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A Feminist Public Ethic of Care Meets the New Communitarian Family Policy*

Eva Feder Kittay

INTRODUCTION

Feminists have had an uneasy relationship to communitarianism. On the one hand, many feminists have shared some of the communitarians' critiques of liberalism. With communitarians, many feminists have criticized liberalism for its individualism, voluntarism, and reliance on rights. Both communitarians and feminists have stressed traditional social and familial arrangements, whether or not they are voluntarily entered into, that confer on us (or lock us into) duties and obligations. In different ways, both sets of critics pointed to the shortcomings of rights discourse in resolving familial disputes and promoting community. That is, it often fails in major settings in which people develop and thrive.¹

Yet feminists have also balked at the invocations of community on which many communitarian arguments depend. Traditional societies, often valorized by communitarians, notoriously restrict women's opportunities to adopt roles other than wife and mother. Marilyn Friedman, in her criticism of communitarianism, recounts the need women have had to escape from what she calls their "communities of place." She acknowledges, however, how frequently women, in making this escape, have sought new communities, what she calls "communities of choice."² Friedman, even as she warns feminists against an all too uncritical embrace of communitarianism, still sees community as a useful ideal for feminists along with liberal concepts such as equality, freedom, and rights. The notion of community offers a way of situating notions of re-

* I would like to thank David Anderson, who is responsible for my writing this article. I was spurred on by his kind invitation to participate at the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics (SASE) Panel on Family, Work, and Gender on July 11, 1999, in Madison, Wisconsin. I would also like to thank the editors of *Ethics* for their useful comments.

1. For an interesting attempt by a champion of rights to reconcile rights with communitarian concerns, see Alan Gewirth, *The Community of Rights* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

2. Marilyn Friedman, *What Are Friends For? Feminist Perspectives on Personal Relationships and Moral Theory* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993).

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sponsibility (social as well as individual), of interdependency, of non-voluntary, but still binding obligations, and of a self that is always embedded in a network of relationships. But historical communities and communitarian ideals have largely been created more for the benefit of men than of women, and so feminists can only look upon even the most admirable of these models and ideals with a healthy suspicion.

The feminist worry is a specific case of a more general critique of communitarianism—namely, that in their emphasis on collective well-being and the individual's responsibility to collective well-being, communitarians forfeit individual freedoms and rights. These achievements of modern political thought are too precious to give up, especially for women. Those freedoms and rights need to be claimed for women as the great male feminist and individualist John Stuart Mill did so well.³ A group of political, social, and economic theorists, the best known of whom is probably Amitai Etzioni, have proclaimed themselves to be “new communitarians.” These new communitarians insist on taking very seriously the misgiving that the rights of the individual cannot be sacrificed for the sake of community. They intend to balance demands of the individual and the community, to consider both rights and responsibilities, and to call for “responsible individuals in a responsive community.”⁴ These new communitarians, then, would appear to share many concerns and approaches of at least some, and perhaps most, feminists: a commitment to social justice, equality, and democracy and a concern that responsibilities for children and the most vulnerable are met adequately, and shared by all. Each underscores responsiveness in the notion of responsibility, recognizes “both individual human dignity and the social dimension of human existence,”⁵ and insists on responsibilities as well as rights.⁶

Furthermore the communitarian platform maintains that “child-raising is important, valuable work, work that must be honored rather than denigrated by both parents and the community.” It avers that “*workplaces should provide* maximum flexible opportunities to parents” and advocates “experiments such as those with unpaid and paid parental leave, flextime, shared jobs, opportunities to work at home,” and so forth.⁷

3. Martha Nussbaum forcefully makes this argument in her effort to reconcile feminism and liberalism in *Sex and Social Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 59–67.

4. Amitai Etzioni, ed., *The Essential Communitarian Reader* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), p. xxxiv.

5. *Ibid.*, p. xxv.

6. I, for one, welcome family-oriented policies such as the National Family Policy, argued for by the new communitarian David Anderson in “Part of the Project of Building a Progressive Coalition: Uniting Working Mothers and Welfare Mothers behind a National Family Policy,” in *Inherent and Instrumental Value*, ed. John M. Abbarno (Bethesda, Md.: Intentional Scholars, in press).

Feminists would be likely to welcome such proposals. Noting that “families headed by single-parents experience particular difficulties,” and that “the weight of the historical, sociological and psychological evidence” favors two-parent families, it claims that the perspective of the responsive communitarian discourages divorce and that “we should cancel the message that divorce puts an end to responsibilities.”⁸

The commitment to the two-parent family, it turns out, is also a commitment to the two-parent heterosexual family in which gender roles are differentiated. David Popenoe, a leading voice among communitarians, states that “more than anything else, strengthening the modern family involves finding ways to improve intimate, long-term relationships between *men and women* and ways of assisting them in their joint task of child rearing.”⁹

Furthermore, as his discussion of gender roles makes clear, Popenoe will not accept the possibility that men can offer the same nurturance as women, nor that women can provide the gender-specific “male roles” (whatever they may be) for children: “The well-functioning family has always been based on a division of labor that reflects the different abilities and motivations of each sex in childrearing: motherhood and fatherhood have never been the same . . . Many communitarians believe (myself, of course, included), therefore, that we should think about gender roles and male-female equality more in terms of complementarity, symmetry, and equivalence than in terms of identity.”¹⁰ This commitment to the two-parent heterosexual family with gender-specific parental roles means to take into account the realities of the changes in women’s gender roles, but it takes no account of the inherent inequalities and oppressive constructions of gender roles.

The preference for an only slightly updated version of the tradi-

7. Etzioni, ed., p. xxviii.

8. Ibid., xxviii–xxix. For an earlier and excellent critique of William Galston’s position regarding the family, see Iris Young, “Mothers, Citizenship, and Independence,” *Ethics* 105 (1995): 535–57.

9. David Popenoe, “Family Values: A Communitarian Perspective,” in *Macro Socio-Economics: From Theory to Activism*, ed. David Sciulli (Armonk, N.Y.: Sharpe, 1996), pp. 165–84, p. 171. In case one might think that this language does not exclude the possibility of such relationships among same-sex couples, Popenoe argues explicitly against countenancing homosexual families as sites for raising children (although he does not advocate the prohibition of homosexual sex). He writes, “Nuclear familialism and homosexuality as lifestyles incorporate contradictory values and views of the world. It would be a moral contradiction for society to affirm and promote the nuclear family, with its basis in heterosexuality and its generation and nurturance of children, while at the same time affirming and promoting all the values of the homosexual subculture” (p. 177). His discussion of homosexual “lifestyles” focuses largely on the pre-AIDS male homosexual culture of promiscuous sex. It pays little attention to the monogamy of lesbian couples who are not infrequently rearing children in stable homes.

