to institutional care for the partially dependent. At the same time, a careful study of the forms and contexts of neighbouring would enlarge knowledge of the nature of social solidarity and community in modern industrial societies. In the first phase, the research was accordingly organised around three main questions concerning the idea, practice and contexts of neighbouring. Firstly, what ideas, expectations and beliefs did people have about their own willingness to help their neighbours or their neighbours' willingness to help them? What sort of relationship did people expect neighbouring to be? Then, what sorts of help were actually given or not given to what sorts of people in what sorts of situation? What was the practical experience of neighbouring? Thirdly, how far could variations in the idea and the practice of neighbouring be related to variations in such contextual factors as kinship, class, hardship, length of local residence, age, availability of public services, and so on? What were the social sources of neighbouring?

By seeking answers to each of these questions in a number of different types of social milieu and r , seeking to relate the answers to each question to one another, it was hoped to develop a body of fairly precise, substantive and empirically grounded propositions about the resources of practical altruism

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available in British society and about the circumstances in which altruism might be effectively mobilised.

Such questions had a close affinity to general questions about the sources of cohesion and solidarity in society which sociologists from Emile Durkheim onwards had sought to answer. Durkheim saw what he called the corporation as a means of fostering communal life without weakening the nation-state. Industrialisation had swept away the 'little aggregations' (including the neighbourhood) in which people existed in the past and which were the centres of their lives (1952:386–92). (Bloch's evocation of the localism of feudal society illustrates this earlier state vividly (1962:64).) The result was a polarisation between the centralising state absorbing all activity of a social character on the one hand, and the mass of individuals on the other, moving formlessly 'like so many liquid molecules'. Some intermediate structure was required between the two to provide a focus for social activity and a point of attachment.

> The absence of all corporative institutions creates, then, in the organisation of a people like ours, a void whose importance it is difficult to exaggerate . . . Where the state is the only environment in which men can live communal lives, they inevitably lose contact, become detached, and thus society disintegrates. A nation can be maintained only if, between the state and the individual, there is intercalated a whole series of secondary groups near enough to the individuals to attract them strongly in their sphere of action and drag them in this way, into the general torrent of social life. (Durkheim 1933:29, 28)

The consequences of organic solidarity were analysed by a number of sociologists, both European and American, including Toennies, Simmel, Cooley, W. I. Thomas and Robert Park. A reflection is found in twentieth-century theories of mass society (cf. Bramson 1961). A modern version, more explicitly addressed to policy and articulating the concept of mediating structures, appears in the recent writings of Peter Berger (1977, 1980), who discerns a dichotomy between the megastructures of society – remote, impersonal and hard to understand – and private life, where meaning and identity are discovered and enjoyed. The relative lack of intermediate institutions not only leaves the individual vulnerable in time of crisis – as when, for example, in need of social care – but threatens the political order by depriving it of the moral foundations on which it rests.

The neighbourhood or local community is one type of mediating structure. 'The question of how residential solidarities are keyed into other social arrangements bears on almost all the problems of societal integration' (Hunter and Suttles 1972:45). Durkheim had dismissed its potential as a basis for collective action. Neither the locality, nor the department, nor the province had in his view enough influence to exert moral authority over the individual. 'It is impossible to artificially resuscitate a particularistic spirit which no longer has any foundation' (1952:390). Some modern sociologists are not so sceptical, for they see the potential politically-integrating role of the neighbourhood or locality.

At the outset, a theme which was to recur appeared, the contrast between neighbouring in the traditional working class community and 'modern' neighbouring. In Philip Abrams's view, neighbourliness and the moral attitudes sustaining it developed in the past in situations where people helped each other because there was no alternative way of surviving. Neighbouring was essen-

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Excerpt
More information

tially a response to economic insecurity, lack of financial resources and the absence of public welfare services. The best-documented patterns of strong neighbouring in the past were directly associated with chronic collective deprivation, class consciousness and powerful and extensive kinship attachment. He was also struck by studies of disasters (cf. Barton 1969) which showed that altruism could be generated spontaneously in such crisis situations. Both kinds of evidence pointed to the view that neighbourliness should be considered as a relatively unnatural phenomenon in the normal circumstances of fairly prosperous societies. Neighbouring was what people did when they could neither afford to buy professional services nor claim an effective entitlement to them from the state.

