Abstract: In this paper I consider what may seem an “accidental” family relationship and stress its worrying attributes for contemporary family life. While we have made strides in being willing and able to “queer” kinship relationships, another frontier remains in thinking about the family. Not all forms of family relations are kinship or quasi-kinship relationships. I refer to a kind of family relationship that remains very largely invisible: that between the household’s kin and their domestic servants. Throughout most of the twentieth century writers about the family came to think of such relationships as unimportant because they were an historical curiosity, their resurgence re-raises unresolved and serious questions about the ethics and politics of the contemporary family. The important questions that I want to raise are these: if the family should serve as a school for justice, then what does the presence of servants teach? Historically and in contemporary terms, what does the nature of servitude have to do with autonomy and dependency? The paper involves a consideration of these questions in the eighteenth century as a way to provoke our current thinking.

1. Introduction

In this paper, I want to consider what may seem an “accidental” family relationship and stress its worrying attributes for contemporary family life. While we have made strides in being willing and able to “queer” kinship relationships, another frontier remains in thinking about the family. Not all forms of family relations are kinship or quasi-kinship relationships. I refer to a kind of family relationship that remains very largely invisible: that between the household’s kin and their domestic servants. Throughout most of the twentieth century, writers about the family came to think of such relationships as unimportant because they were an historical curiosity, their resurgence re-raises unresolved and serious questions about the ethics and politics of the contemporary family.¹

¹ A thorough investigation of this question would require as well to think about the legacy of slavery in the USA. Domestic servitude among African Americans also continued through the first half of the twentieth century, and these accounts inform American culture in deep and
Political theorists still draw upon a canon of texts for their inspiration; though putting questions such as the ones raised in this paper to the theorists often requires that we return and reread their bodies of work more widely. Still, I shall somewhat follow my sub-discipline’s practice here.

So let us begin by setting the question. John Stuart Mill wrote, “The true virtue of human beings is fitness to live together as equals […].” We may well ask, what makes us fit to live together as equals? Within the history of political thought, virtually no one has doubted that the family is the basic institution that underpins society; as Hegel put it, family as ethical root. But the question of how family order is related to political order has followed two distinctive routes: for some, the family is an institution apart from the household, for example, to Aristotle or Hegel; for most others, the family is viewed as a form of association in which citizens (whoever they may be) learn how to conduct themselves in a way that is consistent and congruent with the kind of conduct required of them in public life.

Aristotle argued, e.g., that the political association was by its nature a relationship among equals, while the household was characterized by three kinds of relationships that are, by their nature, unequal: the relationship of husband to wife, parent to child, and master to slave. Hegel also believed that the relationships in a household are different from the ones found in the public spheres of law, economics, and politics. The ideology of “separate spheres” which informed much of nineteenth and twentieth century American writing about the family also maintained these differences, and like Hegel, posited a rigid gender division on these separate spheres. Some recent writers have also posited the family as a different kind of institution, for example, Christopher Lasch’s portrayal of the family as a “haven in a heartless world,” and Michael profound ways. Consider Toni Morrison’s depiction of household servants and slaves, e.g., in The Bluest Eye: A Novel, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970, and Beloved: A Novel, New York: Knopf, 1987. In this essay I will not consider the relationship of servants to slaves in much detail. Raffaella Sarti’s distinction in the Servant Project might help us here; for Sarti, while servants like slaves may be forced into service, slaves cannot exit. (see R. Sarti, “Conclusion. Domestic Service and European Identity,” in S. Pasleau and I. Schopp (eds.), Proceedings of the Servant Project, Liège: Editions de l’Université de Liège, 2005.) This is not to say that “exit” options are easy for servants, either, but the changing circumstance of exit options may in fact be one of the more important differences between contemporary servitude and past forms of servitude. This question is discussed below.


