

Sequential Open Seminar Series “Global Justice” No. 3

From the Ethics of Care to Global Justice

Eva Feder Kittay (Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at Stony Brook University/SUNY)

Having a prominent feminist philosopher Eva Feder Kittay as a guest lecturer, the third open seminar of “Global Justice” was presented jointly with Graduate School of Human Sciences at Osaka University. Prof. Kittay has been grappling with questions about the fundamental nature of humans and their society in challenging the traditional Western, male-centered notions of human beings or subjects. Reflecting on her own experience with caring for her own daughter Sesha with cognitive disability and on the devastated plight of many care-givers (overwhelmingly women), she strived to incorporate the issue of care, care-givers, and care-receivers into theories of justice.

Prof. Kittay’s lecture could be divided into three major sections—1) An Alternative: Carol Gilligan and Her Articulation of an Ethics of Care, 2) A Challenge: Reconciliation of an Ethics of Care with a Justice-Based Ethics, and 3) Beyond Nation-States: Towards a Just and Caring World [all titled by the author of this report]. In each section, she argued as follows.

1) An Alternative: Carol Gilligan and Her Articulation of an Ethics of Care

In her controversial book *In a Different Voice* (1982), a psychologist Carol Gilligan questioned Lawrence Kohlberg’s male-centered assertion regarding moral reasoning. She argued that women reason not less well but differently, because they, unlike men, value connections with others as the single most important determinant in moral reasoning. Gilligan represented Kohlberg’s model as reflecting a justice-based ethics, while representing her own as reflecting an ethics of care. In stark contrast to a justice-based ethics, a care ethics is characterized by its presupposition of a relational self—a self always standing in relationships of dependence and interdependence, an inherently contextual mode of reasoning sensitive to emotions, and a conditional justification of partial judgments. Due to such sensitivity to the actual inequalities, although Gilligan was criticized for being quasi-essentialist, an ethics of care rang true for many women who had been instilled with a justice-based ethics while exposed to a care ethics in their everyday lives and learning to reason on its ground.

2) A Challenge: Reconciliation of an Ethics of Care with a Justice-Based Ethics

For Prof. Kittay as a feminist scholar, reconciliation between these two ethics has been an intellectual challenge. Taking the fact of human dependency as a starting point was the key to reconciling these two ethics. This fact has been disregarded in the traditional theories of justice, which in turn helped to exclude two kinds of people from the scope of the theories. One of them is inevitable dependents, such as infants, children, the frail elderly, and those with various diseases or/and disabilities. The other one is caregivers who are overwhelmingly women because care-giving remains female responsibilities. Because of the very nature of care-giving, a caregiver would be plunged into constructed dependency unless she is reciprocated. Here, distinction between these two kinds of dependency is crucial. While inevitable dependency is a part of our human nature, constructed dependency results from care-giving *unpaid*. The latter dependency is avoidable through appropriate political arrangements. Even while the existence of dependency workers is a prerequisite for human beings to survive and thrive, no one should be compelled to take up dependency work as her individual duty. Ethics of care does *not* require her to sacrifice herself permanently for the sake of her charges.

Then, a third party and society at large should support dependency workers in her care-giving. In order to morally oblige these otherwise-oppressive privies to perform this collective responsibility, three epistemological turns are needed—(1) a reconceptualization of equality that recognizes human dependency, (2) our recognition of the fundamental contributions of inevitable dependency to human society, and (3) a reconceptualization of reciprocity based on the fact of human inevitable dependency. These turns could be symbolized by the maxim, “We are all some mother’s child.” Given that inevitable dependents cannot reciprocate, public support for dependency workers is especially required. But, with the third epistemological turn, this collective responsibility would be framed in terms of reciprocation. Prof. Kittay named this conception of reciprocity *doulia* after the postpartum caretaker, the doula, who cares for the mother who has just given birth so that the mother can herself care for the infant.

3) Beyond Nation-States: Towards a Just and Caring World

Conceptions of justice starting with a care ethics should expand its scope beyond nation-states. Considering the delegation of care-giving to women less-well-off and the consequent migration of caregivers, this expansion in scope is urgent. This transnational delegation most burdens the poorest women of the most devastated nations. Moreover, while the delegation and migration is caused by both the need *for* caregivers and the need *of* these women, the latter is created by global injustice, such as perpetuated structural poverty in

developing nations. This means that the society based on a public care ethics not global in scope can secure “doulia rights,” i.e., rights to receive care and to be supported in her care-giving, only for its citizens and only by unjustly denying doulia rights of caregivers from abroad. If *all* including those whose doulia rights are currently denied by global injustice are to attain doulia rights, we need to consider what counts as a just world, a consideration within the realm of theories of justice. Thus, though an ethics of care was placed in opposition to a justice-based ethics in its first articulation, they now complement each other. We need both a just caring at home and a caring global justice.

The lecture was followed by these three questions: (1) Even when a caregiver is a transparent-self, wouldn't there still be an occasional conflict between a caregiver and a cared-for? (2) What distinguishes the cases requiring a broad definition of care from those demanding a narrow definition possibly referring to dependency work? (3) What distinguishes dominance and dependency both involving relationship of unequal power?

The answer to the first question was that though or because possibilities for such a conflict remain, it is important to see the completion of the care with a cared-for receiving the care graciously. As for the second question, Prof. Kittay explained that while care in its narrowest sense would require sensitivity to uniqueness of each case, care in a broad sense is necessary politically for organizing, in cooperation with housewives engaging in unpaid labor, to remind the society of the extent of the social contributions of care-giving. On the distinction between dominance and dependency, she observed that if a caregiver imposes on a cared-for what she thinks the cared-for needs, it would be dominance in theory. But, in practice, it is extremely difficult to distinguish them.

Postscript:

Highly-sophisticated and thought-provoking, but engaging, empathic and touching nevertheless, her lecture completely captivated me. Moreover, it obliged me to consider how i could contribute daily to the realization of such a just and caring world. Though her audience's responses might differ, i am sure that i was not alone in having a sense of the world turned upside down with her on-going intellectual challenge that never forgets to keep both feet on the ground and values the importance of care in constructing a just world.

By Tobihiko Komatsu (a Ph. D. student at Graduate School of American Studies at Doshisha University)

(Responsibility for the final content of this report rests entirely with the author)