Philip Abrams enjoyed playing with ideas, putting alternative viewpoints, and showing the paradoxes of different positions. There was an element of that here, but nonetheless he was serious in questioning a certain tendency among sociologists towards an idealised view of the traditional working class. He wanted to insist very firmly that neighbouring was not something 'natural', to be taken for granted, but very definitely had to be explained in sociological terms. The aim of the first phase of the research was to do just this. At the outset he identified three types of theory which might be used to explain neighbourliness.

In one view, patterns of neighbouring were strongly determined by sheer physical proximity. Neighbours are nigh-dwellers, and those living next door or a few doors away are *ipso facto* more likely to enter into neighbouring relations than those living further away. The fact that neighbouring is typically highly localised behaviour (even if its sources are unrelated to locality) gave ecological explanations of neighbouring a continuing cogency. Though theories of this type were out of favour with sociologists, they enjoyed a certain standing among geographers and urban planners and deserved serious consideration.

A second type of theory clearly had some appeal to Philip Abrams. This involved recognising that there was a balance between necessity and choice as alternative bases of altruism, and identifying the conditions under which people would help one another because they could 'afford' that choice rather than because they felt they had to in the absence of any other choice. There was a good deal of evidence to suggest that, other things being equal, people preferred neighbourly altruism to public provision as a means of coping with dependency and personal misfortune. Enjoying the paradox, he pointed out that people appearing to *choose* neighbouring if they could possibly afford it was directly at odds with the view that traditionally neighbouring arose from economic constraint. Everything turned on what was understood by the idea of 'affording it'. (The idea of the opportunity-costs of relationships may have come from economic anthropology.) It could of course have literal financial implications, as in cases where informal carers were paid for the care provided; this was one way of exploring the working balance of altruism and self-interest that individuals maintain. However, for most people it was unlikely that financial need would be the prime determinant. Many different values, attitudes and experiences would play a part in determining the point at which any given individual would decide to choose altruism, decide that he could 'afford' to be neighbourly. An understanding of how and why different sorts of people put different

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More information

prices on neighbouring seemed called for, once neighbouring was seen as potentially something more than the traditional concomitant of a certain kind of harsh class situation. The social cost of neighbourliness was a theme running through the first phase of the research.

Implicit in this theory were elements of a third, which became in many ways the lynchpin of the Durham research and a bridge between the first and second phases of the research. It developed gradually during the course of the first two years of the research, aided by lively exchanges between Philip, his team, and members of the Rowntree Trust's advisory committee for the research. It is discussed fully in chapter 6. Linked to the costs of neighbouring were the benefits, and coming from this the idea of neighbourly relations as social exchange rather than a one-way transfer. Philip Abrams came to attach central importance to the idea that the moral basis of neighbourliness could best be understood as an expression of reciprocity rather than of altruism. Care was meaningful as an exchange rather than as a gift. The obstacles to neighbourhood care at the local level were to be found in the ideas of cost and benefit, and around doubts about the possible existence of a flow of help in which the individual could be recipient as well as donor. Unhelpfulness could be a defence against the perceived failure of reciprocity.

