Welfare, Dependency, And a Public Ethic of Care

Eva Feder Kittay

There is every reason to react with alarm to the prospect of a world filled with self-actualizing persons pulling their own strings, capable of guiltlessly saying “no” to anyone about anything, and freely choosing when to begin and end all their relationships. It is hard to see how, in such a world, children could be raised, the sick or disturbed could be cared for, or people could know each other through their lives and grow old together (Scheman, 1983: 240).

“Welfare Is a Woman’s Issue” — The Subtext of Welfare “Reform”

A STRANGE CACOPHONY OF JUSTIFICATIONS AND REBUTTALS DOMINATES CONTEMPORARY DISCUSSIONS OF WELFARE AND WELFARE REFORM. While the Right speaks of “family values,” “unwed mothers,” “family breakdown,” and “teenage pregnancy,” the Left responds with appeals to “structural unemployment,” “creating jobs,” and “ending poverty.” “Welfare policies encourage dependency,” the Right insists. “Provide jobs” answers the Left. “Provide ‘values,’” the Right retorts. Is this the mismatch in call and response it seems to be, or do these two stances share certain philosophical underpinnings? Both positions, in different ways, assume a conception of the citizen based upon a male model of

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the "independent" wage earner. Both see the person on welfare as someone who can only be incorporated as a full citizen by fulfilling the role of the "independent" wage earner. Neither questions the conception of social cooperation that presumes, but does not credit, women's unpaid labor as caretaker (Young, 1995; Pateman, 1989). Feminists, meanwhile, see welfare and the welfare state as a woman's issue; as patriarchal control over the lives of poor women, but also as an essential safety net for all women.2 Paraphrasing Johnnie Tillmon, in a recent talk3 on welfare Kate Millet remarked, "the Man walked out — he quit." Yet poverty remains and it is poverty with a woman's face.

Although most recipients of the now-defunct Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program (AFDC) were children, 90% of the adults benefiting from this program, which we called "welfare," were women. The new welfare program established under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), similarly affects mostly women and their children. Clearly, welfare is not only a poverty issue, it is also a woman's issue. Moreover, the thrust of welfare reform threatens feminist gains. It is, first, a challenge to the reproductive rights of women — poor women's right to bear children. Also, despite some pious calls for ending violence against women in the home, the constriction of aid to solo mothers deeply affects women's exit options in abusive relationships. As some current studies indicate, more than half the women who make use of public assistance are coming out of situations of domestic violence.4 Furthermore, the new welfare law makes a mockery of feminist demands for fulfilling and well-paying nonfamilial labor. To be compelled to leave your child in a stranger's care, or with no care at all, and to accept whatever work is offered is another form of subordination, not a liberation. It devalues the work women traditionally have done.

The issue of welfare, then, is a woman's issue both in the sense that it affects primarily women and that it pertains to feminist goals. The end of AFDC, which guaranteed women with children a basic level of income if they fall below a certain level of poverty, must be a siren call to understand why "a war against poor women is a war against all women" (as the slogan of a feminist advocacy group, the "Women's Committee of One Hundred," declares). This moment, however, should also be grasped as the occasion to reconsider the basis of welfare. We need to muster the political will to shape and support welfare policies that can serve women raising families without stigmatizing those in need. Such policies are necessary for the consolidation of feminist gains and for the achievement of full citizenship for women, especially in the context of modern industrial economies (Fraser, 1997; Young, 1995; Sevenhuijisen, 1996; Mink, 1995; Orloff, 1993).

**Traditional Justifications of Welfare**

To aid in forming the requisite political will, we need to be clearer about the justification for welfare, generally, and the justification for welfare targeted at the
needs of women in particular. The contemporary “Right”/“Left” debate reflects a number of different understandings of the bases for welfare and the welfare state by those who endorse it and by those who oppose it.

By one account, the welfare state, and especially those policies directed at the poor, are based on the need to protect against failures of the market and to eliminate poverty. Within a market economy, the creation and satisfaction of needs and the negotiation of what constitutes need are tied to one’s participation in a relation of reciprocity between the production of wealth and its consumption. This participation is marked above all by labor that is compensated in wages or salaries. It defines “independent.” To stand outside these reciprocal arrangements reduces one to the status of dependent, someone dependent on an individual, a charity, or the state.5

Yet as even the earliest proponents of a market economy saw, in and of itself a market economy will not guarantee that all who can and want to work will be adequately employed. The dynamism of a capitalist economy produces great wealth, but also great poverty. Such poverty is morally unacceptable in the midst of wealth and is politically destabilizing. Efforts at redressing the inequity, however, encounter what Donald Moon (1988) has called “Hegel’s dilemma,” a dilemma articulated and never resolved by the philosopher in his Philosophy of Right. Although the redistribution of wealth can mitigate the poverty, such redistribution (through cash transfers or the provision of goods and services in kind) may undermine a citizen’s sense of participation in community and so undermine the citizen’s sense of self-worth. If the state steps in to create jobs, however, such action interferes with the autonomous functioning of the market and thus disrupts the machine that generates wealth.

The creation of the welfare state is a compromise between capitalism and democracy. Some welfare programs have been developed to skirt the offense to self-respect.6 Populist policies, such as progressive taxation or free public education have as their goal redistribution in the service of community and equality. Social insurance policies are another compromise that avoids the offense to self-respect. These benefits are understood as “earned entitlements” intended to protect citizens against the “predictable risks of modern life” (Marmor, Mashaw, and Harvey, 1990: 27). Although redistribution is not the goal of social insurance, it, too, redistributes wealth, since what is received as a benefit by a participant normally exceeds what is paid in by that individual. Two other visions of welfare, residualism and behaviorism, are aimed at the poor. Residualism establishes a safety net—a floor beneath which individuals must not fall. Behaviorism attempts to alter the behavior of the poor. Behaviorism makes explicit the view that poverty is the fault of those who are impoverished. Residualism as practiced in the U.S. today makes such an assumption implicit in its treatment of beneficiaries. Though populist and social insurance policies avoid one horn of Hegel’s dilemma, residualist and behaviorist policies do not spare their recipients a goring. The scar marks them as “dependent.” As Fraser and Gordon (1994) argue, dependency,
which in preindustrial times was seen as a structural social feature, has in industrial society and still more strikingly in postindustrial society come to be seen as a characterological feature of the poor who rely on public assistance, and poverty itself is viewed as a characterological flaw.

