CHAPTER 1

Human Dependency, Justice, and Christian Love

Dependency is a central aspect of human existence. We begin life ensconced within and dependent upon the body of another human person, using her body as a source of nutrients, oxygen, warmth, and space. When we emerge into the world as a separate body, we remain utterly dependent upon other human beings to feed us, to keep us warm, to hold us, to talk to and socialize us, to protect us from harm. We are bodily dependent again when we are sick, or when we are disabled, and if we live to old age, we are often dependent on others in the frailty of our final years. And at those points in our lives when we seem most autonomous, we nevertheless remain deeply dependent on others in countless ways that we often fail to acknowledge.

Because dependency is central to human existence, so are relations of dependent care: relations between caregivers and small children, persons with disabilities (permanent or temporary), or frail elderly persons. In fact, such relations take up the bulk of human moral effort, and they are deeply complex. However, as feminist theorists in various fields have shown, much recent Western thought reflects a marginalization of human dependency and dependent care.[1] In keeping with the modern valuation

[1] In economics, see, for example, Nancy Folbre, *The Invisible Heart: Economics and Family Values* (New York: New Press, 2001), and *Valuing Children: Rethinking the Economics of the Family* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); in political science, Mona Harrington, *Care and Equality: Inventing a New Family Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000); among legal theorists, Martha Albertson Fineman, *The Autonomy Myth: A Theory of Dependency* (New York: New Press, 2004), and Joan C. Williams, *Unbending Gender: Why Work and Family Conflict and What to Do About It* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); in political philosophy, Eva Feder Kittay, *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1993), and *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); in sociology, Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild, eds., *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002).

of human equality, choice, and self-governance, emphasis has turned to human autonomy, not human dependency. The human person has been envisioned as a fully mature individual able to freely contract with other fully mature individuals. This conceptual marginalization of dependency is reflected in many economic and social structures, so that dependents and their caregivers suffer injustice. Much dependent care is sequestered in the sharply privatized family, now seen as separate and qualitatively different from the economic and political sectors of human life. Care is provided with little political and economic support, and assigned to persons with less social power.

In this book, I argue that much recent Christian ethics, like much modern and contemporary Western philosophy, social theory, and political theory, has failed to adequately address our human dependency. Similarly, dependent care relations have largely been marginalized and rendered problematic in recent understandings of Christian love. Equality is a crucial value, and Christian theology has long asserted the equality of all human persons before God – offering a stronger basis for such equality than secular bases such as rationality and autonomy. Notions of equality have been responsible for many social developments that we hold dear, including the expansion of basic economic and political rights to propertyless men, women, and persons of color, and the abolition of many forms of slavery. The link between equality and autonomy is somewhat problematic, however, because our dependency is also part of the human condition. These two realities, dependency and equality, stand in a paradoxical tension, because when we are dependent on another, there are important ways in which we are not equal to that other, and many groups of persons have had their dependency exaggerated and enforced precisely to exclude them from equality and autonomy. But in creating more egalitarian social structures, we must continue to account for that dependency that is intrinsic to human life, or else we will undercut the very equality we seek. I argue, therefore, that we must acknowledge the centrality of dependency in our theological anthropologies, our understandings of Christian love, and our conceptions of the relation between Christian love and justice. In other words, Christian theological ethics must integrate human equality with human dependency.

The marginalization of dependency within Christian ethics is an injustice to those who engage in the moral work of dependent care on a daily basis. It devalues their labor in moral terms and reinforces the political and economic devaluation of this work. But the marginalization of human dependency and relations of dependent care is also problematic