To anticipate slightly some of the discussion in later chapters, two years into the research Philip Abrams was suggesting that there were more forms of reciprocity than met the eye. One did not have to think in terms of exchange of strictly equivalent services or even of exchanges within immediately given bilateral relationships. Informal care was given by many to others who could themselves give little or nothing in direct return, because the donors had a deep sense of debts of care they had incurred to quite different people in different contexts and often in the quite remote past. Four distinct bases of active informal helping could be discerned: *altruism* (the acceptance of a norm of beneficence as an absolute guideline for personal life), *tradition* (a practice of taken-for-granted helpfulness strongly implanted in childhood or earlier experience in adult life and carried over as an unconsidered principle of present activity), *status* (the culling of self-esteem from the patronage aspect of the relationship between donor and beneficiary or from the honorific connotations of being seen as a caring agent by the larger society) and *reciprocity*. Not only did they find in the first phase of the research that reciprocity was the most widespread and influential of these bases for care, but they were forced to the conclusion that reciprocity was in some important respects a matter of possibilities within the caring relationship which some perceived and many did not. If that conclusion was justified, it would follow that a great deal more informal care could in principle be unleashed by appropriate social policies.

These three sets of theoretical ideas are explored further in the first part of the book. They are implicit in a good deal of the conceptual discussion in chapter 2. The literature review in chapter 3 is focussed with these issues in mind, trying to answer quite specific questions about the social basis of neighbouring. The evidence from the Street studies in chapter 4 was likewise analysed in the context of theoretical issues. The threads of the sociological analysis of informal neighbouring are drawn together in chapter 5. The bridging chapter discusses altruism and reciprocity and the issue of whether beneficence or exchange lie at

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Excerpt
More information

the heart of informal, unorganised, help and support provided by neighbours to one another.

The background to the study of Patterns of Neighbourhood Care reported in the second part of this book was rather different from that of the studies of informal neighbourliness in the first part. It centred on neighbourhood care as a type of community care and grew out of the studies of Good Neighbour schemes. These may be defined as any organised attempt to mobilise local residents to increase the amount or range of help and care they give to one another. The key word is 'organised'. Such schemes were distinctively different from informal care between kin, friends and next-door neighbours, in that they involved the local provision of care by comparative strangers within an administrative framework, however tenuous. In one sense such schemes had a long history. Many projects sponsored by churches, voluntary bodies and community groups, such as the Good Companions of WRVS or the link schemes of Age Concern, had been around for a long time. In the 1970s, however, the theme of encouraging good neighbourliness by drawing an ever-wider range of local residents into an ever-wider variety of caring and helping activities, acquired dramatic new emphasis, including endorsement by the Seebohm and Wolfenden Reports (1968, 1978).

Good Neighbour schemes are quite distinct from conventional voluntary work. 'The Good Neighbour scheme is an organisational Cheshire Cat; it comes into being in order to put itself out of existence. Success for such a scheme would have to be measured in terms of the degree to which the scheme [i.e. the formal organisation] was no longer needed' (Abrams *et al.* 1979:21–2). The principal analytic object of the research as a whole was to examine what some called the 'interface' and what Philip Abrams preferred to call the 'frontier' between informal and formal care, and to enlarge understanding of the possible traffic across it. There is currently much enthusiasm for 'interweaving' formal and informal care, the Barclay Report (1982) being but one example. Philip Abrams was more sceptical, at least initially, and made a trenchant critique of optimists who believed that the formal and informal sectors formed a seamless web. He saw clearly some of the social obstacles and barriers to interpenetration. These difficulties are further discussed in chapter 11.

The initial studies of Sunniside and Alphaville Good Neighbour schemes were carried out alongside the Street studies, throwing up ideas about reciprocity and altruism. In Sunniside, a traditional Durham working class mining community, the scheme had some difficulty in becoming established, and this suggested the need to study not only the Helpers, but also their Clients and community members *not* involved in the scheme. More importantly, comparative studies were needed. In early 1978 Sheila and Philip Abrams wrote:

> Again and again the Sunniside Good Neighbours told us that it was in large towns, tower blocks and more generally the unfriendly 'south' that Good Neighbour schemes were really needed and where they would be really difficult to establish. There are good sociological reasons behind such commonsense judgments and their validity should obviously be explored.

After the contrasting study of Alphaville, where there was a flourishing scheme heavily dependent on the contacts and energy of the local organiser,

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