10. Ibid., p. 173.

tional nuclear family is invoked for the sake of children: "Communitarians believe that the highest social value should be placed on parent-child relationships and the fostering of a child-centered society."¹¹ The preference for a single family form, one which has traditionally been oppressive to women, and even the call for society to be "child-centered," must give feminists pause. I shall argue that these resolutions land the new communitarians back in the position of the old communitarians. But the new communitarians have access to political decision making that the older communitarians could not dream of. Some leading figures of the new communitarians, such as William Galston, have been involved in policy-making positions in the Clinton administration. A Democratic presidential candidate has professed some degree of adherence to the new communitarianism, as have many New Democrats. Given the scope of their influence, an examination of the relation between the new communitarians and feminism, especially with respect to policies that most affect women and the family, is of more than academic interest. If feminism has long faced an assault from the Right, the new communitarians, with respect to their position on the family, pose a potential challenge from the Left. This article engages some of the considerations that have prompted their position. It reveals that their resolution to these problems include presuppositions that have pervaded political philosophy and have made so much political thought inhospitable to crucial feminist concerns. And finally it offers an alternative way to address these concerns, along with specific recommendations for public policy.

For all the feminist qualms with some communitarian positions, communitarianism does provide a plausible starting point from which to formulate a feminist position that I call a "public ethic of care."¹² Consider the following statement from leading communitarian exponent, Philip Selznick: "If people do not need each other, if little or nothing is to be gained from exchanging benefits and cooperating for common purposes, community is not likely to emerge or endure."¹³

Our neediness, as well as our ability to cooperate to fulfill needs and desires, is at the heart of community and all social organization. Needs which political theorists have most often identified include protection of our person and property from violence and appropriation. Thomas Hobbes put the position most forcefully, but more liberal theorists also identify the need for protection and adjudication of conflicts as the source of social and political association. Contractarianism, arguably the received view in political philosophy, posits "a social contract" by which we exchange a natural liberty for a political liberty—a liberty gained

11. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

12. For the most complete account of this position, see Eva Feder Kittay, *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

13. Philip Selznick, "Social Justice: A Communitarian Perspective," in Etzioni, ed., p. 65.

through securing the cooperation necessary for protection within and of communities. Communitarians want to project a stronger base for community, a desire for affiliation as well as the acquisition of material goods, a need for shared moral values as well as the protection of liberty and property rights.

There is, however, another sort of necessity that is still more fundamental and that issues in relationships with the most compelling bonds. This is the need that results from inevitable human dependencies,¹⁴ that is, from our dependency in our young years, in our frail old age, during illness, or from significant impairment. At these times we need care, frequently total care, care so extensive that the people who care for us cannot attend to their own needs, their own requirements. The need to care for one person's extreme dependence (e.g., the dependence of infancy) induces a dependency in the one who does the caring, the "dependency worker."¹⁵ The dependency worker requires others who will see to it that resources are available to meet the needs of both herself and the needs of her charge. She also needs assurance that when her care for another impedes her ability to care for or fend for herself, she can depend on another for sustenance and aid and that when she is unable to care for her charge another will. Although the one who cares for a very dependent charge will herself be more or less dependent on others given different social and economic circumstances, the inevitable dependencies that arise in human life always serve to join us each to one another. We are connected through our own vulnerability when dependent and our vulnerability when caring for dependents, as well as through the potential of each of us to become dependent and to have the responsibility for a dependent.

The bonds that form through relationships of dependency are frequently deep and count among those we most cherish. No society can exist beyond one generation unless its youngest dependents survive and mature into adulthood, and no decent society can neglect those who become dependent during the years that intervene between birth and death.¹⁶ Yet even as these dependencies form the basis of much social organization, the inevitably dependent individual and those closest to her in the chain of dependencies are the most exposed members in a social order.

Dependency work has traditionally been situated in the family. Communitarians, in citing the decline of the traditional two-parent hetero-

14. See Martha Albertson Fineman, *The Neutered Mother, the Sexual Family and Other Twentieth Century Tragedies* (New York: Routledge, 1995), for a related use of the term.

15. See Eva Feder Kittay, "Taking Dependency Seriously: The Family and Medical Leave Act Considered in Light of the Social Organization of Dependency Work and Gender Equality," *Hypatia* 10 (1995): 8–29.

16. Virginia Held makes this point powerfully in regard to the child's dependence in "Non-Contractual Society: A Feminist View," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 13 (1987): 111–37.

sexual family in Western industrial nations, most especially in the United States, have lamented its dissolution precisely because the traditional nuclear family is the site of a particular form of dependency work: care of children. (Historically, the family has been the site of every form of dependency work.) However, it is when women move out of the “private” sphere of the family that the dependency hidden from public view becomes visible and is revealed as having the social dimension it has in fact always had. As women, within our own culture and within cultures everywhere, are the ones most responsible for dependency work, they become vulnerable by virtue of their traditionally assigned labor. Within complex industrial, nonagrarian societies, that vulnerability is heightened by a social and economic structure that makes access to even basic resources dependent on access to income.¹⁷

While lip service is sometimes paid to the notion that caring for children or caring for an elderly or ill family member is “work,” such caring lacks both the social standing and the income production of what is generally acknowledged as “work” within our society. So, in spite of the bumper stickers and buttons that declare that “all mothers are working mothers,” even a woman with very young children has only two respectable ways of obtaining income: through a husband or through employment. Socially approved ways of obtaining income provide not only access to resources, it is also key to full social citizenship, which presumes participation in income-producing social contributions.¹⁸ Thus within a social organization presumed to revolve around independent equal actors, to be dependent on others for sustenance or income precludes one from enjoying the full status of citizenship.¹⁹ The vulnerability of the dependency worker within our own society, then, is that she is susceptible to poverty, on the one hand, and that she forgoes full social citizenship, on the other.

The difficulty begins with the assumption that society is an association of equals, of those who can function independently and who are equally situated with respect to power. Those persons whose dependency

17. In still largely agrarian communities in developing nations, where the devastation of colonialism has left its mark, the vulnerability is often still greater because resources are so scarce, men migrate to cities, women immigrate to find employment as domestics, and some societies express a cultural traditionalism by confining women to the domestic sphere, restraining their access to paid employment. See Amartya Sen, “Gender and Cooperative Conflict,” in *Persistent Inequalities*, ed. Irene Trinker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 123–49. Also see Martha Chen, “A Matter of Survival: Women’s Right to Employment in India and Bangladesh,” in *Women, Culture and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), pp. 37–57.

18. T. H. Marshall, “Citizenship and Social Class,” in *States and Societies*, ed. David Held et al. (New York: New York University Press, 1983).

19. Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, “A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State,” *Signs* 19 (1994): 309–36.

is the result of inevitable conditions related to age, ability, and health are thereby excluded from consideration except as the quasi-property interest of independent equals. Furthermore, the contributions of those labors devoted to caring for dependents become invisible.

As long as we continue to occlude the existence of dependency, our political theory excludes, first, those who are temporarily or permanently dependent and are so inevitably (that is, not merely because of contingent and alterable social conditions); second, those whose labor is devoted to the care of dependents: mostly women, and most especially poor women who often take on both familial and nonfamilial dependency work;²⁰ and third, the moral, social, and political importance of relationships of dependency rooted in the facts of human vulnerability and frailty.