4 Hegel, Philosophy of Right.

Walzer’s description of the household as a realm of “kinship and love.” Some of the arguments about the relationship of the family to the polity have had a largely strategic quality. For example, Locke’s famous distinction between paternal and political authority was meant to undermine the royalist patriarchalism of Filmer, but in his other writings, Locke displayed an interesting sensitivity to the problems of the moral effect of family on children (and, thus, if we expect some continuity from morality to politics, this idea reoccurs).7

On the other hand, many other writers have viewed the family as an institution that is parallel to the state and in which relationships are formed that carry over into political life. Plato’s abolition of the family among his guardian class in the Republic speaks to the strength that he saw in family ties, undesirable though he thought they were, politically.8 More explicit arguments about the ways in which the household functions as the school for citizens became increasingly widespread in the eighteenth century. They also informed the “separate spheres” arguments of the nineteenth century. They became attached to the notion of republican motherhood, and to a notion of “domesticity” in which mothers served as models for children in a democratic society in the nineteenth century.

This view of the family as the school for moral development of children is, I believe, the prevalent view today. Linda McClain’s comprehensive review of arguments left and right about the family notes (as Botting did about Burke and Wollstonecraft) that while they may have different content that they think families need to instill in children, nonetheless, contemporary writers about the family all share the view that the family should serve as “seedbeds of virtue” necessary for life in a democratic society.9 Within political science, the notion that relationships of authority are learned in the household and carry over into political life has been widely held since the 1960s.10

In the end, I want to complicate this view that “democratic families” make democratic society possible. Whether this claim is true obviously depends upon what one thinks being “democratic” is about. If “democratic” means possessing “social capital,” which often means a kind of middle-class engagement in discussion and skill-building,11 then the kinds of families that will

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11  A. Lareau, Contours of Childhood: Social Class Differences in Children’s Daily Lives, Berkeley, CA:
produce this kind of “democratic citizen” will be infused with certain sets of practices and ways of being. Such practices may well rely upon the physical work of others – servants, live-in domestic workers, house-cleaners, nannies, au-pairs, baby-sitters – who free parents to engage in more “character-building” activities with their children. If, on the other hand, one believes that being “democratic” requires treating all others as equals, then such familial economic practices may have negative consequences for the development of democratic character. The question of how democratic families can be is further complicated by the fact that children, regardless of their own senses of contribution, are more dependent within families. If one has to choose between the view of the family as “the image of the state” and the view that the family is a different kind of institution, I prefer to think of it as the latter. A genuinely democratic household is, in reality, an impossibility; children are not equal to adults. The effect of claiming that it is so only serves to drive further underground the family’s undemocratic aspects. Nevertheless, I shall also in the end claim that the family’s democratic potential requires that the family be attentive to the problems of inequality among all the members, kin and non-kin, in the household.

2. The Servant problem

Some years ago, the New York Times entertained its readers with this item submitted by a reader:

Danielle Slap (age 3) was looking out the window into the backyard when she spotted a group of four deer of varying sizes. “Look,” she said. “There is a family: there’s a daddy, mommy, baby and the baby sitter.”

What the three-year old had managed to observe raises an important question for democrats in the new millennium. Are servants a part of the family? And if they are, what does this augur for our claims about the family as the basic private institution in a democratic society?

In the eighteenth century, as we shall see, servants were presumed to be a part of a household. By the end of the nineteenth century, bourgeois and socialist writers all recognized the “servant problem,” in part a consequence of greater educational opportunities for those who might previously have been members

of the servant class. By the mid-twentieth century, few households in Europe or America hired servants any longer. But by the end of the twentieth century, there was an increasing trend, throughout Europe and in the USA, to hire domestic servants again. The question I pursue in this paper is how we should think, politically and ethically, about the return of the domestic servant.\textsuperscript{14}

We might think that, in a democratic society, it is problematic to construct an intimate setting in which some people are masters and others are servants. Whatever democracy might mean, it should not begin with the assumption that some are masters and some are servants. But does the practice of hiring domestic servants necessarily require such a breach of the assumption of equality?

To make such an argument, we would need to unpack the assumptions contained within it. We would need to think systematically about the nature of equality. We would need to explore the relationship of intimate institutions such as families and public practices of equality, or to put the point in familiar terms, the relationships of the spheres of public and private. And we would need also to think through questions about who serves whom, for if our assumptions about who should serve permanently mark some people as suited only for the roles as servants, then the problem might be a more serious one than it at first seems.

First, I want to make clear that I am defining “family” not in terms of a set of kin relationships, nor in terms of a physical locus, a household, but in terms of a kind of dispositional activity, caring, which takes place within the household. So too, the family is not the only institution in which practices of care take place, but in its historical manifestations, what we usually understand the family to do is to take care of the basic needs of life of its members.