for the substance of Christian love theologies. These relations are a focal point for engaging a number of foundational issues in Christian ethics. First, questions about the role of nature – our human nature, and the natural world around us – are particularly relevant in light of dependent care relations. In terms of human nature, Christian theologians offer markedly different understandings of the moral status of our own natural inclinations and desires and our efforts to satisfy them. Are our natural inclinations a source of moral wisdom for human persons, as understood by Roman Catholic natural law theories drawing (in various ways) on the heritage of Thomas Aquinas? Or, is human nature so fallen that Christian love is defined by its radical difference from our "natural" way of loving, as for Anders Nygren or Soren Kierkegaard, for example? What are the implications of either stance for the love and devotion we may be inclined to shower on our dependents, whether they be our children, parents, or clients? Thinking in terms of dependent care relations also re-centers inquiry from the goodness or selfishness of our own inclinations to the moral valence of the inclinations of others. After all, these relations are intended to support others in meeting basic biological needs and fulfilling basic biological inclinations – most notably, the inclination to persist in being, to survive.

The work of care also draws us into the gifts, conflicts, and tragedies of the natural world. Caregivers harness nature's resources to promote the survival and flourishing of the objects of their care. They offer other living things, plants and animals, as food. They learn to facilitate the body's own healing processes and to foster natural developmental pathways. They battle against viruses, injuries, and natural disasters. They shelter their dependents within homes built from organic and inorganic materials in the world around them. They make claims on moderately scarce natural resources available to meet basic human needs. As we shall see, many Christian ethicists take an overly simplified approach to the moral implications of natural processes. Consideration of dependent care relations calls for a nuanced consideration of the moral implications of our entrenchment in the natural world.

The negotiation of natural scarcity raises a second arena within Christian ethics that takes on new dimensions in light of dependent care relations: what is the relation between love and justice? Some Christian ethicists see justice as sharply distinct from Christian love. For these thinkers, justice seeks its own, and demands its desert through merit or contract. Love, in contrast, does not think of itself and rises far beyond the demands of justice in its self-giving. Other Christian ethicists see justice

as a virtue of individual persons and do not give sufficient attention to the structures of injustice within which these virtuous individuals make their moral choices. Most contemporary Christian love theologians do not consider the relationship between love and distributive justice, although they may consider distributive justice separately from their discussions of love. From the perspective of dependent care relations, this omission is deeply problematic. Dependent caregivers do their work within unjust social, political, and economic structures, and their relative privilege or marginalization within these structures profoundly affects their capacity to meet their caring obligations. They require resources such as food, housing, health care, and labor time to provide this care. Justice helps to enable the love expressed through dependent care relations, and injustice can hinder such care or even make it impossible.

In much recent Christian love ethics, the question of distributive justice has been subsumed under the question of "special relations," or relations with kin, friends, colleagues, or other persons to whom we have a particular, intensive bond. As outlined by Gene Outka in his 1971 work, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis,* "special relations" are constituted by preference, whereas agape is constituted by abstention from preference: we love someone regardless of whether they are attractive to us or can make a return on our love.[2] The moral problem then becomes one of allocating our love among preferential and nonpreferential relations, with any decision to favor our preferential relations requiring a special form of moral justification outside of the scope of agape. Special relations are important, and yet they are also dangerous distractions from disinterested, universal agape. In other words, the distributive problem is seen solely in terms of the free choices of the individual as she allocates her moral energies among people she enjoys and people she does not. The problem of exclusion from care and community is not located within social and economic structures but is transferred to the will of the moral agent; it is not seen in terms of distribution of the concrete goods required to foster another human being's survival and flourishing, nor is it understood in terms of the allocation of one's limited time and energy among potential recipients of the labor of care. In this book, I challenge such a formulation and argue that a Christian theology of love adequate to encompass dependent care relations must understand love (particularly the element of care provision) as interdependent with justice.

[2] Gene Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972).

