

# Political liberalism and the dismantling of the gendered division of labour

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## Abstract

Women continue to be in charge of most childrearing; men continue to be responsible for most breadwinning. There is no consensus on whether this state of affairs, and the informal norms that encourage it, are matters of justice to be tackled by state action. Feminists have criticized political liberalism for its alleged inability to embrace a full feminist agenda, inability explained by political liberals' commitment to the ideal of state neutrality. The debate continues on whether neutral states can accommodate two feminist demands: to enact policies aimed at dismantling the feminization of caregiving, especially childrearing, and to compensate women for some of the disadvantages they incur by being primary care-givers. I contribute to this debate with three arguments in support of policies meant to de-gender care-giving and compensate care-givers. The first appeals to equality of opportunity to positions of advantage and justifies policies that prevent or mitigate statistical discrimination and implicit biases. The second draws attention to a possible causal relationship between the specialization of women in early childcare and misogyny; since the latter is incompatible with political liberal justice, it yields the conclusion that political liberals ought to further investigate the causal hypothesis with the aim of establishing or refuting it. The third argument concludes that legitimate childrearing prohibits adults from socializing children or, at least girls, into gender norms; it justifies duties of justice on the side of parents, educators, and economic agents, and state policies meant to offset foreseeable breaches of some of these duties.

## 1. Introduction

Women continue to be in charge of most childrearing; men continue to be responsible for most breadwinning. There is no consensus on whether this state of affairs, and the informal norms that encourage it, are matters of justice to be tackled by state action. Nor is there any consensus that they are matters of justice *sans phrase*. One position is that it can also be incumbent on individuals to refrain from internalizing or acting on unjustified gender norms (henceforth, for simplicity, “gender norms”<sup>i</sup>), or from socializing children into them. The view I defend here illustrates this position by exploring the latter possibility.

Alongside normative disagreement, there is some empirical consensus amongst scholars: women's specialization in care-giving and men's in earning income explain, by and large, the inequalities of outcome between them: In all societies, women hold a lesser aggregate share of wealth, political power and status, they have lesser opportunities on the job market, less

discretionary time, higher levels of dependency on potentially abusive spouses and are at higher risk of poverty, especially as single parents after divorce or during old age, than men<sup>ii</sup>. For egalitarians, such disparities are *prima facie* concerning because the distribution of money, power and wealth, and, plausibly, of discretionary time, is generally regarded as a matter of justice. Further, feminists believe that this division of labour is gendered, meaning that it is, to a large extent, explained by gender norms, including norms that shape economic policies and employers' expectations. According to these norms, women should be nurturing and generally accommodating of other people's needs, in touch with their emotions and self-effacing, and, on the basis of these features, be in charge of the rearing of their children and other care-giving. This is the caregiver role. Complementary, gender norms require men to be generally unemotional, competitive, self-assertive and protective, and thus in charge of their family members' economic security. This is the breadwinner role. I assume that the division of labour between women and men within the family is to some extent the result of individuals acting under the influence of such informal gender norms and, to the extent to which it is so, I call it a "gendered division of labour" (henceforth: GDL). I remain, however, agnostic about the extent of this influence, which may be exercised in different ways: (a) through institutional coercion or incentive-setting or (b) through individuals' endorsement of the norms, or (c) through the pressure exercised by other people's expectations or (d) because the behavior of individuals in (b) or (c) makes it rational for people to conform to the GDL.

Feminists have criticized political liberalism for its alleged inability to embrace a full feminist agenda, inability explained by political liberals' commitment to the ideal of state neutrality. The debate continues on whether neutral states can accommodate two feminist demands: first, to enact policies aimed at dismantling the feminization of caregiving, and especially childrearing; second, to compensate women for some of the disadvantages they incur by being primary care-givers (Okin 1994; Lloyd 1995; Chambers 2008; Hartley and Watson 2018; Schouten 2019).