Caring need not be democratic, and it usually is not. Care givers are usually powerful enough to define care in a way that will undermine the care receiver’s account of care. Needy care receivers are all too often at the mercy of those who provide them with care. Indeed, if we accept the premise that we should care in ways that enhance democracy, we come to bear the burden of making plausible the claim that we can care democratically at all. Many care relationships are not relationships of equality. Humans are not equal in their capacities, especially if we include those who are too young, too infirm, too frail, within the society.

Historically, democratic theorists and democratic practices solved this problem of undemocratic care by excluding those who were “dependent” (and thus accounted not fully rational) from being citizens. For the ancients, these exclusions extended to slaves and women. In the modern period, the struggles of democratic societies have been to expand those who are included

\textsuperscript{14} I had previously explored some dimensions of this question in J. Tronto, “The ‘Nanny Question’ in Feminism,” \textit{Hypatia}, 17 (2001), pp. 34–51.
as full citizens; property-less and working class men, and eventually women, were added to the franchise. But in a way, by leaving care behind the wall created through a rigid modern separation of public and private life, democratic societies continue to practice a kind of exclusion. Simply shutting the door on the modern, private, household, however, is no way to solve the problem of the inequality intrinsic to many forms of necessary care. On the other hand, simply assuming that if we are democrats, then the families that we fashion will be appropriate and congruent democratic institutions is an equally treacherous mistake.

3. The Eighteenth Century

The servant problem had a contentious history at the time when arguments for democratic forms began to re-emerge in eighteenth century Europe. As Ellen Hunt Botting thus summarized her findings about Rousseau, Burke, and Wollstonecraft:

They each held differing conceptions of the best structure of the family, and deploy their respective ideals of the family toward supporting divergent political ends. Yet their view of the moral, social and political function of the family remains fundamentally the same: each highlights the crucial role of the family in cultivating the affectivity necessary for human moral development and the formation of human social and civic identities.15

While in our reading of the eighteenth century we notice the common theme of cultivating affectivity, eighteenth century authors might have put the point differently. For them, it was a question about whether a sufficiently wide portion of the population was capable of achieving the autonomy necessary for becoming citizens in a new republic.

4. Rousseau

As someone whose autobiographical writings describe in some detail the indignities that he suffered as a servant, Rousseau knew intimately the stinging harm to the self that dependency can create. As John Charvet long ago argued, Rousseau’s writings were largely animated by his desire to avoid

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dependency. Following Charvet, the still convincing argument made by Judith Shklar is that Rousseau’s great texts in political theory can be organized around the theme of dependency. In *The Social Contract*, Rousseau defines the problem he wishes to address as this one:

The problem is to find a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before.

The solution, Rousseau famously argues, is

These clauses, properly understood, may be reduced to one – the total alienation of each associate, together with all his rights, to the whole community; for, in the first place, as each gives himself absolutely, the conditions are the same for all; and, this being so, no one has any interest in making them burdensome to others. Moreover, the alienation being without reserve, the union is as perfect as it can be, and no associate has anything more to demand: for, if the individuals retained certain rights, as there would be no common superior to decide between them and the public, each, being on one point his own judge, would ask to be so on all; the state of nature would thus continue, and the association would necessarily become inoperative or tyrannical.

Finally, each man, in giving himself to all, gives himself to nobody; and as there is no associate over whom he does not acquire the same right as he yields others over himself, he gains an equivalent for everything he loses, and an increase of force for the preservation of what he has.

He continues,

Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and, in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole.

What Rousseau proposes is a kind of equality that requires a common “general will” within each. While we are all dependent upon this general will, then, none of us are dependent upon others.

19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., I.6.9.
If we cannot create such a perfectly legitimate political state, though, then Rousseau proposes that we imagine the recreation of a free, non-dependent person in *Emile*. Emile is tutored by a man who never punishes nor restricts the freedom of his ward. Emile learns about the world, but remains free and independent. The tutor, of course, is an interesting figure; we may well wonder why he has been willing to surrender so many years of his life to the task of raising Emile. It is almost as if the tutor is as selfless as a mother; he is a non-female mother. Thus, Rousseau’s fantasy of a man-child raised without ever experiencing dependency can come to be so.