Welfare debates today are most often between residualists on the Left and behaviorists on the Right. The Right, emphasizing the evils of dependency on state support, has pushed workfare, or work outside the home in exchange for benefits. The Left does not question the “debilitating effects of dependency” and does not dispute the premise that a job is preferable to a “handout.” It insists that if there are persons who are employable but not employed, there is a need for job creation. That is what is implied in the question, “Where are the jobs?” to which the welfare “dependents” are to turn in their newly forged — and forced — independency.

Supporters and foes alike nonetheless recognize that not everyone in a society is able to perform waged work, even if jobs are limitless. Individuals may lack the capacities required for employment: ill health, disabling conditions, or inadequate education or training. Nor does any society expect everyone to work. Within most industrial societies, we exempt and even prohibit children from working and don’t presume that those over a certain age will continue to work.

Welfare policy initially assumed that solo mothers would not work outside the home. Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), the forerunner of AFDC, was, in the words of the 1937 Committee on Economic Security,

designed to release from the wage-earning role the person whose natural function is to give her children the physical and affectionate guardianship necessary not alone to keep them from falling into social misfortune, but more affirmatively to make them citizens capable of contributing to society (cited in Abramovitz, 1996: 313).

It was aimed precisely at those women who were justifiably not engaged in wage labor. ADC, like its predecessor, Mother’s Pensions, was supposed to be doled out to mothers — though only to “deserving” mothers, that is, widowed or abandoned domestic mothers.

The 1962 amendments to the Social Security Act stressed the twin goals of strengthening the family and family self-sufficiency. “For the first time in 1962, federal law permitted states to require adult recipients to work in exchange for benefits” (Ibid.: 333). These amendments, which altered the name of the federal welfare program from Aid to Dependent Children to “Aid to Families with Dependent Children,” also permitted two-parent families to receive assistance where the breadwinner was unemployed. Congress and welfare rules expressed general ambivalence about forcing mothers to find employment rather than care for their children, instead focusing work expectations on fathers as family providers.
Since 1962, women's increased poverty and dependence on public assistance has, paradoxically, coincided with our entry into the workforce and our greater equality of opportunity. Shifting expectations and opportunities mean that the understanding of mothers' dependency on state aid has altered significantly. The declarations of 1937 and the debates of 1962 are scarcely conceivable today, when nearly half the women with children of preschool age are in the workforce, at least part time.

As systematic, formal barriers to social goods are removed, injustices that remain become less visible and those who are unable to take advantage of new opportunities are blamed for their own distress. Although previous social policies attempted to distinguish "deserving" from "undeserving" poor women, the removal of obstacles to women's employment has opened the door to characterizing all unemployed poor women as undeserving. Nonetheless, not all poverty, even in postindustrial society, has been viewed as a character flaw. When the disabled are poor, we either fix the working environment to enable employment, or we look to supplemental income for those so disabled that they cannot maintain employment even with altered work environments. We do not say to them "work or lose benefits." In our recent past, when the aged constituted the majority of the poor, our nation looked for solutions that were adapted to that population. The solution was not to force every able-bodied elderly person to get a job, but to provide old age insurance, to peg benefits to inflation, and to provide medical care for the elderly.

In reading the literature by men, and some women, one comes to wonder why, when women are poor, theorists and social scientists fail to ask if there are not particular causes of women's poverty. Why are the conditions faced by women, especially those caring for dependents, not highlighted? There is a presumption that when it comes to getting jobs, there is no gender inequity and that the joblessness of women is independent of the gender-related vulnerabilities they face at home, in the family, and in the economic sphere. There is no talk of gendered wage inequity, of the gendering of familial caretaking responsibilities, or of gendered susceptibility to spousal abuse and sexual abuse in the workplace.

The inattention to the gender issues behind women's poverty should be of special concern to feminists, not only for the obvious reason that feminists must always be alert to analyses that ignore gender, but also because feminist gains for some women may jeopardize other women, especially those least benefited by equal opportunity gains and reproductive rights legislation. For example, currently the poorest women benefit least from reproductive rights, as they often lack the means to procure contraception or obtain abortions. Yet they are held accountable for each pregnancy and birth as if they had the same choices middle-class women do. Even feminist women will say of poor women, "Why do they have children if they can't afford them?" With respect to the expectation that even women with children will be employed, Linda Gordon (1995: 92) points out, "the
fact that most mothers today are employed...nurture resentment against other mothers supported (if only you could call it ‘support’) by AFDC.” Naomi Zack (1995), in another context, warns, “you must dismount the tiger with great care.” The efforts of some better situated women to dismount the tiger of patriarchy may well have left other women — less well situated — in mortal danger. In particular, feminist successes have facilitated an analysis that ignores the gendered concerns of women who have turned to welfare to support their families.

The Maternalist Justification of Welfare

As noted, at the inception of U.S. social policy, the poverty of women was thought to be distinctive. Feminist scholars have documented the influence of women in building the welfare state in the United States and in drafting the policy that was to become AFDC (Gordon, 1994; Skocpol, 1992). The story of how a welfare program initiated by women for women became the despised program we now call simply “welfare” is a fascinating, if depressing, story. At best, it is a story of a “progressive maternalism,” which gained power through the efforts of well-educated upper- and upper-middle class women even before women had gained the vote. At worst, it is a story about how these same women, mostly white, used the social benefits conferred to women to “Americanize” (and thus erase the native ethnic identities of Eastern and Southern European women), even at the cost of preventing those benefits from being extended to Black women and non-European immigrants.