I contribute to this debate with three arguments in support of a range of individual duties and state action, including policies meant to de-gender care-giving and compensate care-givers, which political liberals can endorse. The first argument appeals to the principle of equality of opportunity to positions of advantage (henceforth: EO). It justifies policies that prevent or mitigate statistical discrimination and implicit biases. The other two arguments rely on several bodies of scholarly literature whose potential to advance the debate between feminists and political liberals has not yet been exploited: the tradition of psychoanalytical feminism, recent work on misogyny, and the philosophical literature on legitimate childrearing. My second argument draws attention to a

possible causal relationship between the specialization of women in early childcare and misogyny; since the latter is incompatible with political liberal justice, it yields the conclusion that political liberals ought to further investigate the causal hypothesis with the aim of establishing or refuting it. The third argument concludes that legitimate childrearing prohibits adults from socializing children or, at the very least girls, into gender norms; it justifies duties of justice, most likely unenforceable, on the side of parents, enforceable duties of justice on the side of educators, and economic agents, and state policies meant to offset foreseeable breaches of some of these duties. My overall conclusion is compatible with the belief, held by many political liberals, that states shouldn't try and dissuade *adults* from endorsing gender norms and from leading gendered family lives. It therefore falls short of vindicating the feminist hope that political liberalism can deem the gendered division of labour as such illegitimate. It does, however, justify a prohibition from foisting gender norms on children, which significantly departs from the *status quo* and rectificatory measures.

The next section clarifies my take on the feminist project, and explains the demands of political liberalism. The third section explains why the GDL is responsible for women's diminished opportunities to positions of advantage, and for their higher risk of poverty and domination. Although they disadvantage women and, to a lesser extent, diminish men's opportunities to important goods,<sup>iii</sup> the GDL endures due to the aggregate effect of many individuals' past engagement in it. Section four explains the difficulties of justifying state action aimed at dismantling the GDL. Sections five to seven – the normative core of the paper – elaborate on so-far neglected reasons to resist GDL and its promotion through childrearing. The last section draws the implications of my views for the permissibility of the state-enacted feminist policies.

## **2. “Feminism”, “justice”, “state neutrality”**

The aims of the feminist project, as I understand it, are (a) to eliminate unjustified gender norms, and (b) to mitigate, or compensate, the disadvantages generated by these norms.

To understand “gender norms”, one needs to rely on some version of the sex-gender distinction – although not necessarily on the traditional and contested (Mikkola 2017) version according to which there are (only) two sexes. On the one hand, there is the empirical fact that individuals have differentiated sexual characteristics, such as chromosomes, the kind of gametes that bodies can produce, hormonal make-ups, and sexual morphology; for the present purposes it doesn't matter whether there “really” are only two sexes, or more. On the other hand, there are norms which create the “social meaning of sex”: the norms sort out people in two kinds (women

and men) and hold them to different standards, by encouraging them to display different virtues and interests, to take on different social roles, and sometimes assign them different rights and duties based on their sexual characteristics. These are gender norms.

I assume that the GDL exists in virtue of unjustified gender norms, and that it is therefore a central goal of the feminist project to undermine it. To the extent to which they are most effectively undermined by policies meant to dismantle the GDL, feminists have reason to endorse such policies: for instance, parental leaves designed to encourage equal uptake by women and men, part-time jobs, and jobs that allow parents to work flexible hours without penalties in the pro-hour pay rates and other benefits (Schouten 2019). Other policies have been defended as better suited to serve the second aim of the feminist project, namely the elimination of disadvantageous outcomes generated by GDL-promoting norms: split pay-checks (Okin 1989) and maybe pension-checks, caretaker resource accounts (Alstott 2004), a Universal Basic Income (Baker 2008) and the creation of a sufficient number of jobs that allow parents to make ends meet while working flexible hours or part-time (Gornick and Meyers 2003). Some policies that feminists advocate are likely to accomplish both goals at once: subsidized and good day-care centers, after-schools and care for the frail elderly. While there are significant tensions between the aims of some of these policies – reflecting unavoidable tensions between trying to dissolve unjustified gender norms and trying to compensate those who are disadvantaged by them (Gheaus 2020) – feminists in general support a combination of such policies.