An analysis of Christian love in terms of dependency and care is made more urgent by the contemporary phenomenon of "global care chains." This term, coined by Arlie Russell Hochschild, refers to "a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring."[3] About half of the world's 232 million international migrants are women, and of these, an increasing number are migrating on their own (not as a part of family units) in order to serve as child care workers, cleaners, home care aides, and health care workers, or in long-term care, both in domestic and institutional settings.[4] Many of these women leave behind their own children or elderly parents in the care of other family members, neighbors, or even orphanages. In other words, care-giving labor is effectively extracted from many less-developed countries and imported to more-developed countries, in what Hochschild has dubbed a "global heart transplant."[5] And some forms of needed care are simply not available at all: the migration of health care workers has significant detrimental impacts on a range of key health care indicators in sending countries, many of which have disproportionate health care needs.[6]

This phenomenon confounds the paradigm used in so many recent Christian love theologies that contrast universal, inclusive concern with particular loves or pit the distant stranger against concern for those near and dear to us. The globalization of the social organization of care means that the problem that vexed the moderns – the problem of our moral obligations to distant persons with whom we share humanity and interact in impersonal ways – has turned in on itself, as that distant person may now be living in our home and changing our children's diapers (or our own). We cannot discern the moral requirements of this situation in terms of abstract universals, but neither can we draw upon a communitarian focus on a shared vision of the good. This is because some participants in the relevant moral relationships will not be part of our community, but will be thousands of miles away, missing their mother, or caring for the children of our nanny or home health care worker. They will be living out ways of life that embody deep cultural, economic and political differences from our own, and yet are profoundly impacted by

[3] Arlie Russell Hochschild, "Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value," in eds. W. Hutton and A. Giddens, *On the Edge: Living with Global Capitalism*" (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000), 131.
[4] Nicola Yeates, "Global Care Chains: A State-of-the-Art Review and Future Directions in Care Transnationalization Research," *Global Networks* 12, no. 1 (2012), 139.
[5] Arlie Russell Hochschild, "Love and Gold," in Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 22.
[6] Lisa Eckenwiler, "Care-worker Migration, Global Health Equity, and Ethical Place-making," *Women's Studies International Forum* 47 (2014), 213–222.

our own way of life. A contemporary Christian ethic of dependent care relations must include a conception of love that can encompass care, and must integrate Christian love with a conception of justice that is adequate to address this globalization of caregiving relations, this "global heart transplant."

There are multiple terms for (and some would say multiple forms of) Christian love: agape, eros, philia. In this book, I focus primarily on aspects of love most often captured by the word "agape," while recognizing that not every thinker means the same thing by this word. In general, though, agape connotes a steady other-regard that often comes at some cost to the self and is open to inclusion of all human persons (even if the individual Christian cannot personally show love to all human persons). Caregiving involves such other-regard and cost to the self, even when it is deeply rewarding. One of my primary concerns is the recognition of this sacrifice in caregiving relations, and the integration of justice with care such that this sacrifice, necessary to the continuation of human life itself, is not disproportionately assigned to certain groups to their severe detriment. I am also concerned that care be recognized more fully as moral work. Put differently, I focus more on love as the sort of active benevolence highlighted in the parable of the Good Samaritan than on love as the spiritual communion highlighted in the Johannine literature. Dependent care is also frequently rewarding, and the love that emerges in dependent care relations can express the sort of deep, spiritual, affective, affirming, mutual, and erotic aspects that are highlighted by many Christian thinkers. I do not deny the importance of these dimensions of Christian love, but my primary focus is elsewhere. The justice I seek in dependent care relations can, in fact, make precisely this sort of rich, rewarding connection possible.

Christian Love as Inclusive, Extravagant Care

I will not develop a comprehensive or systematic account of Christian love in this book. Rather, I affirm that any adequate account of Christian love must be able to incorporate relations of dependent care. This is true because of the centrality of such relations in human life, and because Jesus's own account of Christian love, offered in the parable of the Good Samaritan, highlights caregiving. I will assess major schools of thought on Christian love, asking how well they can account for dependency and care. This will reveal certain characteristics that must be encompassed by any adequate account of Christian love, of justice, and of the relation between love and

justice if these accounts are to inform a Christian ethic of dependent care relations.

The parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus's own explication of the meaning of Christian neighbor-love, would have been shocking to listeners in two primary respects.[7] One shocking element involves the identity of both the man who fell among thieves and the one who helped him. We have no way of knowing who, exactly, the unfortunate man is; he is naked, which leaves him "without the signs of either nationality or social status."[8] In contrast, the identity of the helper is both known and thoroughly surprising – the one who helps is a Samaritan, a group viewed with great contempt among Palestinian Jews in Jesus's time. This aspect of the parable lends itself to interpretations of Christian love that support inclusivity or universality, in the sense of unwillingness to exclude any human person, even a complete stranger or a member of a despised group. The Samaritan reaches out to one who is anonymous and could well be an enemy; Jesus's hearers are invited to imagine the actions of their own enemy as a paradigm of neighbor-love.

The second shocking element of the parable is the sheer extravagance of the care bestowed by the Good Samaritan on the unfortunate traveler. Such intensive care, calling forth gifts of time, energy, and resources, attending to the very particular needs of the individual recipient, is most often exemplified in the arena dubbed "special relations" by many recent Christian ethicists, because these relations often demand such intensive care. That is, we generally bestow this kind of care on our children, parents, or friends. We might recall the oft-noted transformation that Jesus makes to the question posed to him by his interlocutor. He is asked, "Who is my neighbor?" and he responds with the parable and a question: "Whom do you think proved neighbor to the man?" Jesus directs attention away from the object of love to the subject of love and the content of love – in effect, he asks, what does it mean to prove neighbor? The answer is clear: attending to stark human need.

Many recent treatments of Christian love focus primarily on the inclusive nature of love exemplified by the identities of the giver and the receiver in the Good Samaritan parable. Such an interpretive emphasis would seem to reflect certain characteristically modern (and profoundly important) preoccupations, including the problem of our moral obligations to persons outside of our direct circle of concern or those whom we will never

[7] See Luke 10:25–37.
[8] John R. Donahue, S.J., *The Gospel in Parable* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press: 1990), 130.

meet. However, an exclusive emphasis on the universalist dimension of agape renders problematic the second aspect of the parable, the intensity and extravagance of the Good Samaritan's care, which reflects the love expressed within dependent care relations. As several commentators have noted, the Good Samaritan could not have offered such extravagant care to every person he encountered.[9]

I argue that an adequate Christian feminist conception of agape, one that encompasses relations of dependent care, must incorporate both the universally inclusive scope and the extravagant nature of the care offered by the Good Samaritan. All persons are entitled to necessary care, and the care required for human persons to survive is extravagant care. We are deeply needy. Therefore, to meet both the inclusivity and the extravagance of Christian neighbor-love, agape must be not only a foundational question in personal ethics; it must also be a social ethic. Once we focus on fulfillment of human need, it becomes clear that no individual agent can love universally; meeting the universal needs of human beings for care requires a collective, social, political, and institutional approach. To the extent that agape is focused on providing the scarce resources of time, energy, and material goods necessary to give care to a dependent human being, it is enabled or obstructed by social, economic, and political institutions and policies governing the allocation of such resources. In this book, then, I will focus sharply on agape as a matter of social justice. This focus recognizes and honors the moral contributions of caregivers as the basic elements of a collective effort to ensure the dignity and well-being of every human person, rather than casting these care relations as distractions from a universal love.

In my focus on Christian love as action in response to need, reaching out inclusively to friends, strangers, and enemies, I highlight some particular concerns of recent Protestant love ethics. At the same time, I advocate a more Roman Catholic emphasis on the social nature of the human person and our existence in a prevoluntary web of communal relationships that, in part, define our particular moral obligations, and a Roman Catholic emphasis on the integration of love and justice. As we shall see, I argue that

[9] Gilbert Meilaender asserts that because of our inherent finitude and commitments to friends and family, a love like that shown by the Good Samaritan is "not a love fitted for society," though this makes it no less required of us. Gilbert Meilaender, *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 34. Sally Purvis notes that the Good Samaritan would not have the resources to provide this extravagant love to every person he encounters. Sally B. Purvis, "Mothers, Neighbors and Strangers: Another Look at Agape," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1991), 32n31.

a theology of love that addresses dependent care relations cannot denigrate nature to the degree that many Protestant love theologies have done, and yet it cannot rely uncritically on nature for moral wisdom to the degree that Roman Catholic love theologies have often done.