The progressive paternalists who adopted a philosophy of “social housekeeping” saw their role as bringing maternal virtues into the public sphere. Along with establishing a Children’s Bureau within the executive branch of government, the Sheppard-Towner Act, and Mother’s Pensions, they were also responsible for administrative rules that monitored mother’s sexuality, reviewed the women’s housekeeping standards, and intervened in feeding and rearing customs retained from the Old World. These policymakers were paternalists in that they wanted to bring women’s values into the public sphere. Yet as the city housekeepers, the eyes of the well-meaning reformers were primarily directed at the end result — the child. They bypassed the mother as a citizen in her own right. Gwendolyn Mink writes (1995: 27): “The fruits of paternalist social policy research were policies designed to improve motherhood through cultural reform. The beneficiary of these policies was the child, the conduit her mother, the social goal the fully Americanized child.”

The paternalists’ feminist vision resonates with certain feminist visions today, especially those that are associated with the feminist morality of care. Although there are doubtless many significant differences between the historical case and feminists today, the historical example alerts us to some of the dangers lurking in the otherwise worthwhile project of bringing women’s value of care, of concern for children, and so forth to the public arena. How, and in what spirit, we try to import these values makes all the difference.
Dependency Revisited

The question before us is whether, and how, we can conceive of welfare that addresses women’s lives. How, that is, can we fashion policy that does not insist that all women must fit the Procrustean bed of the male wage worker, that recognizes the demise of the “family wage,” and that recognizes the dependency of those for whom mothers care, but does so without reducing the mothers themselves to dependency and control? Alternatively, can we conceive of social welfare policy that extends social citizenship to all women? As feminists have argued, women’s social citizenship requires social recognition and support for the caring labor done by women. Can we develop policies that meet this goal?

We need to shift our attention on dependency away from the social, political, economic, and moral registers that Fraser and Gordon explicate. For there is another deployment of the term that gets lost and that we can retrieve in the acronym AFDC — Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Human development, disease, disability, and decline result in “inevitable dependencies” (see Fineeman, 1995). The relationships in which these dependents are cared for I have called dependency relations. Dependency relations, as I conceive of them, have as their core a dependent (or charge) and a dependency worker (one who cares for the charge). Dependency relations require support from additional sources to be sustainable. I call this support “the provider” (Kittay, 1995; 1996).

The Derived Dependency of Dependency Workers

Dependency relationships, which are all too easily eclipsed when society is understood as an association of independent equals, constitute the fount of all social organization (Held, 1987; Baier, 1987; Pateman, 1989; Fineeman, 1995; Kittay, 1996). The bonds of political association among equals, however binding they may be, are not as powerful as those created by caring relationships. These intimate ties allow individuals at different stages of life to withstand the forces that act upon them (Kittay, 1996). As Virginia Held (1987) has argued, the intimate bonds of dependents and their caretakers make civic order and civic friendship possible. In the solo mother and her children, we find the distillation of these founding social relations. Yet in caring for the dependent, the dependency worker herself is in need of support wherever and whenever caring for dependents is incompatible with producing the material support needed to sustain those in the relationship. In more highly developed economies, caregiving is rarely compatible with wage earning.

The welfare “dependency” that so exercises the critics of welfare is not the dependency of the children, but that of their mothers. Yet these two dependencies are linked. Feminist research has established “that in all industrialized Western countries, welfare — tending to children, the elderly, the sick, and disabled — is largely provided in private households by women without pay, rather than by
states, markets, and voluntary nonprofit organizations” (Orloff, 1993: 313). That is, women not only do most of the dependency work, they also do it without pay. Having dependents to care for means that without additional support, you cannot — given the structure of our contemporary industrial life and its economy — simultaneously provide the means to take care of them and do the caring for them (to use a useful distinction in the term “caring” that Joan Tronto [1993] has introduced). That also means that without additional support, you cannot participate in the reciprocal arrangements of production and consumption, as defined within a market economy. The requirement for support, then, constitutes a condition of a derived dependency for dependency workers, especially those who do unpaid dependency work. The dependency of the dependency worker is derivative, not inevitable — it is structural, not characterological.

Even dependency workers who are paid incur a special vulnerability to derived dependency because this dependency is, in large measure, due to the nature of dependency work and the relation to the dependent. There are three features of this labor, which together are responsible for this vulnerability. First, because dependency work involves the charge of one who is in many important regards helpless without the caretaker, there is a moral obligation that transcends the bounds of most jobs. Second, because dependency work requires a responsiveness to needs, often an anticipation of needs, the dependency work, when done well, requires a degree of emotional attachment to the charge. We want a caretaker who cares.15 Third, the work of dependency care is “functionally diffuse” rather than “functionally specific” (Darling, 1988). That is to say, a caretaker does not have a fixed set of tasks, but instead must address the individual’s general state of well-being and do whatever is needed to assure that her charge’s needs are met. Such responsibilities will often override the needs of the caretaker herself, except where meeting her own needs are crucial to meeting the needs of her charge.

The moral and emotional commitments, then, which are part of the very work of dependency care, mean that the dependency worker’s own needs are too often left unattended. As Joel Handler (1987) has argued, the regulatory models and legal rights that govern citizen-state or citizen-citizen interactions serve poorly to adequately protect the dependent and to limit the obligations and properly compensate the labor of dependency workers. For these reasons, the dependency worker is liable to incur a dependency that has a character different from the dependency on the economic and governmental to which all workers are subject.

