

EVA FEDER KITTAY Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency.  
New York: Routledge 1999. Pp. xvii + 238. [\$70.00; Can. \$105.00] (hb: ISBN 0-415-90412-9; [\$19.99; Can. \$27.99] (paper: ISBN 0-415-90413-7)

In Love's Labor, Kittay examines the issue of what she calls *dependency work*—which is a kind of care work done for those who are inevitably dependent, e.g., young children, the sick, the disabled, and many elderly persons—and the nature of those who perform dependency work, whom Kittay calls *dependency workers*. Kittay's main conclusion is that the dependency workers are intrinsically vulnerable because the nature of dependency work requires that they place the needs of those who are inevitably dependent above their own, and therefore, society has an obligation to ensure that they do not fall into a cycle of dependency themselves. Kittay argues, moreover, that this issue is undertheorized in contemporary political theory, and inadequately treated by public policy makers in the United States. For example, Kittay examines the work of John Rawls, and argues that when developing his conception of justice, Rawls fails to take into account dependency concerns. Or, Kittay considers welfare policy, family and medical leave policies, and issues regarding the rights of disabled persons in the US, and argues that these policies are not adequate to help the dependency workers. Kittay concludes by proposing that this issue may be resolvable if one offers, among other things, universalized compensation for dependency work, that is, all who perform dependency work should be paid.

Love's Labor is eclectic, as Kittay admits, but it is also knit together by her concern to understand and address the issue of dependency work. Kittay's main conclusion that we have an obligation to dependency workers is plausible, but her justification for this obligation is less so. Kittay's argument that public policies in the

US do not adequately address dependency concerns also seems correct, but it is less clear that her proposal of universalized compensation for dependency work would resolve this problem. Kittay justifies our obligation to dependency workers on the ground that these workers have cared for other people and therefore we have an obligation to care for them in return. To support this claim, Kittay discusses a lawyer, whose mother expects that she cares for her. The daughter, as Kittay describes, accepts and justifies this obligation as follows: “[My mother] expects me to help her. And you know, she took care of her mother. So I have to help her” (67). According to Kittay, the daughter’s reasoning explains why we have an obligation to dependency workers, namely, as the daughter has an obligation to her mother because her mother cared for her mother—the daughter’s grandmother, we have an obligation to the dependency workers because they have cared for other persons. Kittay explains that the kind of reciprocity involved here is not the standard kind of reciprocity where ‘I do something for you, then you have to reciprocate,’ but is instead what she calls a ‘connection-based’ reciprocity. Kittay also explains that the justification she offers is neither deductive nor inductive, but is what she calls, *analogical*, although she does not explain this idea further (69).

It is doubtful that our obligation to dependency workers is justified this way. If it were so, it would mean that if someone, X, did not care for another person, one would not have an obligation to care for X. For example, suppose the mother in the previous example had not cared for the daughter’s grandmother, if our obligation to dependency workers is justified on the ground that they have done something for some other persons, it would mean that the daughter or other people would not have an obligation to care for the mother. But this is surely not the case. Common sense morality tells us that the fact that a person is vulnerable is a sufficient reason for one

to have an obligation to care for that person, irrespective of whether that person had done something for others. For example, if a person is drowning and one is nearby, then one has some obligation to help that person, even if that person has never helped anyone else. If this is correct, Kittay's justification for this obligation is not sound.

Kittay, I should note, explicitly rejects the 'vulnerability' model of justification on the grounds that it is unclear, on such a model, who would have the obligation and what sort of vulnerability would impose an obligation (54-64). But these issues are not unique to a 'vulnerability' model, nor are they intractable. Kittay's preferred account would also have to address the questions of who has an obligation to dependency workers and to what extent one has such an obligation.

Kittay's reason for a scheme of universalized compensation for dependency work is that this 'would significantly alter the dependency workers' bargaining position...A welfare program that universalizes compensation for dependency work...would allow women to leave abusive relations without the stigma of current welfare participation' (144). Dependency workers who would be vulnerable as a result of dependency work certainly should be compensated. But not all dependency workers ought to be compensated, because not all dependency workers would be vulnerable as a result of dependency work; some might, due to natural advantages, have resources that would prevent them from being made vulnerable. For this group, it is not clear that others would still have an obligation to compensate them for their work. Of course, there is a practical problem of identifying such a group, and Kittay's critique of present welfare policy suggests that we have, at present, not done an adequate job in this regard. But, the principle that one's obligation ends when a person is not vulnerable is a correct one.

Kittay's Love's Labor is an important contribution to the feminist aspiration of greater equality and justice for women, because most dependency workers today are still women. It also contributes significantly to both the field of contemporary political theory and to present-day social policies, because adequate political theories and social policies must be able to account for dependency concerns, and this book provides a standpoint from which to examine these concerns.

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