In liberal societies there is intractable disagreement about justice; yet, following John Rawls, I assume that reasonable citizens can converge on the view that justice demands both “a list of certain basic rights, liberties, and opportunities (such as those familiar from constitutional regimes)” and “measures ensuring for all citizens adequate all-purpose means to make effective use of their freedoms.” (Rawls 1997) The first demand, which has special priority, guarantees, amongst other things, the conditions of equal citizenship, including individuals’ equal power to shape the policies of their societies. On Rawls’ own understanding of justice, all-purpose means provide individuals with the ability to pursue their conception of the good, and include money, opportunities for social positions, and the social bases of self-respect, and possibly also discretionary time (Goodin et al 2016; Rose 2016.) For the present discussion, I assume these goods constitute the metric of justice.

A central tenet of political liberalism is that the legitimate exercise of state power requires state neutrality. A main assumption here is that liberal societies harbor deep and unresolvable disagreement about the best way of leading one’s life; such societies are unavoidably characterized

by a plurality of incompatible conceptions of the good. Because citizens are free and equal, having the moral power to choose, revise and pursue their own idea of a good life, they are owed justification of the use of state power. Thus, state policies must be justified by appeal to considerations whose authority can be accepted by all. Such considerations may not appeal to controversial beliefs, like those that are internal to disputed conceptions of the good life. For instance, policies may not be defended by appeal to divisive religious or metaphysical beliefs, nor to other particular ethical values rejected by some. Hence, the required state neutrality is of justification, not of effect: policies need not make the pursuit of all conceptions of the good life equally costly; they pass the test of neutrality irrespective of consequences as long as they are justified by considerations acceptable to all reasonable citizens (Rawls 2005, 191-194).

“Reasonable” here is a technical term. There is considerable debate about how to interpret it, but for the purpose of this paper it is enough to note that reasonable citizens may endorse views that many comprehensive liberals, and various egalitarians, including gender egalitarians, will think are underlined by mistaken metaphysical or evaluative accounts. What makes one reasonable is their recognition of others as free and equal, their acceptance of unavoidable disagreement, and a willingness to cooperate on fair terms, i.e. terms that they can reasonably expect others, who do not share their comprehensive views, to accept. Ethical and metaphysical beliefs about gender are notably contentious, and this fact rules them out as justification for state policy. Yet, not all those who endorse gender-conservative views can be deemed unreasonable in virtue of their sexism. Rather, as long as they don’t seek to limit women’s basic liberties, they count as reasonable in the technical sense. People who endorse sexist, but reasonable, views, are owed justification for state policies in terms that avoid assuming the truth of comprehensive feminist conceptions of the good life. This explains why political liberals who hold comprehensive feminist conceptions of the good, and would like to see the GDL-promoting norms gone, can nevertheless disagree about the legitimacy of state policies aimed at dismantling such norms (Lloyd 1995).

### **3. The gendered division of labour**

A division of labour is gendered because, and to the extent to which, the specialization in different roles is the result of gender norms. A host of discrete norms contributes to the GDL. Some are explicit, and have to do with encouraging people to develop GDL-conforming skills and ambitions. Others are implicit, often unconscious, and operate by (sometimes intentional) shaping of women’s and men’s expectations about themselves and others. The influence of both typically

starts in childhood. In short, gender norms prescribe the evaluation of women and men according to different standards. It is possible that in addition to gender norms, other factors, such women's and men's different natural preferences, explain the specialization of women in care-giving and of men in breadwinning. Therefore it is possible, although hard to establish, that in a world free of *any* gender norms we would continue to see some degree of specialization along these same lines. In that case, however, there would be no GDL: the GDL is not merely a pattern of specialization of women and men in different occupations. Rather, it is a pattern of specialization inasmuch as it is determined by gender norms. Without gender norms, there would be no GDL. Feminists, I assume, object to the GDL, and not to the pattern of specialization in itself<sup>v</sup>. The objection is manifold.

The first complaint is that GDL-promoting norms unjustly limit women's and, to a lesser extent, men's, freedom of occupational choice. The norms are pervasive in private interactions, on the labour market and more generally in the public sphere. On the labour market, they can result in discrimination, whether overt, driven by conscious stereotypes, or based on unconscious biases (Brownstein 2019). For instance, field experiments find that identical resumes are evaluated more favorably by potential employers if the applicant is believed to be a man rather than a woman (Steinpreis, Anders and Ritzke 1999). At times, individuals inadvertently limit their own freedom by becoming subject to stereotype threats, themselves a by-product of gender norms<sup>v</sup>. A well-known example concerns women's math performance, which is lower when they are made aware of gender stereotypes about women being worse at maths (Spencer, Steele and Quinn 1999.)