Patriarchal family structures, whether these be the nuclear family prevalent in industrial societies, or the extended family forms of agrarian societies and peasant communities, have been responses to the requirement that dependency relations require support. As feminist critiques of the patriarchal family have shown, however, they are neither the only nor the best response. Within these structures, dependency work is assigned by gender, not by skill or disposition, and the dependency of the dependency worker is the condition of her vulnerability to
exploitation, abuse, and all the ills against which feminists have fought. Patriarchal state support in the form of welfare has been the response to the solo mother in need in capitalist welfare states. Again, it has been a poor response — better than none, but too little, too stigmatized, and too intrusive. The welfare repeal, or “reform,” is no response at all. Not only does the demand that women on welfare “work” fail to value the unpaid dependency work of the women using welfare to support themselves and their children, by imposing the model of the male breadwinner on them, it also fails to recognize the dependency work of mothering. In the name of fostering a fictive “independence,” it refuses to acknowledge “the obligation of the social order to attend to the well-being of dependents and of their caretakers, and to the relation of caretaker and dependent upon which all other civic unions depend” (Kittay, 1996).

The political theories social policy depends on for its justifications are intended to capture the conditions for justice and the relationships of dependency and care, yet they have been seen as standing outside these “public” domains. Since the publication of Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice*, feminist theorists have pointed to the distinction between principles of justice and principles of care. They have taken to task political philosophies for ignoring the principles of care. Perhaps we should say with Susan Okin (1989) and Marilyn Friedman (1987) that the distinction between care and justice should not be overdrawn. We should say instead that justice itself is not served if principles of care are not incorporated within the social order and that care is not served if it is meted out without reference to principles of justice. For dependents to receive care, they must be able to be cared for by one who can focus on their particular needs. Good caring requires a relationship between the one cared for and the one caring. Yet the one caring must herself not be treated without justice or caring. Her needs must themselves be met if a just caring is to be possible. A society that refuses to support this bond absolves itself from its most fundamental obligation — its obligation to its founding possibility.

*The Citizen and Social Goods*

Theories of the just state tend to neglect these considerations. The result is that they fail to include among the social goods those that bear on the needs of dependency workers, dependents, and the relations of dependency. Because of its power and influence, Rawls’ theory of justice serves as a good starting point for a discussion of how to reconceive of the welfare state by centering the concerns of dependency.

Consider the conception of the citizen as the free, independent equal to whom rights attach. This is the citizen who enters freely into exchanges with equals with a sense of justice, but also with a conception of his own good. He both benefits from social cooperation with equals and partakes of the burdens of such cooperation. Within this conception of society as an association of equals, however, neither
interactions with dependents nor the dependencies that result from caring for dependents figure in. They vanish from considerations of what are the moral features of citizens, the social goods that are crucial to their citizenship, or the conception of social cooperation.

Consider Rawls' characterization of free and equal citizens. The moral features of the citizen are those that contribute to political and civic participation with equals. Rawls speaks of citizens as having two moral powers: an ability to form and revise one's conception of one's own good and a sense of justice. These give rise to the political and civil rights that are given prime consideration under liberal democracies. When the exigencies of life in a market economy are figured in, the social rights not to have all of life's interactions commodified are included. These two moral capacities call for a set of social goods necessary for their exercise. This set of goods, which he calls "primary goods," serves as an index for making comparative assessments of interpersonal well-being.

The list, unaltered through the many revisions of Rawlsian theory, includes: "(i) the basic liberties (freedom of thought and liberty of conscience), (ii) freedom of movement and free choice of occupation against a background of diverse opportunities...as well as [the ability] to give effect to a decision to revise and change them, (iii) powers and prerogatives of offices and positions of responsibility, (iv) income and wealth and, finally, (v) the social bases of self-respect..." (Rawls, 1980: 526). By examining this list, one may identify the first as given by political rights, the second and third by civil rights, and the final two as social rights. Omitted from the list are just the sort of social goods that are critical for women's social citizenship. These are the goods of dependency care and relationships of caring.

That is to say, a conception of a just state must include an understanding of the citizen as having not two, but three moral powers, the capacity for responding to those in need with care. 17 The exercise of this moral power requires additional social goods, namely, "(1) the understanding that we will be cared for if we become dependent, (2) the support we require if we have to take on the work of caring for a dependent, and (3) the assurance that if we become dependent, someone will take on the job of caring for those who are dependent upon us." Without these social goods, all persons, but women especially, cannot assume their rightful role as citizens. If we can possess basic liberties — freedom of movement, choice of occupation, the powers and prerogatives of public office, and even income and wealth — we are provided with the political and civil rights of citizenship. We have not yet attained the powers and capacities to function as free and equal citizens, however, if we lack the assurance that we will not lose the ability to care for ourselves (and thus for our charge as well) when we are called upon to do the work of caring for a dependent and focus our energies and attention on another. These, then, are the social goods all citizens, but particularly women, require for social citizenship. We have yet to discuss how these might translate into demands for particular social policies.
Re-visioning Welfare

Social Cooperation and the Principle of Doula

I have claimed that the ideal of the independent citizen presumes an equality and reciprocity of social relations that is blind to the inherent dependencies in which we all are immersed. To incorporate dependency and the dependency relation into social relations, we need a concept of interdependence that recognizes what is not precisely a relation of reciprocity, but a relation that I characterize as “nested dependencies” (Kittay, 1995: 1996). These link those who need help to those who help, and link the helpers to a set of supports. If we look at women’s poverty and the social response to “welfare” from the perspective of the dependency relation, and if we attempt to reconstruct our understanding of social goods and cooperation from this perspective, I believe we arrive at a conception of an argument for welfare, especially as it pertains to women, that differs from either antipoverty considerations (the residual model) or social control justifications (the behaviorist model).

If we agree that the care of the dependents takes place within a dependency relation, then a principal ethical justification of welfare, and indeed of the welfare state, is to support dependency relations. The purpose of welfare needs to be at once to care for dependents and to mitigate the costs to dependency workers for their participation in the dependency relation. To be politically viable, this welfare must not be restricted to the poor, but should be extended to cover dependency work more generally.