As many commentators have noticed, though, there is a price to pay for Emile’s independence. Sophie, the mate fashioned for Emile, is by her nature dependent, as are all women, on her “needs and desires” for him. As Rousseau patiently explains gender and sex difference to us in Book V of *Emile*:

> Men and women are made for each other, but their mutual dependence differs in degree; man is dependent on woman through his desires; woman is dependent on man through her desires, and also through her needs; he could do without her better than she can do without him. She cannot fulfill her purpose in life without his aid, without his goodwill, without his respect; she is dependent on our feelings, on the price we put upon her virtue, and the opinion we have of her charms and her deserts. Nature herself has decreed that woman, both for herself and her children, should be at the mercy of man’s judgment.

If women are dependent upon their husbands, it is clear that Rousseau’s unanswered question in the *Social Contract*, can women participate actively in politics, is no. Such dependent creatures would have no capacity to discern and apply themselves to the general will, and indeed,

To cultivate the masculine virtues in women and to neglect their own is evidently to do them an injury. Women are too clear-sighted to be thus deceived;

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when they try to usurp our privileges they do not abandon their own; with this result: they are unable to make use of two incompatible things, so they fall below their own level as women, instead of rising to the level of men.22

What then, might the families in the *Social Contract* society be like, and how will they contribute to men’s autonomy? The discussion of gender roles suggests that the family will bolster a man’s sense of autonomy by creating for him a relationship of dependency, *but not his*, in the household. Furthermore, since he will come to see his role as that of defender of his household, he will be able to make judgments about others, learning there to exercise the kinds of judgments he will need to make in public life. In his novel *Julie*, St. Preux reports that in the glorified republican Swiss canton of Valais, “the family is the image of the state.”23 As Botting describes it,

Rousseau wanted the rural family to act as a “small fatherland” in which the natural affections between family members would inspire the practice of the *moeurs*, or moral codes, necessary for the smooth functioning of an authentic republic grounded on popular sovereignty.24

That Rousseau’s account of the family is highly gendered, and patriarchal, is obvious. But what about the role of servants?

Here, Rousseau’s efforts to avoid dependency are also in evidence. Rousseau himself had suffered deep indignities in his life when he worked as a servant. Recounting the tale of an evening in which Rousseau was serving at a dinner party and spoke to correct a guest’s comment about his master’s heraldic motto, his recent biographer Leopold Damrosch comments, somewhat hyperbolically, “It was as if a piece of furniture had spoken up.”25 While in his ideal Rousseau might have imagined a life without servants, there is scant evidence of it. He does include this exclamation in the “Profession of Faith of a Savoyard Vicar” passage of *Emile*: “We will be our own servants, in order to be our own masters.”26 Many commentators have taken Rousseau on his word at this point, for example Judith Shklar, who observes:

If in Rousseau’s case apprenticeship, vagrancy and domestic service did not lead to a rejection of all authority, they did fill him with a deep contempt for all the cruel and incompetent masters of this world, in fact for all actual masters. Being themselves corrupt, they can only maim and hurt those doomed to serving

23 Quoted by Botting, *Family Feuds*, p. 42.
them. The reason why servants cheat and steal is that the masters are usurpers, liars, and fools.  

But in his actual portrayals of households in his novels, Rousseau does not envision a household without servants. In the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, Wolmar’s relationships with the servants are discussed at length. And again in *Julie*, St. Preux’s account of the household in the Valois recounts that, while master and servant kept those roles most of the time, they were permitted to sit at the dinner table. If the servants are sitting at the table, though, who then waited on the tables? St. Preux continued, that the wife and daughters of the household “wait at table like domestics.”

It is possible, as Ellen Hunt Botting has done, to put a more positive spin on this role for women as servants and servants more generally. In Rousseau’s households, servants are not really servile because masters are not, like most masters, corrupt boors who lord their position over their servants. Indeed, in many eighteenth century households, servants were not servile in the ways that retainers were in large noble houses. They were apprentices and general helpers, and wives sometimes also participated in the household work. From this standpoint, the role of the servants is to see themselves as working within the context of a larger good, that of the household. Whether we find this account convincing does depend to some extent on our view of the autonomy/dependency discussion. Here, servants are being asked to sacrifice for the “greater good” of the harmonious household. Under what conditions should such a sacrifice be enough for servants? In reality, historians have suggested that some servants in the eighteenth century did end up creating some greater opportunities for themselves through working as servants.