A version of the freedom complaint against GDL-promoting norms is that they are responsible for encouraging different preferences and abilities in women and men. For this complaint, the etiology of the norms has normative relevance: until recently, many of them were inscribed in laws and regulations that denied women's full legal status and prevented, to different degrees, their access to education, politics, and the labour market. Although liberal democratic states no longer overtly promote such norms, the legacy of sexist legislation likely explains, in part, their endurance as socially operative norms, and therefore grounds a moral presumption against them. In general, norms that encourage people to cultivate different preferences based on morally arbitrary differences can be justified – perhaps, for instance, those that encourage people to develop those skills for which they have greater talent. And, indeed, gender norms are sometimes defended by appeal to the good of encouraging people to get better at what they are already good. Such considerations run against many feminists' belief that inborn differences between women and men are not significant enough to justify GDL-promoting gender norms as encouraging the development

of inborn talent. More likely, these norms unduly limit individuals' free development, by making their central life goals depend on their sexual characteristics. This strikes many as arbitrary as a feudal economic system which requires people to join particular trades merely because they happen to be born to parents who already belong to the trades in question. Or as arbitrary as a schooling system that encourages children to only pursue the abilities attributed to them by racial stereotypes.

Freedom-based complaints don't fully capture the disadvantages inflicted by the GDL on women. Gender norms encourage them to care about meeting other people's needs, sometimes at the expense of their own, and discourage them from pursuing public ambitions, thus making them economically dependent on their partners, explains the higher feminization of poverty in old age, the high rates of poverty amongst single parents, who are usually single mothers, and women's lower life-time earnings compared to those of men's. Lower participation in paid employment also means lesser levels of status and power, and lesser access to the most interesting, stimulating, intrinsically rewarding jobs, because the jobs that usually come with these kinds of advantages require full time, and highly committed, workers. Moreover, jobs in feminized sectors tend to pay less than jobs requiring the same level of qualification in other sectors; according to some, the explanation is that women's general association with domesticity (and, hence with unpaid work) leads to a general devaluation of women's work (Okin 1989), which may be erosive of self-respect (Shiffrin 2004). When they combine employment and child-rearing, women are also poorer than men in discretionary time. Finally, women have lesser opportunities on the labour market; the GDL creates a path-dependent development of many women's careers: women take leaves for pregnancy, childbirth and caregiving and the longer they stay away from full-time jobs, the lower their employment opportunities, relative to men's. Money, the social basis of self-respect, discretionary time, and opportunities are all part of the metric of justice, at least on a Rawlsian account according to which the metric contains primary goods (Rawls 2005).

Gendered specialization is difficult to undo for parents; it is economically rational for fathers to continue to work full-time because women tend to earn less (Okin 1989; Allen 2008; Schouten 2019). Some feminists argue that life partners ought to defy the GDL and engage in egalitarian sharing of both domestic and paid work<sup>vi</sup>. But whether or not individuals have duties to undo the GDL, a full account of justice must also establish whether states are permitted, or required, to intentionally to dismantle gender norms and to compensate women for disadvantages incurred as a result of the GDL.

#### **4. Feminism and political liberalism: the difficulty**

The GDL has many expressions, from ultra-conservative religious views that deny women any independent access to public spaces, to the tendency, shaped by lighter social pressures and by economic rationality, that women, rather than men, raise children. Some of these expressions are clearly inimical to political liberal justice. First and foremost, justice protects basic freedoms; the infringement of women's freedom of consciousness, speech, movement, association or occupational choice, or of their political freedoms to vote and run for election, are ruled as illegitimate by political liberals (Lloyd 1995).