In seeking to bring a care ethic to the public arena, the contemporary version of social housekeeping, we need a conception of social goods and a notion of social cooperation that acknowledges dependencies and the need for care, and that employs a notion of reciprocation appropriate to a situation where one member of the relation is incapable of reciprocating. Such a concept of social cooperation I have called doula, adopting a term that derives from the Greek word for a service, which I have adapted from the name of a type of caregiver, the doula, who assists the postpartum woman.

Some families within the U.S. have traditionally availed themselves of a paid care provider, the “baby nurse,” who displaces the mother by taking over care of the infant. The doula, instead, assists by caring for the mother as the mother attends to the child (Aronow, 1993). We can extend this notion of service and shift it from the private circumstance of postpartum care to a public conception of care by calling for an arrangement whereby those who become needy by virtue of tending to those in need can be cared for as well. Doula, the practice of the doula, can be captured in the colloquial phrase: “What goes around comes around.” If someone helps another in her need, someone, in turn, will help the helper when she is needy — whether the neediness derives from her position as caretaker or from circumstances that pertain to health or age. We are each implicated in a set of
dependency relations at some point in our lives, either as the one who needs care, as one called upon to care, or as one responsible for obtaining care for another. We may reciprocate the caring we received by ourselves caring for the same person, or seeing that this person is cared for. We may also reciprocate by assuring care for still another individual who must depend on us in the way we depended on another. The circles of reciprocity move outward to the larger social structures of which we are a part and upon whom we depend. We can articulate a principle of doula: “Just as we have required care to survive and thrive, so we need to provide conditions that allow others — including those who do the work of caring — to receive the care they need to survive and thrive” (Kittay, 1996: 233).

Although the doula who served as our paradigm is engaged in private interactions, the idea of doula extends to the public domain. Just as the caretaker has a responsibility to care for the dependent, the larger society has an obligation to attend to the well-being of the caretaker. Only so can the caretaker fulfill responsibilities to the dependent without being subject to an exploitation some have called “compulsory altruism” (Taylor-Grooby, 1991, cited in Orloff, 1993).

Robert Goodin (1988) writes that the justification for the welfare state is, ultimately, an ethical one, namely to address the needs of dependents. His argument is that:

> those who depend on particular others for satisfaction of their basic needs are rendered, by that dependency, susceptible to exploitation by those upon whom they depend. It is the risk of exploitation of such dependencies that justifies public provision — and public provision of a distinctively welfare state form — of those basic needs (Ibid.: 121).

There is much to be said for an understanding of welfare as the protection of the vulnerable. The vulnerability in need of protection, however, is not only the dependent who is disadvantaged by age, illness, or disability. I have already addressed vulnerability of the dependency worker that the work itself incurs. We need to add that the dependency worker is not only economically vulnerable, but is also less able to make her social and political voice heard, especially when it goes against the provider of the material support that helps to sustain her and her charge. Furthermore, because the dependent requires a relationship, not only the caretaking itself, to thrive, and because for the dependency worker to be a caring worker requires the recognition that only a genuine relationship provides, the relationship itself requires protection. I am suggesting that the concept of doula can serve as a justification for welfare extended to the solo mother, but such a justification calls for a much broader implementation. Not only must welfare be extended to impoverished solo mothers, it should also be extended to all dependency workers, on a model that moves away from residualism and approaches the universalistic models of social insurance and populism.
A Vision of Welfare Based on Doulia

The concept of doula itself suggests that the dependency worker must be involved in what Fraser has called "the struggle over needs interpretation." The feminist theorist and advocate must be careful not to follow the model of the invasive baby nurse rather than the assisting doula. Nonetheless, because dependency work does partially deprive the dependency worker of political voice, interventions are crucial. With these caveats in mind, what would basing welfare policies on a concept of doula entail? First, all dependency work, whether it is care for children, the ill, the aged, or the disabled, must be recognized as social contributions that require reciprocation, not by the cared for, but by a larger social circle in which the dependency relation is embedded; second, the social goods and burdens to be distributed and shared must include the goods of caring relations. There are a number of possible ways in which such goods and reciprocation can be recognized.

As noted, the traditional family, with its breadwinner and caretaker, forms one such embedding nest, at least for the care of young children. Because it does, many conservatives, but also some liberals, have seen the "two-parent" family as the best solution to welfare dependency. Is it? Let us presume the viability of the traditional family. Ignore for the moment the social forces that have hammered away at it and at the questionable justice of its gendered division of labor. Let us imagine a family form and an economy in which one breadwinner can produce income sufficient to support a spouse, who does the domestic labor and caring work, and a couple of children; and let us suppose that this family is not governed by traditional gender divisions of labor. The dependency worker cares for the dependents, and the breadwinner, whom we will also call "the private provider," supports the dependency relation with resources sufficient to maintain all. This, then, is a private arrangement that presumably calls upon no additional social supports and so is "self-sufficient." There are at least three problems with this analysis. The first is conceptual, the second is economic, and the third is ethical and a matter of justice. First, it is an obfuscation to think of such a structure as "self-sufficient." Although dependency work results in the dependency worker's derived dependency, all employment involves some dependency. The provider is dependent on an employer and still more significantly dependent on an economy whose skills, services, or products are marketable. The waged worker is him/herself in nested dependencies — dependent on an employer, who is dependent on a market and on a particular configuration of economic structures and forces, such as interest rates, global competition, etc. A private provider does not lend "self-sufficiency" to the dependence relation, because this self-sufficiency is a conceptual chimera in a capitalist economy. The appropriate contrast between a dependency worker and other workers is not between those who are self-reliant and those who are
dependent, but between those whose labor results in some sorts of vulnerabilities rather than others.\textsuperscript{25}

Second, an economically self-reliant provider/caretaker model requires a rate of compensation that makes it viable for a provider to support a family. The fact of structural unemployment, as we all know, means that not all providers can find employment, and especially employment adequate to support a family. The rates of poverty among families with two adults present indicate that this goal is not achievable within the current economy for large numbers of families.\textsuperscript{26} The reality for most two-parent families today is a wife who has primary responsibility for domestic and dependency work, while holding down a job, often part time, that almost never pays as well as her husband’s. The pure provider, caretaker model has been hybridized. The change has resulted partly from women’s aspirations and partly from economic necessity, since average weekly inflation-adjusted earnings have declined by 19% since 1973 (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics).