5. Wollstonecraft

In the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, a more egalitarian account of the family, and its effect on the prospects for a democratic society, emerge. As with Burke and Rousseau, Wollstonecraft viewed the family as a critical institution for creating the proper virtues of public life.

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30 Sarti, *Domestic Service*.
Why then do philosophers look for public spirit? Public spirit must be nurtured by private virtue, or it will resemble the factitious sentiment which makes women careful to preserve their reputation, and men their honour.\textsuperscript{32}

Wollstonecraft's basic argument, that men's "tyranny" produced women's non-virtuous, "cunning" ways of dealing with men,\textsuperscript{33} suggested to her this principle: "Let woman share the rights, and she will emulate the virtues of man."\textsuperscript{34} Wollstonecraft describes at length how women's dependence on attracting a husband distorts their nature and makes them less capable of virtue. She proposes early co-education for all children, hoping to create some conditions early for companionable marriages.

Wollstonecraft had herself worked as a governess, and was well familiar with the difficult lives of domestics. She was writing at a time when a majority of the middle class households had servants, and she did not argue that service could be abolished. What she did suggest, however, was that servants could be treated with respect, indeed she averred in her Journey to Scandinavia, "I do not know of a more agreeable sight than to see servants part of a family."\textsuperscript{35} But servants were not "one of the family," and Wollstonecraft recognized that servants were often treated unjustly. "The treatment of servants in most countries, I grant, is very unjust; and in England, that boasted long of freedom, it is often extremely tyrannical."\textsuperscript{36} The danger is that young servants would often misunderstand their proper role, and treat children in the household with "false respect and flattery."\textsuperscript{37} The other side of the problem was also one that Wollstonecraft observed, women who treated servants inappropriately thereby passed this attitude on to their children:

One striking instance of the folly of women must not be omitted. The manner in which they treat servants in the presence of children, permitting them to suppose that they ought to wait on them, and bear their humours. A child should always be made to receive assistance from a man or woman as a favour; and, as the first lesson of independence, they should practically be taught, by the example of their mother, not to require that personal attendance, which it is an insult to humanity to require, when in health; and instead of being led to assume airs of consequence, a sense of their own weakness should first make them feel the natural equality of man.\textsuperscript{38}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p. 318.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 319.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Quoted in Sapiro, \textit{A Vindication of Political Virtue}, pp. 105–6.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Sapiro, \textit{A Vindication of Political Virtue}, p. 108.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Revs. 1790: 310; quoted by Sapiro, \textit{A Vindication of Political Virtue}, p. 107.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Wollstonecraft, \textit{A Vindication of the Rights of Woman}, p. 314.
\end{itemize}
Equally seriously, servants would respond to such unjust treatment in the same way that women respond to men, by developing “cunning” in the place of virtue.  

Thus, while the details of their accounts are quite different, both Rousseau and Wollstonecraft share the view that the nature of the family can have a profound effect on the development of public virtue. The more republican the family, the more republican the resulting society. This notion of republican virtue as fostered in the family became a leading theme in the discussion of the relationship of household to polity throughout much of the early decades of the American republic, and persists in many forms until the present day. The presence of servants was viewed as an especially serious problem, for in the corruption of masters (Rousseau) or ease of learning to manipulate others rather than treat them with dignity (Wollstonecraft), the “servant problem” threatened republican and democratic traditions.

6. The Contemporary Re-emergence of Domestic Service

After its long decline throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, domestic service is once again on the rise. Early in the twentieth century, “the servant problem” was not only the concern of bourgeois women who discussed it frequently, but of socialists who took a different approach. For socialists, the disappearance of domestic servants would result both from the egalitarian commitment to wider education, and the capacity of new technologies and collective forms of organization to make domestic work less arduous. Regardless of whether the argument was that domestic work was a burden for the workers or for the employers, it seemed to have fallen out of favor.