DEPENDENCY AND WOMEN'S EQUALITY

Women not only have been but also continue to be the primary source of dependency workers. Dependency workers carry the burden not only for their own care and sustenance but also for the well-being of their charges. In return, dependency workers (whatever their gender) receive fewer benefits than those who either are unencumbered by such demands or can delegate these responsibilities to others. In other words, in the social division of benefits and burdens, dependency workers carry the burden for more than one and receive the benefits of less than one. This inherent lack of equality for dependency workers most egregiously affects those who are poor, persons of color, or the otherwise disenfranchised. But all women, even those who are of the middle class and well-educated, are affected by the inequalities posed by dependency and dependency work. Today there are women who can take advantage of opportunities to enter as equal workers (and so presumably as equal citizens) in a world defined by men.²¹ But someone will have to do depen-

20. "The typical woman can expect to spend seventeen years caring for children and eighteen years caring for older family members. Nine out of ten women will be caregivers for either children or parents or both" (Women's Action Coalition, *WAC Stats: The Facts about Women* [New York: New Press, 1993], p. 42, citing Sara E. Rix, *The American Woman, 1990–91* [New York: Norton, 1992]).

21. Linda J. Waite points out that while men, both black and white, enjoy a "wage premium" if they are married—6.3 percent for white men and 4.5 percent for black men—women who do enjoy a wage premium enjoy a much smaller one, not quite 3 percent, and many women, mostly white women, "pay a marriage *penalty*, in hourly wages of over 4 percent" ("Social Science Finds: Marriage Matters," in Etzioni, ed., pp. 247–55, p. 250). White married women without children do receive a marriage premium and may be in the best position to take advantage of job opportunities that have been opened to women. Although Waite's figures do not uncover differences between married and unmarried women with children with respect to their ability to delegate dependency responsibilities, poverty figures illuminate the vast differences between those who can comfortably pay others to take over dependency responsibilities and those whose potential earning can scarcely cover childcare.

dency work. As long as primarily women, in unpaid or even paid positions, do that work, and as long as dependency work continues to be done at the expense of either the dependency worker or the dependent, women cannot all be equal to one another or to men.

Carol Pateman calls the situation I am pointing to “Wollestonecraft’s dilemma.”²² The dilemma arises from two demands by women which are incompatible where citizenship has been modeled on and defined by the male wage earner: the demand to be accorded equal citizenship and the demand that women’s special responsibilities be recognized. For those women who have always been in the paid work force and for women today whose labor, paid and unpaid, becomes the entire support upon which they and their dependents must rely, the dilemma requires a resolution. We should note that what creates the dilemma for women, however, is that a resolution can only be satisfactory to women (qua dependency workers) if it does not force the abandonment of their charge. When a relationship between a man and a woman ends, it is not, unfortunately, infrequent that men abandon all responsibility for a vulnerable child.²³ Few women view this as an option for themselves—in large measure because the moral responsibility to the dependent is so immediate, so compelling, and so deeply ingrained. What lies at the heart of Wollestonecraft’s dilemma is the failure to include within political theory the concerns of fundamental human dependency and the gender-specific way in which concerns of dependency have been allocated. Equality for all persons must recognize our inherent dependency and interdependency. We must demystify ideals of self-sufficiency and independence and promote a conception of equality that begins with our relationality and neediness.

Such a concept of equality requires a different conception of the reciprocity required for social cooperation. In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls writes, “Those who can take part in social cooperation over a complete

22. Carol Pateman, “The Patriarchal Welfare State,” in *Democracy and the Welfare State*, ed. Amy Gutman (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 231–60, p. 252. Pateman posits Wollestonecraft’s Dilemma as the complement to what Donald Moon has called “Hegel’s Dilemma” (“The Moral Basis of the Democratic Welfare State,” in Gutman, ed., pp. 27–53). Hegel’s Dilemma is that while the redistribution of wealth can mitigate poverty, such redistribution (through cash transfers or the provision of goods and services in kind) may, on the one hand, undermine a citizen’s sense of participation in community and so undermine the citizen’s sense of self-worth. If, on the other hand, the state steps in to create jobs, such action interferes with the autonomous functioning of the market, and so disrupts the machine that generates wealth.

23. “Currently, only about one-half of the custodial parents due child support receive full payment. About 25 percent receive partial payment and 25 percent receive nothing” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Service Administration for children and families office of child support enforcement, “Child Support Enforcement: Twenty-Third Annual Report to Congress,” June 24, 1998 [http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/rpt/annrpt23/appendixH.html]).

life, and who are willing to honor the appropriate fair terms of agreement are regarded as equal citizens.”²⁴ Similarly, “The Communitarian Platform” asserts, “at the heart of the communitarian understanding of social justice is the idea of reciprocity: each member of the community owes something to all the rest, and the community owes something to each of its members.”²⁵ Such a conception is plausible as long as we think of community as consisting of independent persons who are all capable of reciprocating. But consider the sentence that appears in the same section (entitled “Social Justice”): “Beyond self-support, individuals have a responsibility for the material and moral well-being of others.”²⁶ We might well ask why this should be so if indeed we all have a responsibility for self-support?

Suppose that we lived in a society in which no one is prevented by law, or by a general scarcity of resources, from fulfilling a responsibility for self-support? Would we still have a responsibility for the material and moral well-being of others? If each individual were capable of self-support and reciprocity, there would be no compelling reason to suppose that we had such a responsibility. Anyone who did not support herself, assuming that she was capable of it and that there were no social, political, or legal barriers to her doing so, would be acting irresponsibly.²⁷ If, however, we acknowledge that every community includes those who are incapable of self-support—incapable because we are all inevitably dependent at some period in our lives and sometimes throughout our lives—then such responsibility takes on new importance. At first glance, it might appear that providing support for those periods and only those periods is a very minimal responsibility. But as we will see in the final section of this article, such a form of public provision is anything but minimal. Moreover, once we take into consideration the fact that all persons are not capable of full functioning, we find that we must expand our understanding of social cooperation to include those who care for dependents as well as the dependents themselves. This moves us beyond interactions between independent and fully functioning persons who are capable of being self-supporting and forces us to reconsider social cooperation and the reciprocation it requires in honoring the “fair terms of agreement” (in Rawls’s words).

24. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 302.

25. Etzioni, ed., p. xxxiv.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Perhaps the best spin one can give on the conservative argument against welfare adopts this logic, with the added premises that the United States is a society in which there are no social, legal, or political barriers to self-support, and it is also a country in which resources are plentiful enough to permit anyone who is capable and willing to be self-supporting to be so. Since, furthermore, conservatives leave little leeway for the possibility that anyone might be incapable of self-support, the only other explanation for anyone who depends on state support is that they are irresponsible.

RECONCEPTUALIZING SOCIAL COOPERATION

Reconceptualizing social cooperation to include interactions between dependents and their caretakers allows us both to acknowledge the social worth of dependents—who, even in their inability to be self-supporting, bring meaning to the ongoing nature of human relationships—and to recognize the special vulnerability incurred by dependency workers—who, in the process of caring for others, come to have a diminished capacity for self-support.

To think about reciprocity and yet take dependency seriously means acknowledging the importance of reciprocating the efforts of those who do the labor of caring. That reciprocation cannot, virtually by definition, come from the one who is dependent. So another must be available to support the dependency worker and help her sustain her efforts. This notion of reciprocity I term *doulia*. I adopt the term from the postpartum caretaker, the *doula*, who assists the mother who has just given birth, not by caring for the infant but by caring for the mother so that the mother can herself care for the infant.