Dependency work and provision can be divided in such a way that both partners engage in the two forms of labor and relationship. More often, though, even the hybridized model follows many of the same structural features as the pure model.\textsuperscript{27} The hybridized dependency worker primarily continues to assume responsibility for dependents and remains largely (though not totally) dependent on the income of the hybridized breadwinner partner. If the marriage falls apart, the financial suffering falls largely on the one who bears the major responsibility for dependency work. Often, the demands of the dependency work prevent that partner from pursuing financially more advantageous situations.

Third, the work of dependency care disadvantages the dependency worker with respect to her (or his) exit options if the relationship with the breadwinner becomes fragile. Following Orloff (1993), the social right women need to demand is the capacity to form and sustain autonomous families. Only such a right would adequately address the vulnerability of the dependency worker. Her vulnerability to the good graces of the private provider represents a disadvantage of bargaining power in relations of “cooperative conflict” (Sen, 1989). This handicap is a source of the myriad injustices that pervade the intimate relations of family life and consequently deprive woman of the social citizenship that the welfare state affords the male worker by “decommodifying” his labor (Orloff, 1993: 319). The consequences of cooperative conflict and the economic dependency on an individual man are aggravated by women’s subordinate position in the larger society, that is, by the likelihood that she will receive a smaller paycheck, by her susceptibility to sexual intimidation on the job, and so forth. Even if many of the public injustices were corrected, the injustices of intimate life, particularly when one is responsible for the well-being of a dependent, would continue to be present (though to a lesser degree). Furthermore, even if dependency work were not gendered, the disadvantage in cooperative conflicts such as the family would itself
be a consequence of the dependency work in a private provider model.

Thus, a just reciprocation for dependency work could not presume the “private arrangement” of the traditional breadwinner-caretaker model — or even of the hybridized model. This urges a universalization of benefits for dependency work. Just as workmen’s compensation and unemployment insurance became programs that were universally available to workers, with benefits rationalized and routinized (and extended without stigma), so must compensation for dependency work (Waerness, 1987). I can envision a payment for dependency work that can be used to compensate a mother for her time caring for her child or allow her to use the money to pay for daycare. Similarly, the money could provide for a son or daughter to care for an ailing parent or to pay someone else to perform the service. The level of reciprocation must allow the dependency worker not simply to survive, but to have sufficient resources to care for the dependent and herself. Thus, we must consider what else a dependency worker requires: health coverage (as all workers and dependents should get), certain in-kind services or goods or a monetary equivalent, and housing. Again, dependency workers themselves must be engaged in specifying these.

The conception of *doulia* respects not only the nature of dependency, but also the caretaker as a dependency worker. Like other workers, they need vacations, exit options, and retraining when they are no longer needed at their employment. Like all work, dependency work must be de-gendered, in fact, not in name only. This suggests public programs of educating for dependency work — especially for young boys and men.

Workers normally are accountable to those who pay their wages. One problem with having public support for dependency work may be that when the state pays for the labor of caring for one’s own children or aging parents, then the state can claim that it has the right to oversee the quality of work and the input of the worker. Such intrusion into the “private domain” runs counter to much liberal thought. Can we justifiably say to the state: “be the ‘public’ provider, be the one who pays the dependency worker her salary, but then, stay out of the ‘private’ dependency relation, except, of course, when the dependency worker violates the trust of her charge and begins to be abusive or negligent”? Putting the matter this way may rely too much on the dichotomy of public and private that feminist theorists have urged us to reconsider. Yet state oversight of personal relations, except to protect against abuse and the perpetuation of sexist oppression, seems to run counter to most feminist liberatory goals.

I believe that the concept of social cooperation inherent in the concept of *doulia* offers a resolution to this dilemma. Ordinary concepts of reciprocation dictate that if I provide you with a product or a service, you compensate me for the product or the labor I poured into that product or service. Lines of accountability follow the lines of reciprocation. If you do not pay me, I do not receive the benefits for which I labored; I hold you accountable and it is my right to do so. If you pay me, but I
do not deliver the goods, you do not receive the benefits for which you labored, and you hold me accountable and again, it is your right to do so. There is no third party affected by the transaction, and each party is accountable to the other, except that the state may have a duty to insure that both parties honor their agreements. However, the labor of the dependency worker flows to the dependent. If I do a good job as a dependency worker, the dependent is the beneficiary. I am accountable above all to the direct beneficiary of my actions, my charge. Just as any other worker, I have a right to demand compensation for my labor. Because the dependent, virtually by definition, is not in a position to compensate, the compensation comes from another source, e.g., the provider. The right to demand that the work be well done, however, is the right of the dependent. The duty of the state, whether it is a provider or not, is to assure that the work is done well and that the dependency worker is compensated. The duty of the state is especially significant in the case of a party as vulnerable as the charge. In short, when a larger social structure is the provider, being such a provider is not the same as being the employer to whom a worker is responsible. Such a duty is not an open ticket to intrude into the relationship or to regulate the life of the dependency worker. The duty of the public provider remains the duty of the state at present: to insure that a child is not neglected, abused, or denied provisions of a fundamental sort. Such a duty is consonant with the obligation of the state to protect its citizens against abuses from other citizens. Just as we do not want the “private relation” of spouses to be exempt, so we cannot want dependency relations to be exempted.