It is surprising then to note that domestic service is once again on the rise. In the exhaustive analyses of the Servant Project, Raffaella Sarti and her collaborators identified some important shifts in the nature of servants from the eighteenth and nineteenth century to the present. Most importantly, while servants in the eighteenth century were marked primarily by age (they were young people who worked as servants before they created their own families), and in the nineteenth and early twentieth century by age, class, and increasingly, gender, by the contemporary period, what distinguishes servants are their class, gender, and nationality.

41 Sarti, *Domestic Service*, p. 7.
In what way might our earlier explorations of how domestic service embodies the relationship of autonomy/dependency help us to make sense of the moral and political effects of contemporary domestic service? There are a number of ways in which our analysis might prove helpful.

First, we might note an important difference between contemporary and past servitude. Whereas service “opened” households in the past, and where service was a temporary employment during one part of the life cycle rather than a permanent status (in Europe), this is no longer the case. An important feature that distinguishes contemporary forms of servitude from past forms is that servitude is increasingly marked by race, class, gender, nationality, ethnicity, and language. The result is that some of the fluidity that might have characterized earlier forms of servancy have now solidified.

As Sarti observed, in the past, the effects of domestic service on the servant were not one-sided. In the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century, being a servant was often a route for improving one’s social or economic situation. So too current servants negotiate positive and negative features of their situation. We might begin by noting that some good effect does come to the women and men who place themselves in situations of transnational domestic service. In some ways and in some cases, service abroad allows men and women to make better provision for their children who they have left at home. For many who retain ties to or who have left families in their home countries, they are able to return home to display an enviable kind of life. While it is a great hardship for women to leave their children, remittances make up a large percentage of the balance of payments of sending countries and many countries have national policies that favor training care workers to go abroad. There is evidence that the money sent back by women who have sojourned abroad improves the quality of the education that their children receive; the UN Population Report discovered that “56% of female remittances were used for daily needs, healthcare or education.”

What does it mean to think of these individuals’ choices from the standpoint of autonomy and dependency? On the one hand, subjecting oneself to such humiliating treatment is a kind of submission. On the other hand, though, leaving one’s home, traveling abroad, also appear to be acts of some degree of autonomy. (We leave aside the question of those who have been

42 Ibid., p. 12.
43 I prefer not to use the language of “global care chain” because this language restricts and naturalizes our views of the women and men in the “chain” as mothers.
coerced or tricked into such service, whose autonomy and freedom have clearly been compromised.) Yet to what extent does it make sense to use such language as “choice” when an individual confronts a global “necessity” such as the need for money, and is schooled in a society (such as the Philippines) that encourages such “service”? The question of “choice” is thus more complex perhaps than simply describing a situation of poverty versus wealth, or the absence of coercion in making a decision to migrate.

We can point to ways in which domestic workers are exploited today, as they were in the eighteenth century. Domestic workers are often treated poorly and discriminated against. Increasingly, because they are so exploitable, transnational migrants who are not citizens are sought out as the preferred domestic servants. As the feminist geographer Linda McDowell has indicated, often the person brought into the home to care for children brings values, ideals, practices, and languages from a different class (to say nothing of a different culture), and there is an assumption that the mother’s role is not only to pay this worker but to manage the ways in which the children are raised.

Domestic workers, especially those who are most vulnerable, receive low wages. Although they are expected to be “one of the family,” they realize that they are not one of the family, and they suffer indignities and hardships to live in this manner. Mary Romero wrote extensively about the complications of being a “Maid in the USA,” and in her subsequent work, she has found the situation for domestic workers has not improved. Romero concludes:

While intimate relationships between employees and employers have been material for novels, films, and myths, studies indicate that such relationships are much more exploitative than personally or financially rewarding to workers. Rather than treatment as ‘one of the family,’ the occupation is characterized by everyday rituals of verbal and spatial deference.

But the fact that domestic work is perceived as lowly, even as working class, does not yet make its choice a violation of one’s autonomy. But perhaps that perception is a correct one, after all. Bridget Anderson observes that

The employment of a paid domestic worker facilitates status reproduction, not only by maintaining status objects, enabling the silver to be polished or the

clothes to be ironed, but also by serving as a foil to the lady of the house. The hired productive worker is reproducing social beings and relationships that are not merely not her own but also deeply antagonistic to her own interests. Her presence emphasizes and reinforces her employer’s identity – as a competent household manager, as middle-class, as white – and her own as its opposite.49