We might note that *doula* originally meant “slave” or “servant” in Greek. While the etymology may seem unfortunate, I find it intriguing to redirect the concept of servant or slave, to reappropriate, if you will, the very significance of serving. The notion of serving another’s needs is demeaning or elevating depending on the urgency of the need, the respect given to the one serving, and the value attached to the labor. It is interesting that the value of the server is independent of the status of the one served. Service to God is lofty, but so is service to the needy. To be a chambermaid in the home of a powerful person is to still be a mere servant. The physician who addresses others’ medical needs, in contrast, performs a service, but that physician is rarely thought to be a servant, that is, a mere servant. Yet the politician proudly proclaims himself a public “servant.” To indulge the indolence of the persons with status and wealth is demeaning, not because this is service, but because to do so is to do what the more powerful disdain and do not want to do for themselves.

A relevant application of this point to the discussion between feminists and communitarians can be found in examining a claim frequently heard: if our nation were one that truly prized its children, the role of caregiver, at least one who gives care to children, would not be so undervalued. In a nation as wealthy as our own, the mere fact that as many as one-fifth of its children live in poverty tells us something about how we value children. Communitarians especially have decried our society’s neglect of the well-being of so many children, and they call for a more child-centered society. It would seem that feminists who are interested in the well-being of both women and children would do well to align themselves with communitarians on this point. For it would seem that if we set

a higher worth on our children, we would necessarily raise the significance of their caregivers. But this is not automatic, precisely because the status of the one who serves another's needs is not necessarily bound by the status of the one who is served. Once again, it is the value we attach to the labor that is reflected in the value we attach to the caregiver. A child-centered society will not necessarily raise the status of caregivers if the work of care is still demeaned.²⁸

The service in *doulia* is service to the server. Its purpose is to respect the caregiver and acknowledge the value of her labor. The service in *doulia* reestablishes our interdependence and the indispensability of us being of service to one another. Extending the notion of the service, I argue for a public conception of *doulia* (service)—a public ethic of care by which we acknowledge the social responsibility to care for the caregiver.

In the case of the newborn, caring for the caregiver is necessitated by the newborn's need and the mother's neediness in her own care. For the mother both tends to the utterly helpless newborn and attempts to recover from the labors (the dependency work, if you will) of nurturing the fetus in her womb and birthing. The newborn cannot reciprocate—she cannot say “Mom, take a break, I'll cook up a meal for us while you take a nap.” Similarly, during periods of dependency in later life, when we need to be cared for, we are unable to reciprocate at the moment when the caretaker needs sustenance, needs to bring in material resources, and so forth. So while we generally expect the one who benefits from another's labor to do the reciprocating, in the case of the dependency work where the one cared for cannot reciprocate, it may appear that no one assumes that responsibility—at least at the time when the caring takes place. In the case of the postpartum woman, it would seem that no one bears a responsibility to the exhausted mother, who must struggle on her own. Generally, however, someone (a spouse or lover, a mother, a mother-in-law, an aunt, or a sister) does come to her assistance, though usually with less regularity and consistency than she requires. Why do they tend to her needs? Both (or either) from a responsiveness to her neediness and out of a sense that she is doing some labor for which she requires support. Those cared for are not the only beneficiaries of the dependency worker's ministrations. Nor is the benefit confined to the family. The larger community of which the family is a part is also a beneficiary. The obligation to reciprocate the labor of the dependency worker falls to all those who receive benefit, insofar as they are able to reciprocate. As the responsibility spills out to the larger social order of which the dependent and dependency worker are a part, all are encompassed by a nested set of dependencies and responsibilities. This

28. See below for a more extended discussion of this point.

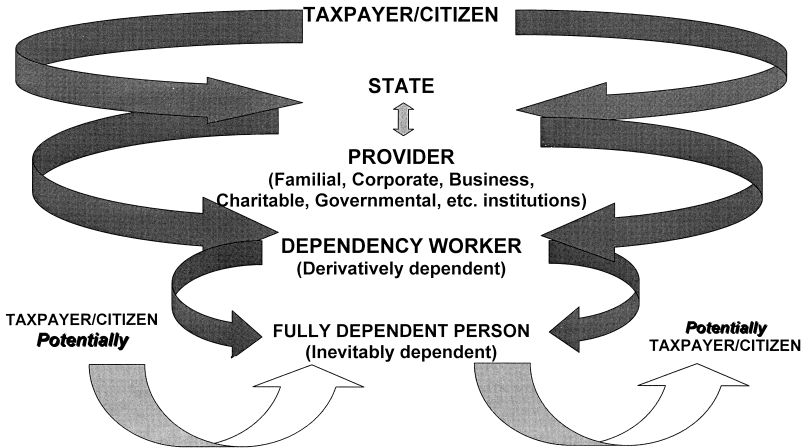


FIG. 1.—Nested dependency-reciprocity as *doulia*

concept is displayed in figure 1. The taxpayer pays for social programs that reimburse families and dependents; the citizen obligates the state to assure rights and responsibilities to see that care is adequately provided and compensated.

When I spoke above of those who benefit from the dependency worker's care of dependents, I referred to the family and larger community. But what, one might ask, is this benefit? The charge clearly benefits from the care—materially, emotionally, and so forth. Parents benefit because the child may reciprocate care and because they can participate in the joys of watching their loved child develop and thrive. Others may benefit because, in the case of a child, the child grows into an adult who can function as a producer, consumer, taxpayer, and citizen. Ill persons who recover can resume their productive lives, as can many disabled individuals, given the appropriate support and an accommodating environment.

However, there is another benefit, one that becomes clearer when we think of the care of a frail old person, a person who is terminally ill, or a very developmentally disabled individual. None of these will benefit either a family or the larger community in the same way as will a growing healthy child, a temporarily ill person, or a person with disabilities enabled through adequate support. Any society that is morally decent, assuming it has resources sufficient for maintaining nonproductive individuals, understands that fully dependent persons must be cared for irrespective of their productive potential. It is not a hypothetical imperative; it is a categorical imperative. It is not something we must do only given that we desire some other outcome—for example, that we can assure that we raise a child to be a productive citizen or that we will restore an ill or disabled person to productivity. The dignity of persons as

ends-in-themselves mandates this moral imperative. It is an imperative derivable from universalizing our own understanding that were we in such a situation, helpless and unable to fend for ourselves, we would need care to survive and thrive.²⁹ We may delegate the responsibility for the care—but we cannot evade the moral responsibility to assure that care is provided.

We frequently speak as if the obligation to provide care to a particular person belonged to a given individual or, perhaps, to a family. But an individual in need of care is like a stone cast in the water. Those feel the impact most immediately who are in closest proximity, but the effects come in wider and wider ripples. Even though the well-being of an individual may be the immediate duty of those who are closest, it is the obligation of the larger society to assure that care can be and is provided. The parallel to that other vulnerability to which the creation of the state is often attributed—protection from the malfeasance of others—is fairly direct. For although the responsibility not to harm another falls on each of us individually, it is the role of the larger society to protect us against and to punish those who do violence. While a crime against an individual victim is the responsibility of the criminal, it is up to the wider society to protect against criminals and to punish crimes. As society benefits from those who work to protect us against crimes and those who mete out the punishment, so society benefits from those who work to care for dependents, whether or not the dependent individual is one for whose well-being we are most directly responsible. To those who discharge our duty to care for dependents, we, either as kin or as citizens, owe gratitude and compensation.