Adequate public support of dependency work, then, would significantly alter the dependency workers’ bargaining position, making them and their charges better able to respond to abuse within the family and less subject to intrusive state regulation. Even the miserly AFDC program was primarily a boon to women with children escaping abusive relations. A welfare program that universalizes compensation for dependency work, regardless of whether another able adult is present in the home, would allow women to leave abusive relations without the stigma of current welfare participation.

Within our society, dependency workers — paid or unpaid — are generally poorer than others. Paid dependency workers, such as childcare workers, are the most poorly paid workers relative to their level of education and skill (Hartmann and Pearce, 1989). In hospitals and nursing homes, orderlies and aides — those who do most of the hands-on dependency care of patients and clients — are the lowest-paid staff. Female-headed households account for the poorest families in the U.S. Doula requires that dependency work that is currently paid work be well paid. It is not enough that women be able to have affordable childcare. We are not adhering to a principle of doula when we exploit other women to care for our children.

Finally, a concept of doula would be accepting of any family form in which dependency work is adequately realized. It would honor different familial forms
of caring, from a child caring for an elderly parent, a gay man caring for his partner with AIDS, a lesbian woman caring for her lover and her lover’s children through a bout of breast cancer, to a single-parent household or a multiple-adult household in which children are being raised. A concept of doula only recognizes need and the vulnerability arising from the responsiveness to need—not family form, forms of sexuality, gender, class, or race.

Underlying the debate over AFDC has been the question of the visibility and the social responsibility for the dependency work of women. By keeping the responsibility private, poor women will stay poor and those not already poor will be impoverished if they try to raise families without the support of a man. It is a category in which the interests of women of different races or classes can be turned against each other. For example, white women benefit from the dependency work of women of color and wealthy women benefit from the dependency work of poorer women. Glenn (1992) points to the difficulties that await an effort to unite women around issues of care. She writes:

With the move into the labor force of all races and classes of women, it is tempting to think that we can find unity around the common problems of “working women.” With that in mind, feminist policy makers have called for expanding services to assist employed mothers in such areas as child care and elderly care. We need to ask, Who is going to do the work? Who will benefit from increased services? The historical record suggests that it will be done by women of color...and that it will be middle-class women who will receive the services (p. 36).

Applying this scenario to the needs of employed middle-class women and to regulations that insist that women on welfare find employment, she wryly points out that the apparent coincidence of interest comes apart when one recognizes that at current wages, childcare work will not suffice to bring the welfare mother out of poverty; moreover, if wages are raised, the middle-class woman will not be able to afford the less-advantaged women’s services. Feminism will come apart unless women speak and think together about how to forge policies that will benefit both sets of women and will lessen the increasing disparity between them.

Calling for a concept of doula and universal policies is not an attempt to smooth over these difficult issues between women with different interests and from different races and classes. Neither is its aim to reinstate universalism, as if identity politics, postmodernism, and critical race theories do not matter. The call for universal policies is not universalism. Universal policies do not pretend that we are all alike in some designated characteristic. They only maintain that if anyone should have access to a given resource, then everyone should, since such a resource comes to us by virtue of our membership within a given community, often because it is believed that such a resource is needed for each to function as a full member of such a community.
Universal policies have had their critics. They have been criticized as insufficiently redistributive and as benefiting most those who need them least. Yet universal policies formed from the perspective of the least well-off to serve their needs first are least likely to be deficient in this respect. A good example is the case of disability. The ramps and modified sidewalks meant to serve the disabled, but available for all to use, have benefited many populations for whom they were not envisioned, without diminishing their usefulness to the disabled. The universal policies advocated on a conception of doula derive from the need women have to function as full citizens in a postindustrial world. To function free of vulnerability to exploitation due to paid or familial dependency work, to be free to engage with the full resonance of their voices, women must have access to universal provisions that recognize their indispensable function as dependency workers and the importance of their participation as full citizens.

NOTES

1. The title of this section is borrowed from Tillmon (1976).

2. Many of these feminist writers see welfare both in terms of gender and race. For some examples of these analyses, see Abramovitz (1996), Sassoon (1987), Skocpol (1992), Gordon (1990, 1994), and Mink (1995).

3. Delivered at the “Teach-In on Welfare” at SUNY Stony Brook, Stony Brook, New York (March 1997). Tillmon (1976: 356) was a welfare mother and National Welfare Rights Organization leader. She spoke of welfare as “a sexist marriage” in which we trade in “a” man for “the” man.

4. A recent study released by the McCormack Institute and the Center for Survey Research (both at the University of Massachusetts, Boston) found that among a representative sample of the Massachusetts Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Families (TAFDC) caseload, 65% would be considered victims of domestic violence by a current or former boyfriend or husband using Massachusetts state law’s definition of abuse.

5. For an excellent discussion of how the term “independent” came to be associated with wage labor and “dependent” became attached to those who were excluded from wage labor, see Fraser and Gordon (1994). They point to three groups who epitomized a dependent status: paupers, slaves, and women. As they narrate the semantics of dependency, children, the disabled, and the frail elderly do not figure in the primary use of the term.

6. See Marmor, Mashaw, and Harvey (1990) for a discussion of the distinctions between social insurance, residualist, behaviorist, and populist welfare policies.

7. Even as the Left tries to protect residualist programs from being eviscerated, the target of the Right is broader. Many programs such as Social Security, progressive taxation, and even public education are targets. By restricting a defense of welfare to residualism, supporters of the welfare state may lose the opportunity to respond adequately to both the narrow and the broad attack.