In sum, my goals in this book are threefold. First, I set out to demonstrate an inadequacy in many recent accounts of Christian love: they do not adequately account for relations of dependent care. Second, I aim to reveal some of the theological distortions introduced by the theoretical avoidance of dependency. Third, I elucidate some necessary parameters for conceptions of love and of justice that would be adequate to underwrite a Christian ethic of dependent care relations. In pursuit of these goals, the book develops a critical dialogue between recent Christian theologies of love, feminist economics, feminist political theory, and feminist political ethics of care. For the latter, the qualifier "political" is crucial. Most feminist care thinkers have moved well beyond Carol Gilligan's dyadic, gendered account of two internal, psychological moral orientations,[10] to propose an integrated account of love and justice, one that should be instantiated in concrete social, political, and economic structures that organize care relations. This necessary movement has not yet occurred within Christian ethics.

I wager that the dialogue between Christian ethics and these feminist disciplines can bring important insights to both conversations. Feminist political and economic theory helps to reveal systematic connections between the work of care and social and political structures, and thus between dependency and equality, love and justice, personal ethics and social ethics. At the same time, however, the question of the integration of equality and dependency may not be resolvable, at the most foundational level, within the parameters of secular feminist theory. In these secular feminist literatures, the integration of equality and dependency is treated as a political problem. But ultimately, the question of how we can be profoundly dependent creatures, and yet invested with a fundamental equality and dignity, is also a Christian theological question. Christian theology provides a way to affirm that we can, in fact, be dependent (on God and on each other) and equal (because loved and endowed with dignity by God) at the same time.

The work of dependent care has primarily, though certainly not exclusively, accrued to women. Women are the primary caretakers of young

[10] Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

children and of aging parents; they represent the bulk of those who provide basic, bodily care (as opposed to highly specialized and technological care) in health care settings; and they are the majority of home health care workers aiding the disabled. Within the broad category of "women," women of color, poor women, and immigrant women provide even more care and often under more exploitative conditions than do more privileged women. Accordingly, the critique of recent Christian love ethics that I undertake here is a feminist critique, and I strive for attentiveness to the many dynamics of marginalization and exploitation in dependent care relations, including dynamics of race, class, nationality, and immigration status.

A Framework for Integration: Four Forms of Equality

As I have framed my project as an integration of human equality and human dependency within Christian theologies of love and justice, let me say more about what I mean by "equality" and what I mean by "dependency." Four interrelated notions of equality can be seen operating in the debate within Christian ethics, in Western political thought, and in recent feminist revisions to the Western political tradition. Often, these levels of equality are not clearly distinguished by classical or contemporary thinkers. On one level, we find assertions of a moral equality pertaining to all human persons. This equality may be grounded in different ways by different thinkers: in theological terms, because we are all equally created by God; in terms of human rationality, which can be grounded either theologically (as in Thomas Aquinas or, arguably, Immanuel Kant) or philosophically (certainly in Kant); or, in some recent thought, in other features of our humanity such as our relationality (Eva Feder Kittay)[11] and our vulnerability (Martha Fineman).[12] In contemporary discourse (including discourse about both Christian love and justice), the notion of moral equality is also frequently linked to the term "universal": equality is something that each and every person possesses, based on some universal human characteristic, such as human rationality or relation to God.

This moral equality grounds each person's claim to the second and third sorts of equality. The second form is equality as autonomy. In much Western thought, "equality" has been conceived of largely as liberation

[11] Kittay, *Love's Labor*, especially pages 23–26, 68–71.
[12] Martha Fineman, "The Vulnerable Subject and the Responsive State," *Emory Law Journal* 60 (2011), 251–75.