This responsibility to provide care, even if the cared-for is never able

29. I do not mean to suggest that we can only derive the obligation to care from our own desire to be cared for. One could invoke various other bases for such a duty, e.g., utilitarian grounds, or theological ones, such as that found in Robert M. Veatch, *The Foundations of Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). Veatch uses theological grounds to claim equality for the person with mental retardation. In my book *Love's Labor*, I also lean heavily on the idea that we are obligated to provide care to those who are vulnerable to our actions, a conception of obligation for special relations developed by Robert Goodin in *Protecting the Vulnerable* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985). Here I invoke the more Kantian universalization because I take it to be a very widely accepted way to establish obligation, and it is, I think, quite self-evident in this context. Of course, it suffers from some of the problems that justifications by universalization frequently do. For example, some may claim that if they were rendered incapable of being self-sufficient, they would prefer to be allowed to die. This may display lack of moral imagination. Many who, in their prime, have made such declarations have found that when they reached that point in life, they very much wanted to live, and desired to receive the care they needed to make their life tolerable. And others who might maintain such a position find that when they have a family member who is incapacitated, they want that loved one to continue to be cared for as long as they can sustain a reasonably good quality of life. As a concept of reciprocity, I prefer to invoke the notion that we are obligated to provide care because we have all, at some point in our lives, been the recipient of care.

to reciprocate, is encompassed in a sense of equality that I want to highlight. We are all equal in that we are “all some mother’s child”—we are each a person who has benefited from the care of another, who has been seen as worthy of an investment of care and attention merely to survive, much less thrive, as we grow into adults. If each is worthy of care, then the caregiver, too, deserves care when she is needy. Even as I care for another, I, too, am worthy of care. This is a notion of fairness and reciprocity that is not dyadic but one that involves at least a third party and, more properly, an infinite spiral of relationships that reaches both into our past and projects into future generations.³⁰ This conception provides a theoretical framework that needs specification through explicit programs and policies. It calls for a collective, social responsibility for care, but one that doesn’t dilute relationships between dependent and caregiver, between dependent and dependency worker. It is a call that resonates with the new communitarians’ emphasis on the moral grounding of society and on a collective responsibility that must accompany calls for personal responsibility.³¹

We should note that not all forms of dependency are total. The more complete the dependency, the more the provider and those in the circles of nested dependency that radiate outward to the society at large need to reciprocate the obligation that the dependency worker fulfills toward her charge. The less absolute the dependency, the more the charge enters into the reciprocity usually assumed among those equally situated and equally empowered. As a fully able child grows and matures, she has increasingly reciprocal obligations to her caretakers—whether familial or paid or both—and that in proportion to her maturation and capabilities. An infant is incapable of showing consideration, respect, or concern for her nanny, babysitter, or parent. A six-year-old child who is cared for by a nanny is old enough to be respectful, but she is not old enough to prepare a cup of tea if her caretaker feels unwell. A twelve-year-old could prepare the tea and should. None is in a position to reciprocate her care by providing an income for the caregiver.³²

30. Anita Silvers has pointed this out in a commentary on *Love’s Labor* (Wake Forest Law School, Law, Culture and Humanities Working Group, 1998).

31. Compare the above delineation of responsibilities with the following statement from the *Responsive Communitarian Platform*: “A communitarian perspective . . . mandates attention to what is often ignored in contemporary politics: the social side of human nature; the responsibilities that must be borne by citizens, individually and collectively, in a regime of rights; the fragile ecology of families and their supporting communities; the ripple effects and long-term consequences of present decisions” (“The Responsive Communitarian Platform: Rights and Responsibilities, ‘Preamble,’” in Etzioni, ed., p. xxv).

32. These obligations on the part of the dependent hold as well toward those who pay the caregiver—they, too, are responsible for the care, although indirectly, and so deserve reciprocation from the cared-for to the extent that the dependent is not fully dependent. At times, there is a difference between those in our lives who give us direct hands-on care and those who are, in general, responsible for our well-being and who pay the hands-

Similarly, a disabled individual who can function largely independently of assistance is due what will enable her to function so that she can participate as one equally situated. A disabled individual who needs assistance dressing and taking care of important life functions has both every right to the care and is not directly obligated to reciprocate those services, but, to the degree she can operate independently, she is obliged to engage in reciprocity of the usual sort. A provider, however, should reciprocate the efforts of the caregiver. The provider role should not fall entirely to the (partially dependent) person. That is to unfairly burden the dependent with the costs of her care.³³

The point of a public ethic of care is to spread the costs and burdens of dependency more evenly through the population. This offers “insurance” (so to speak) to all who are potentially dependent (and that excludes no one) that if they either become dependent or have to take on responsibilities for caring, they will not have to bear unduly the costs and burdens of their own or their charge’s dependency.

RESPONSE TO NEW COMMUNITARIAN’S FAMILY POLICY

What implications does a public ethic of care, conceived along the lines of *doulia*, have for a family policy sensitive to the concerns of the new communitarians? Communitarians have expressed concern for the well-being of children and for a sense of social cohesiveness by which we feel ourselves responsible for others as well as ourselves. Feminists, communitarians, liberals, and even conservatives have pointed to the stark facts of feminized poverty, especially for single mothers (and most especially for black single mothers), as well as the poverty experienced by children in single-“parent” households (by which social scientists usually mean solo female-headed households). Conservatives as well as communitarians and even some liberals have urged us to embrace a “child-centered

on person to care for us. To the extent that the one who pays has a more extensive role, for example, she is the default back-up person responsible for assuring hands-on care, I consider both her and the hands-on caregiver to be dependency workers. The cared-for has the responsibilities to both, and situations of conflict between these have to be resolved case by case. There are also responsibilities that the cared-for has to the provider of the resources for care, again to the extent that she is able to reciprocate. We have obligations to a mother who has played the role of sole provider, just as we have to a father who provided daily hands-on care. To a state that enables our caregivers to have cared for us, we have obligations—obligations generally discharged through paying taxes when we have an income.

33. For a very different view, see Anita Silvers, David Wasserman, and Mary B. Mahowald, *Disability Difference, Discrimination* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998). For a criticism of Silvers’s view from a dependency perspective, see my essays, “At Home with My Daughter,” in *Americans with Disabilities*, ed. Leslie Pickering Francis and Anita Silvers (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 64–80, and “When Care Is Just and Justice Is Caring: The Case of the Care for the Mentally Retarded,” *Public Culture*, “Special Issue on Disability Criticism,” (2001), in press.

society,” and they have insisted that strengthening the nuclear family is the way to prevent poverty and other ills that accompany single-parenthood for women and children alike. The poverty of single women with dependents, the need for social responsibility, and the welfare of children are all issues that a public ethic of care looks to address. But it does not endorse the notion of a “child-centered” society nor does it favor the heterosexual nuclear family as the locus of dependency care. Neither is necessary for the concerns feminists and communitarians share, and neither is favorable to women’s well-being and advancement.