Feminist theorists who have written about “relational autonomy” emphasize that sometimes decisions that appear to be the result of a choice may nonetheless violate one’s autonomy. As Carolyn McLeod and Susan Sherwin explain this perspective:

Whereas traditional accounts concern themselves only with judging the ability of the individual to act autonomously in the situation at hand, relational autonomy asks us to take into account the impact of social and political structures, especially sexism and other forms of oppression, on the lives and opportunities of individuals. In particular, a relational view of autonomy encourages us to understand that the best way of responding to oppression’s restrictive influence on an individual’s ability to act autonomously is to change the oppressive conditions of her life, not to try to make her better adapt to (or simply to manage to “overcome”) those conditions privately.50

Perhaps we should be impressed with this irony. In making a decision to leave one’s own country or community, one acts in a way, which though a free choice, is a constrained choice. If this is a challenge to autonomy, though, the result is more so. To be so deeply ensconced in a different private sphere, one where one is deeply dependent, discloses the moral difficulty of thinking of these new global servants as autonomous. Whatever else autonomy might mean, it has to involve the kind of freedom that Philip Petit describes as the freedom from domination.

In a recent discussion in which he tries to describe the nature of the loss of freedom, Philip Pettit distinguishes between the harms of non-interference and domination. Interference with one’s wishes, for example, by a city ordinance that prevents one from making too much noise late at night, is not a significant a form of violation of liberty, Pettit argues, as one that produces domination. Domination is worse, Pettit argues, because it makes us into a different kind of person, one who is dependent upon others. Such dependence distorts who we can be as humans. So, Pettit, following Quentin Skinner, argues:

49 Quoted by Romero, Unraveling Privilege, p. 1661.
The person who is dominated will tend to second-guess the wishes of the dominator, wanting to keep him or her on side and to restrict their own options accordingly. In the traditional language, they will tend to toady and fawn, bow and scrape, placate and ingratiate—in a word, abase themselves; furthermore, they will censor everything they say and do, tailoring it to an assuaging effect.\footnote{51}

From the standpoint of servants, then, they are constructed so that they shall not think of themselves as the equals of the members of the household. Servants cannot meet Mill’s challenge to think of others as equals.

Yet, from the standpoint of the role of the family in creating a democratic society, a second effect remains to be explored. The service relationship not only creates a servant, it also creates a master, or a set of masters. This side of the situation has also attracted moral condemnation.

Transnational commodified care is undemocratic because when immigrants are care workers, they become marked, as the anthropologists put it, with the stigma of care work. They are viewed as part of a feminized, multicultural work force. They are distinctive because they are marked by a brutalized or privatized form of work,\footnote{52} and the work they do becomes marked because it is done by those who are brutalized or privatized.\footnote{53}

From the standpoint of justice in a democratic society, we should also be careful of such markings of people as the appropriate ones to do banal work. Such marking of the multiculturals, even by dress, persist wherever a class of servants exist. They are different people in different regions and historical eras, but they are clearly designated as appropriate to do servile work and are marked by race, color, religion, creed, accent, national origin, and so forth. Audre Lorde recounted in her volume, \textit{Sister/Outsider}: “I wheel my two-year-old daughter in a shopping cart through a supermarket in Eastchester in 1967, and a little white girl riding past in her mother’s cart calls out excitedly, ‘Oh


\footnote{52}{It would be possible to create a long list of examples of such “marking.” Consider, for example the stigma among American teenagers in working with food (see D. Johnson, “For Teenagers, Fast Food is a Snack, Not a Job,” \textit{New York Times}, 8 January 2001, A1, A13). This pattern of marking and its consequences may be more severe for the least qualified care workers, but it also affects doctors and nurses as well. One in six British health care workers reported being bullied, especially by immediate supervisors, but among ethnic minorities the number increased to three in ten (International Centre for Human Resources in Nursing, \textit{Workplace Bullying in the Health Sector}, Geneva: International Center for Human Resources in Nursing, 2008.)}}

\footnote{53}{If the argument seems circular here, it is because it is. The question of whether “women’s work” is devalued because women do it or if it is only available to women because it is undesirable work is a similar conundrum.}
American culture often places the multicultural person in the place of a servant whose role is to placate the concerns of white Americans who increasingly rely on such support. \(^{55}\)

Yet the harm of such marking is multi-faceted. In the first place, it signals that marked people are better suited for care work, and thus, are not equals. This is a serious danger in a democratic society.