8. In an environment of equal opportunity rhetoric, victims of social circumstances not infrequently blame themselves especially harshly. As Sandra Bartky (1990: 30) remarks:

   It is itself psychologically oppressive to both believe and at the same time not to believe that one is inferior.... I may [inconsistently] live out my membership in my sex or race in shame.... Or, somewhat more consistently, ...I may locate the cause squarely within myself... — a character flaw, an “inferiority complex,” or a neurosis.
9. Diana Pearce put this point in this fashion at a panel on women and welfare at Yale University (May 1995). My formulation is borrowed from her.

10. I have heard this repeatedly from women who considered themselves "liberal" and "feminists." One officer of NOW-Legal and Educational Defense Fund remarked that she had rarely seen so much negative mail and threats to withdraw support as when the organization took up the fight against the "family cap" provision of state welfare plans. The family cap provision prohibits the use of public assistance for any child born while the mother was receiving welfare.

11. It also resonates with questions relevant to "the public household" (Bell, 1976). Michele Moody-Adams (1997: 12) points to social policy "that seeks to use...the vast resources of the public household to legislate against certain behavior rather than to provide positive social support..." Although such "reactive" policies are inimical to truly liberal democratic institutions, I propose elsewhere (Kittay, 1996) that noteworthy principles of liberalism are inadequate for the more positive policies implied by the notion of the public household.

12. For the notion of social citizenship with respect to women see, for example, Piven (1985), Siim (1988), Pateman (1989), Gordon (1990), Orloff (1993), and Skocpol (1992).

13. In offering a gendering of the "power resources" school of analysis, Orloff (1993) argues that social citizenship for women is not centrally about the decommodification of labor, as it is for men within a market economy. Instead, she argues, social citizenship for women involves women's ability to be economically independent of men and their capacity to form and sustain autonomous families. This is an argument that can motivate feminists, but one still needs to show that the corresponding condition disadvantages women unfairly — that is, that it amounts to an inequitable distribution of the benefits and burdens of social cooperation between men and women and that this condition benefits the larger social group and simultaneously disadvantages women. That is the point of the argument in this section of the article.

14. See Jack Greene (1976) for a discussion of the role of independence and manhood in the consideration of who were the persons deemed equal by the authors of the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. See also Young (1995) and Kittay (1996) for the relation between independence/dependence and equality.

15. A striking instance of this is indicated by an infant's need for high-quality interaction with their caretaker to develop well cognitively. Such interactions are most likely to be found in ongoing relationships with caretakers (Blakeslee, 1997).


17. For an argument that this moral capacity is not reducible or included within Rawls' other two moral powers, see Kittay (1996: 237); also see Schwarzenbach (1990).

18. Moreover, as I argue in Kittay (1998), it needs to take place within dependency relations.

19. I wish to thank Elfie Raymond for helping me search for a term with the resonance necessary to capture the concept articulated here.

20. The importance of this ethic within the African-American community is documented in Stack (1974).

21. In a later work (Schmidtz and Goodin, 1997), Goodin takes these matters into account. His is a superb defense of the notion of collective responsibility against those who maintain the primacy of "personal responsibility."

22. The question can be raised, "What happens when the government is the provider?" Where the provider is not privatized and individualized as it is in families, the dependency worker has an option that is available to other workers — to organize. This doesn't mean that the dependency worker takes the option of strikes — walking out on dependents. However, they have available mobilization strategies used by other politically organized groups. The model of the National Welfare Rights Organization is perhaps useful here.

23. Fraser (1997) has listed a number of criteria by which to evaluate proposals for the welfare state. The criteria are guided by an ideal of gender parity. I invite the reader to consider the proposals put forward here in terms of these criteria.
24. This is close to the vision articulated by the 1996 vice-presidential candidate Jack Kemp in one of the vice-presidential debates. He envisioned an economy that could support a family with one breadwinner and one stay-at-home parent, although he was quick to add that the stay-at-home parent would not have to be the woman! It is interesting to have the ideal of the “family wage,” a concept fought for by the Left in this country, reemerge as a proposition by the Right, at the same time when they are legislating the entrance of women (usually without male support) on welfare, even those raising children as young as two, into the labor force at minimum-wage salaries.

25. Orloff (1993) points out that one way of characterizing the difference between welfare programs geared to men and those targeted at women is that the former are meant to shield the citizen against the worst effects of market failures, while the latter are meant to shield against familial failures. In this respect, it is important to see that when the benefits are intended to deal with familial failures, it is the fate of the children rather than the adult women that is most likely to have public sympathy. Women again come to be seen as conduits rather than as persons and citizens in their own right.

26. According to the Current Population Survey of March 1994, nine percent of married couples were poor and single mothers comprised 46% of the poor; of all poor families, 12% had at least one year-round, full-time worker and 32% had at least one member who worked at least 30 weeks during the year. These figures are based on a rate of poverty that all experts agree is set too low.

27. Why this is so is an interesting sociological question. It is also interesting to contemplate the possibilities for gender equity within the family if such an arrangement within the home is coupled with genuine gender equity in the public domain of paid employment and political and social power. In spite of all of women’s advances, though, this remains a utopian vision, whose possibility of realization remains in the realm of speculation. I suspect that the sorts of considerations with respect to dependency work that I bring forth here would be relevant to the realization of this more private instantiation of genuine gender equality and sharing of dependency responsibilities and dependency work.

28. Strictly speaking, universality is too strong a claim, for there are occupational exclusions and eligibility rules that restrict who can receive these benefits. Nonetheless, all workers within those limits are eligible — their eligibility is not income dependent. When writers on welfare and the welfare state speak of “universal” programs, they mean either that all citizens receive the benefit or that all within a certain category do. The contrast is generally with programs that depend on income or sometimes occupation. For example, neither AFDC nor farm subsidies are universal benefits.

29. It also recognizes that all these specificities are called into play in discursive matters of need interpretation — so again, how the need is defined and how it is to be satisfied is something that must be negotiated by those in the dependency relation (see Fraser, 1987).

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