The Primacy of the Nuclear Family

The public ethic of care I have outlined provides grounds for arguing against the sort of view advocated by communitarians such as Popenoe: that the most desirable way to raise children is in a two-parent nuclear family, one which is composed of a man and a woman, who each assume complementary roles.³⁴ Furthermore, the implications of a public ethic of care indicates that a reliance on the nuclear family works against the very principles for which communitarians stand and fails to place the priority where it ought to reside: in the relationship between the dependency worker and the dependent. The deficiencies of the single-parent home to which communitarians point can largely be remedied by adequate support for the parent’s dependency work. Such support comes not only—but very importantly—in the form of income. In addition, such support must include the variety of benefits that accompany all work that minimizes exploitation and worker isolation. (I discuss this proposal in more detail below.) The problem of male role models is one that should be handled by encouraging the degendering of dependency work (see below). As the stigma of solo parenthood has diminished (a social occurrence decried by conservatives and some communitarians), children’s shame has decreased, along with some of the pain of parental divorce or abandonment. Forces favoring both a companionate conception of marriage and women’s aspiration for sexual, social, and economic equality will continue to make marriage less stable.³⁵ The stigma of solo parenthood does not need to be reinstated to guard against child poverty. Rather, we should encourage the larger community’s support of dependency work.

The new communitarians share a set of presumptions with much traditional political philosophy since the seventeenth century. These pre-suppositions catch the solo parent in a bind. On the one hand, the citi-

34. For examples of this view, see Popenoe (discussed above), and William Galston in “A Liberal-Democratic Case for the Two-Parent Family,” in Etzioni, ed., pp. 145–55.

35. Currently there is every indication that a marriage is seen as a relationship based on love and sexual compatibility, as one based on affection and companionship rather than on economic or reproductive considerations. And there is no indication that such a view will become less rather than more prevalent.

zen is supposed to be self-supporting; on the other hand, it is the family that is presumed to be self-supporting. Where only heads of households are citizens, there is no contradiction. When all men are citizens and virtually all households have a male head, the two propositions can be held together without tension. The difficulty enters when women assume citizenship and are thought to be self-supporting. Worse still is the situation of the woman who is the solo head of a household who has to carry dependency work responsibilities along with the responsibility to be self-supporting. The new communitarians move between these two propositions. At times they presume that only households are self-supporting and that a dependency caregiver has a provider who supplies the family income. Yet they also make the same expectation of self-support of a familial caregiver who is the solo parent, an expectation that is based on the idea that each citizen is self-supporting.

In fact, especially within complex industrial societies, no citizen is truly self-supporting; all depend on others to satisfy the most basic needs. Families, too, are enmeshed in so many political and economic dependencies that they, too, cannot achieve a genuine self-sufficiency. The insistence on self-sufficiency perpetuates a fiction that hides the role of dependency work as well as the many dependencies families, businesses, and corporations all have on each other, on economic factors, on government, and on global forces. The rhetoric of self-sufficiency works to diminish social support for dependency work,³⁶ worsening the options for dependency workers and aggravating the conditions that make children in solo parent families more vulnerable to poverty and pain.

Furthermore, to promote the traditional, heterosexual family with its gendered division of work arbitrarily discriminates against nontraditional family forms, such as those of gay and lesbian parents. It also fails to take into consideration the many other forms of affiliation in which persons care for one another—whether they be of gay and lesbian couples who care for each other through bouts of illness or “fictive kin” who care for a child or relation who needs attention.³⁷ These family forms give every indication of being fully adequate in providing dependency care.³⁸

36. This is most recently evidenced by the popularity of welfare “reform,” which eviscerated support for families with dependents in the United States and of cutbacks in social services that help support dependency work globally under the name of “structural reform.”

37. See Carol B. Stack, *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

38. Legal arrangements in most states favor the nuclear family. Some new communitarians oppose changing such legislation. They also oppose marriage counselors who treat divorce favorably, and they want to see divorce become more difficult to obtain. See, e.g., William J. Doherty “How Therapists Threaten Marriages,” in Etzioni, ed., pp. 157–66. Contrast these views with that of Carol Levine, “AIDS and Changing Concepts of the Family,” *Milbank Quarterly* 68 (1990): 33–57; also Carol Levine, *Families and Health Care Proj-*

The Child-Centered Society

A second proposal advanced by communitarians, that our society be child-centered, is one that seems, at first, very reasonable from a feminist ethic of care. It would seem that an ethic of care would want to put children first and have a society centered around the well-being of its young who, after all, are to become its future citizens. But in my view, and from the perspective of the public ethic of care I advance, the proposal that society be child-centered is problematic for two reasons.

First, it promotes an exclusive focus on only one group of vulnerable dependent persons, children—eclipsing many comparable situations of vulnerability in the frail elderly, the very ill, and the severely disabled. A decent society must be as committed to the well-being of its ill and disabled members as to its children. Focusing only on this group of vulnerable people is problematic morally because it betrays an essentially instrumental attitude toward children and the “temporarily” dependent, suggesting that the only reason to care for dependents is the usefulness they will provide once they are no longer dependent. Furthermore, pragmatically, demographics tell us that increasingly the care of the frail elderly will supplant the care of children in terms of the resources needed.³⁹ If the moral obligation to care extends to all dependents, then we need to be prepared for this shift in the population of those needing care.

Second, history and cross-cultural data suggest that as long as there is not constant and vigilant attention, women’s caring labor will be exploited—either in the name of children’s well-being or in the name of the collective’s well-being. In a “child-centered society,” women remain vulnerable to gender discrimination (in spite of society’s professed commitment to equal opportunity) wherever “the best interests” of children justify their confinement to “Küche und Kinder.” As important as the welfare of children is, attention to their welfare cannot be permitted to overshadow claims for a just distribution of the labor, resources, and attention needed to provide for their care and well-being.

ect: Guiding Principles for Effective Partnerships between Family Caregivers and the Health Care System (New York: United Hospital Fund, 1998). Levine, after extensively working with AIDS patients and their caregivers, concluded that “Family” should be broadly defined. “Legal definitions of ‘family’ do not reflect the diversity of relationships that often make up an individual’s support network. Family caregivers include people related by blood, marriage, or adoption, as well as individuals who have longstanding emotional ties to the care recipient” (p. 2).

39. Robert M. Solow, reviewer, “On Golden Pond (Review of *Gray Dawn* by Peter G. Peterson),” *New York Review of Books* 46 (May 6, 1999), p. 17. Also see Fred Deven, Sheila Inglis, Peter Moss, and Pat Petrie, “Childcare Key to Women’s Employability: State of the Art Review on the Reconciliation of Work and Family Life for Men and Women and the Quality of Care Services,” *Equal Opportunities Magazine: Quarterly Magazine of the Medium-Term Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men* (August 1998): 15–18.

Moreover, the answer to the question of what is in the best interest of children is itself always subject to contestation. I, for instance, would want to argue that the interests of children are not well served unless the institutions established for their well-being are themselves caring and just. John Stuart Mill, John Rawls, and Susan Okin have all made persuasive arguments that learning justice begins in a home that is itself just. Whatever its virtues, the traditional family with its gendered division of labor in a heterosexual two-parent household, advocated in the name of children's best interests, has had limited success—at best—in teaching the virtues of a tolerant, gender-equitable, and just society. Instead, it has produced a vulnerability on the part of women and children alike that is neither just nor caring. The proliferation of family forms and the solid support of the larger community and the state may provide us with better models in the future—models that serve people when they are still children, when they are grown, and during periods in which they revisit dependency. Every existent family form has had limitations that hinder the full flourishing of persons. Nearly one hundred and fifty years ago, John Stuart Mill called for a society in which experiments in living could proliferate so as to allow the diverse natures of individuals to flourish—so long as the freedom of any one member of society was not permitted to limit the freedom of any other. This great liberal individualist may still have much to teach feminists and communitarians alike, for such “experiments”—particularly when exploring alternatives in family forms—may well yield better communities, as well as better individuals. To insist that only one family form, the two-parent heterosexual family, is the form to emulate is not to recognize the present limits of our knowledge.