Barbara Ehrenreich observes that this has especially bad effects on children who learn that they do not need to learn to clean up after themselves:

To be cleaned up after is to achieve a certain magical weightlessness and immateriality. Almost everyone complains about violent video games, but paid housecleaning has the same consequence—abolishing effect: you blast the villain into a mist of blood droplets and move right along; you drop the socks knowing they will eventually levitate, laundered and folded, back to their normal dwelling place. The result is a kind of virtual existence, in which the trail of litter that follows you seems to evaporate all by itself. A servant economy breeds callousness and solipsism in the served, and it does so all the more effectively when the service is performed close up and routinely in the place where they live and reproduce. \(^{56}\)

One of the elements of this harm that Barbara Ehrenreich stresses is that it is exacerbated by being privatized and carried out in the household. As I have argued elsewhere, \(^{57}\) I also believe that the moral dimensions of exploitation of workers are worse in the household. This is so because household work is often not viewed as work at all, and household workers who do care work produce more intimate relationships than those produced in other kinds of work environments. Michael Walzer writes:

The principles that rule in the household are those of kinship and love. They establish the underlying pattern of mutuality and obligation, or authority and obedience. The servants have no proper place in that pattern, but they have to be assimilated to it. \(^{58}\)

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\(^{55}\) S. Wong, “Diverted Mothering: Representations of Caregivers of Color in the Age of Multiculturalism,” in E. N. Glenn and L. R. Forcey (eds.), *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, Agency*, New York: Routledge, 1994. For another recent example, see the role of the Native American caregiver in *August/Osage County*. This play won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2008 (T. Letts, *August/Osage County*, New York: Theater Communications Group, 2008). None of the commentaries I have read have noted this aspect of the drama.


\(^{57}\) Tronto, *The “Nanny Question” in Feminism*.

\(^{58}\) Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p. 52.
What does it mean to assimilate servants to kinship and love? Feminist scholars have been more dubious than Walzer about the rule of kinship and love; nonetheless, the personalistic rule in the household makes this a work relationship that is distinctive. Insofar as domestic servants are conceived as a substitute for the wife in a traditional household, they are expected to conform to an account of their work that is only partly real “work.” “You want someone who puts the children before herself,” said Judy Meyers, 37, a mother of two in Briarcliff Manor, N.Y., who works for a health insurance company. “But to find someone for the right amount of money is not so easy.” As Hondagneu-Sotelo observes, employers were often shocked to realize that their child care workers were “only in it for the money.” The solipsism that Ehrenreich describes is a kind of blindness that affects everyone in the employing household. One of the effects of such a self-referential view on other people is surely the diminishment of moral capacity.

7. Conclusion

What does it mean to be returning to an era in which domestic service is on the rise, marked by race, class, gender, nationality, ethnicity and language, and in which we have become inured to the complexity of the dynamic between autonomy and dependency? If, as Sarti suggested, the servants are now becoming more of a permanent serving class, what does that mean for the ways in which such servants think of themselves as democratic equals? If, as Botting suggested, the key issue that emerged from the eighteenth century “culture wars” about the family were about the kinds of affectivities children learned, then what does it mean that children now learn “callousness and solipsism” in their pursuit of the individual identities as consumers? If we take seriously the notion of the household as the training ground for public life, then our current models of household life and the casual presence of servants bodes ill for our democratic future. Given these “habits of the heart,” we will have our future work cut out for us in trying to produce moral and genuinely democratic citizens.

On the other hand, perhaps we should reject the model of the household as training ground. The best we might be able to hope for in households are more democratic forms of care, to embody the principles of expecting

humans to distinguish their genuine needs from their whims, and to expect, furthermore, that everyone in the household should be involved in addressing the caring needs of the people there. Whether “respect” can exist without “equality” is the underlying problem here. It raises the same deep concerns here as when it arises elsewhere in political theory.

Such issues need a longer discussion elsewhere. For my purposes here, though, I hope I have demonstrated that the problem of servants is a serious one in a democratic society, and that the larger non-kin consumption-oriented family (like those four deer: mommy, daddy, baby, and babysitter) requires our serious intellectual attention.

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