AN ALTERNATE FAMILY POLICY—SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

Because women continue to invest in dependency relations more than do men, women are much more affected by policies that affect the maintenance of dependency relations. The effort to achieve gender equality has largely been directed at laws and policies that give women access to positions held by men. But as such policies do not address the obstacles women face because of their commitment to dependency relations, women find themselves in Wollstonecraft's Dilemma. The way out is to address what dependency relations demand from whoever are the caregivers—be they men or women. Policies needed to nurture these relations affect many aspects of women's lives: their employment; their identity as a parent, partner, daughter, and kin; their ability to be free of unsatisfying or abusive domestic partners; their moral self-understanding and sense of self-worth; and their standing as a citizen. The various policies can be sorted into two, guided by a set of distinguishable but related propositions. First, the relation between a dependent and a dependency worker have a special status. Second, caring for dependents must be recognized and compensated as work.

The Special Status of Dependency Relations

From the perspective of a public ethic of care, the traditional nuclear family is only one possible “social technology” among many, a social technology whose telos is to facilitate the well-being of the dependent and the dependency worker. Contra the communitarian assumption that only the father/husband occupies a legitimate role as provider, once we acknowledge the primacy of the dependency relation to the well-being of the dependent, it is evident that different or wider nesting relations will also serve. Neither the biological role in procreation,⁴⁰ nor sexual intimacy with the dependency worker cum mother,⁴¹ privileges the father per se as provider, in theory or in practice. To say that the traditional family is only one possible social technology suited to the care of dependents is not to say that, where that social technology has taken hold, parents who leave their children should be absolved of all responsibility toward them. But however we insist that the absent parent continue a level of responsibility, that responsibility should be exacted by larger social structures (e.g., federal or state governments), and the parental failure in serving a provider role should not be borne by the dependency worker or the dependent. Even if the nuclear family remains a dominant social technology (out of habit and convention), that lends no moral support to a society that fails to provide for those who stand in the relations of dependent and dependency worker.

None of this is to say that fathers have no important role to play. On the contrary, as a society we should work to encourage dependency work from fathers, so that they share that role more evenly with mothers. If we are to judge from the rate at which fathers/providers rather than mothers/caregivers abandon the parental role when the relationship with a partner ends, we must conclude that the obligations and bonds forged in the dependency relation outlast those of being a provider or of biological kinship. If we want to strengthen the role of fathers in children’s lives—one of the aims of the new communitarian family policy—we should stress their participation in caregiving rather than exalt the role of a provider.

A related consequence for a principle of *doulia* is that the responsibility and care of dependents must not fall on the dependency worker alone—that even the family unit is inadequate as the sole nesting for

40. I would argue, following Dorothy Roberts in “Racism and Patriarchy in the Meaning of Motherhood,” *Journal of Gender and the Law* 1 (Spring 1993): 1–38, that the biological role in procreation or other biological connection is *a*, but not the *sole*, basis for assigning prime responsibility for a dependent. See also Dorothy Roberts, “Why Race Matters in Child Welfare Interventions,” *Nomos* (in press).

41. See Fineman, *The Neutered Mother*, for an argument that sexual intimacy between two adults should not be legally regulated and should not form the basis for the legal sanctioning of parent-child relations.

dependency care and dependency relations. Various elements of the society, employers, and local communities, as well as the state, have a role to play in supporting dependency workers in their effort to care for their charges.

The relationship between the dependency worker and the charge itself must be respected as nonfungible and of value, in and of itself. The environment in which good care is most likely is one in which there is an emotional investment in the well-being of the dependent on the part of the dependency worker and a trust and an emotional bond toward the dependency worker on the part of the dependent. The attention and responsiveness to the needs of another necessary for caring care favors long and lasting relations.⁴²

A minimal requirement is an adequate paid family-leave policy that covers all workers, one which is not exclusively the responsibility of the employer.⁴³ When employers, especially small businesses, are solely responsible for paid leave, there is an incentive to hire employees without dependency responsibilities.

Child welfare is another arena where dependency bonds need to be nurtured by public policy. Policies that respect these relationships attempt to strengthen them rather than to sever them when they are at risk, as they are when a child is neglected or abused. Only when there is no way to avoid damage to either the dependent or the dependency worker should these relations be forcibly severed. Many interventions can take place before actual abuse or neglect occurs if those who are at risk are attended to and provided with supports they need. All new mothers and their babies, for example, would benefit from the *doulia*-like support of visiting nurses to help mothers with the early infant care.⁴⁴ The same could be said for adults who suddenly are faced with an ailing parent to care for or for a man who finds himself having to attend to his partner after a traumatic accident. Sometimes severing abusive dependency relations cannot be helped, but a policy “to first save the child” in child welfare cases not only neglects one party in the dependency relation, but it may also be counterproductive in its aim to help the more vulnerable party.

Respecting relations of dependency also means that when a person

42. See chap. 2 of Kittay, *Love's Labor*, for a fuller account of the requirements of care and the importance of relation.

43. A more substantial demand would be a “right to care” such as has been argued for by legal theorist Robin West. See Robin West, “A Right to Care,” in *Theoretical Perspectives on Dependency and Women*, ed. Eva Feder Kittay and Ellen Feder (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, in press).

44. David L. Olds, Charles R. Henderson, Jr., Harriet J. Kitzman, John J. Eckenrode, Robert E. Cole, and Robert C. Tatelbaum, “Prenatal and Infancy Home Visitation by Nurses: Recent Findings,” *Future of Children* (“Home Visiting: Recent Program Evaluations”) 9 (1999): 44–66.

who has the primary responsibility for the dependent chooses to do (or to continue to resume) the day-to-day caring labor, that choice should be supported. A further consideration of how such a choice can be supported leads to the second guiding proposition, the need to respect dependency work as work.

Respecting Dependency Work as Work

To say that the care of dependents must be recognized as work is to say that it must be included within a system of social cooperation wherein it is adequately compensated and given the same status and social standing as any legitimate employment. Familial dependency workers must be permitted to devote themselves to caring for dependents, if that is their preference, without becoming impoverished and without irrevocably damaging their opportunities to engage in other labor if and when the period of intense dependency ends. Like other workers who are treated in an equitable manner, those doing familial dependency work should have available opportunities for retraining when the period of their charges' dependency is over; they also should have the equivalent of a paid vacation and time off for personal medical care, worker's compensation if they are injured, and so forth. Such monetary compensation and benefits must be universal (i.e., they should not be limited to those who are impoverished); otherwise, they quickly deteriorate into stingy and stigmatized assistance such as welfare, both as we knew it and as we now know it.

For dependency work to be like all work that is fairly recompensed and open to all talents, it must be degendered and deraced. While sex-segregated labor often needs to have barriers removed to become open to all genders, dependency work needs to be coaxed into gender integration. This requires making a public commitment to training young boys, as well as young girls, in caring skills. It also requires encouraging men to participate in caring work and to take on familial dependency work. Perhaps most immediately, it means restructuring the work place and educational institutions to allow family members, both men and women, to engage in dependency care. For those doing nonfamilial dependency, there should be opportunities to advance in training and in pay. As men often have wider employment opportunities, care work needs incentives to bring men into these occupations. Finally, the establishment of a "care corps," on analogy with a peace corps or a military corps, of young persons who spend a part of their youth engaged in caring work could become a national resource, developing a citizen body that gains skills in, and values, the demands of dependency work. Such experience may also help instill a social responsibility for dependents and dependency care.

Perhaps the most radical proposal that is implied by a true public ethic of care based on the principle of *doulia* would insure that caregiving become recognized as work by meeting the one nearly essential fea-

ture of what we call work in our culture: that it be paid. I advocate a system of payment (and generous payment at that) for all dependency work—a system that would be rationalized in its compensation, just as the loss of life and limb is now rationalized through workers' compensation plans. The level of compensation should be set to bring poor caregivers well above the poverty line and should be graduated so that very wealthy persons who care for dependents realize benefits only through tax deductions. The degree of compensation should similarly reflect the extent of the dependency of those in need of care. As having prime responsibility for dependents does not have to coincide with daily hands-on care, so those responsible for dependents should be able to use the stipends either to enable them to do hands-on care or to purchase such services from others.

Some may object that parents and other family members who care for their children or other relations do so out of a sense of duty rooted in love. To put a price on that caring—to compensate it and, worse still, to apply measures that would make payment scales rational—is to sully sacrosanct familial relations, especially those between parent and child, converting these into commercial transactions. But the fact that life and limb are of immeasurable value does not preclude us from assigning to their loss a monetary value when that loss is the result of liability or employment-related injury. Not only do we assign a monetary value to what is invaluable, but we formulate payment scales that assign a higher monetary value to some losses than to others. Again, when we assign a higher monetary value to one bodily part rather than another, we are not thereby making a claim that diminishes the pricelessness of either. Similarly, we can attach one rate of compensation to caring for a well six-year-old and another to caring for a severely disabled six-year-old (who may need as much care as an infant or toddler), with the latter recognizing the added investment of time and attention. We can do this without underappreciating the invaluable contribution of caregivers or the immeasurable value of either child.

Where should this payment come from? From the taxpayer's dollars, and, where appropriate, from employer contributions, either combined with or in lieu of familial support. If payment would be universal, as is social security insurance, a skeptic may ask, "Why should taxpayers pay for a wealthy woman to stay home with her child?" If a woman who is wealthy chooses to stay at home to be a caregiver, the stipend is not what would be paying for her to stay home—she stays home because her wealth, not the stipend, gives her that choice. The stipend can, however, inoculate her from need if the source of her income is her husband and the marriage fails. She would not, at that point, have to sign up for caregiving benefits (although as her income changes, so would the extent of her benefits)—a step that initiates a stigma associated with need-based programs. Many formerly middle-class women with depen-

dency responsibilities have joined the ranks of the poor in the case of a failed marriage. Even a wealthy woman can suffer impoverishment if her spouse leaves and fails to pay child support—or if, because of serious abuse, she must leave suddenly, go into hiding, and leave behind material resources that had sustained her and her children.

Furthermore, as experience in welfare states has demonstrated, the benefits that are the hardest to revoke are those that are distributed universally and are not need-based. They may be the least redistributive, but they are the most effective antipoverty measures in that (1) they are the most resistant to being cut back during recessions; (2) they are most likely to be pegged to inflation pressures; and (3) they are not stigmatized or subject to much bureaucratic obfuscation. As a result, benefits that are not limited to the poor are sometimes the benefits that best serve the poor. Social Security, once it was pegged to inflation, became the most successful of all antipoverty programs, massively reducing the destitution of the elderly. A caregiver's allowance is best modeled on insurance-type public provision.⁴⁵ When we are able to be employed we pay into the fund, but if and when we have to take on caregiving responsibilities or we ourselves need care, we will be able to give or receive the needed care. Done well, such an allowance could have the same significant impact on poverty reduction of single-headed households—which today constitute the majority of the poor (especially poor children)—that social security had on the poverty of the elderly.

A final and vexing objection is that such a set of policies will be very costly. The labor of care always seems too expensive. But the cost is high for two reasons: first because to date so much of this labor is gotten for free. Even though the large pool of workers who charge no fees also means that those who do paid dependency work received depressed wages, when something is generally available for free, any cost seems too high. Second, the cost is high because there are not many efficiencies to be realized in dependency work. It is labor-intensive work. As Diemut Bubeck points out, we would not want it any other way.⁴⁶ A future in which care is mechanized hardly seems desirable, least of all to those who need care. If, however, the cost is so high and it is to be paid for by taxpayers, then, the standard objection goes, this will decrease national production and so create fewer jobs—a scenario that most hurts those who have been last hired. Those are often women. So, once again, women will pay the cost, and this cost may be too dear.

In considering this argument, I would like to take a page from the environmentalist's book. Forty years ago, when environmentalists did not

45. See Theodore R. Marmor, Jerry L. Mashaw, and Philip L. Harvey, *America's Misunderstood Welfare State: Persistent Myths, Enduring Realities* (New York: Basic Books, 1990) for a very helpful discussion of the various forms welfare policies take and the merits of insurance models.

46. Diemut Bubeck, *Care, Gender, and Justice* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

include an official presidential candidate of a major political party but were largely considered oddballs, the standard argument against considering the ecosystem was cost. The same argument was made: jobs would be lost—those who could least afford to pay for the clean-up would pay most dearly. But environmentalists taught us how to do our accounting differently. The degradation of the environment became a line in the ledger book. It itself came to be seen as a cost that our society and our world could not afford—not for long at least. Not being trained as an economist, I cannot suggest how the parallel argument should go with respect to dependency work. But my intuition is that there is such an argument to be made. In the case of environmental concerns, we humans have been exploiting our natural resources. They have begun to bite back and we've taken notice. But first the moral argument had to be made, namely, that there was something wrong with so utilizing our natural habitat, that it was abusive and exploitative. Where there is exploitation, there are costs to someone or something that have not been included in the accounting books. It is similar in the case of care. Women's labor has been exploited. Until we call it exploited labor and refuse to deck it out in claims that the traditional division of labor and the nuclear family are needed to avoid impeding disaster, we will not see that the price for this work is being paid already. It is just not paid for fairly. Nor is the unfairness necessary to benefit children and others who are the objects of care. It does not have to be countenanced. It may well be that by compensating dependency work fairly, those who do the labor will be those drawn to it by genuine talent and skill. This should result in the improvement of the quality of care for everyone. Who can say in advance how great a "savings" is realized by the better alignment of talents and occupations?⁴⁷

What is crucial is that dependents be cared for, that those who do the caring are not exploited, and that the responsibility to assure the well-being of each is fairly spread across all who derive benefit from the proper care for dependents—and that is: everyone. If this core of social order is in good order, the possibilities for the well-being of individuals and for justice within collectivities may proliferate in as yet unimagined ways.

47. It may also be that costs will be too great as long as there is other labor to exploit beyond our national borders—that is, if taxes go too high, industry will move elsewhere. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the international dimensions of exploitation and dependency work, but it is certainly not a coincidence that poor and immigrant women are so frequently the ones who care for our children and our parents.