Further, political liberalism requires that citizens have sufficient shares of all-purpose means, including money, to make use of their basic liberties. As such, a prosperous society would have no involuntary poverty; hence, in such a world, the GDL would not mean (risk of) poverty for women, let alone for their children. Further, Rawls identifies the social bases of self-respect as an important all-purpose good. Given that care-giving is essential to the wellbeing of every individual<sup>vii</sup>, and indeed a socially mandatory form of work, those who perform it in a just society would be protected from the devaluing that caregivers experience in the real world<sup>viii</sup>. As Elizabeth Brake (2013) notes, not only women's, but also girls', treatment according to ultra-conservative gender norms is likely prohibited by political liberalism: parents telling girls that their interests are less important than boys' is incompatible with a fair distribution of the social basis of self-respect. (It is a further question whether such prohibition can result in a legal ban, since it is not clear whether one can enforce such a ban by legitimate means.) And if all able citizens should be in the position to support themselves economically, justice requires that girls be imparted the skills necessary for effective participation in the labour market (Lloyd 1995).

Other policies can be defended on political-liberal grounds as protecting women from some unjust consequences of an unregulated GDL, for instance overt discrimination driven by sexist prejudice objectionable.

But it is less clear that state neutrality is compatible with policies meant to mitigate other disadvantages that women incur as a result of the GDL, including lower lifetime earnings due to lesser participation in the labour market, fewer opportunities for the most advantageous jobs, less discretionary time and diminished access to top tiers of political life. Particularly difficult to justify are policies attempting to eradicate women's specialization in caregiving, which is the core of the GDL. For these reasons, political liberalism has been said to be incompatible with the full feminist demand, that is to dismantle the GDL.<sup>ix</sup>



Political liberalism protects people's pursuit of their reasonable conceptions of the good, including sexist ones. The family is an association which adults enter willingly and can exit at will (at least legally), and some forms of the GDL are compatible with the basic freedoms of family members. Consider a heterosexual couple engaging in a GDL, with the usual consequences on the woman's career, life-time earnings and job opportunities, but free from risk of poverty, and social stigma, thanks to adequate unemployment benefits and social respect for care workers. Assume this instance of the GDL is driven by gender norms that the couple has internalized and endorses; political liberalism cannot deem their situation illegitimate by appealing to the superiority of a feminist account of morality or justice. Indeed, if it could, it should also classify as illegitimate the many religious views that mandate the GDL. Some such views depict women and men as different but complementary not only in their inborn abilities but also in their virtues: men are supposed to lead good lives by being protective, innovative, courageous and public-spirited, while women by being nurturing, caring and supportive. On this view, women and men flourish in different ways. Call this "the Gender Complementarity View". The Gender Complementarity View is a conception of the good – not a mere set of empirical beliefs about sexual difference, but also a metaphysical and ethical doctrine. When it takes forms that don't deny women's basic liberties, including their liberty to reject the view, it is also reasonable on Rawlsian terms. A political liberal state must be able to justify policies aiming to dismantle the more benign forms of the GDL, or at least undo its effects, to those who hold a reasonable version of the Gender Complementarity View.

Several answers to this challenge have been provided (Okin 1989; Chambers 2004; Hartley and Watson 2018; Schouten 2019). But I believe that more can be said on this matter. Below I discuss three promising, yet so-far insufficiently considered, reasons that justify state action meant to constrain the effects of the GDL (the argument from equality of opportunity), to investigate the causal connection between feminized early childrearing and misogyny, and, if the connection is established, to adopt policies that de-feminize childrearing (the argument from misogyny and feminized early childcare) and to de-gender childrearing (the argument from legitimate childrearing). To the extent to which the state is unsuccessful in these aims, the same reasons justify policies that rectify certain disadvantages incurred by women due to the GDL.

## **5. The Equality of Opportunity Argument**

Consider again the spouses depicted above. They endorse a version of the Gender Complementarity View and live in a society that is just at the bar of political liberalism: Care-givers

are socially respected and not at risk of poverty or domestic abuse. In case of divorce the wealth accumulated during marriage is fairly shared.<sup>x</sup> Caregivers also have enough discretionary time and are eligible for training in order to (re)enter the labour market to a degree sufficient to make them economically independent. However, specializing in care-giving has opportunity costs – diminished opportunities for well-paying, interesting and prestigious jobs, lower lifetime earnings – and, inevitably, fuels the sexist assumptions embedded in the Gender Complementarity View. Further, the GDL is sufficiently widespread to warrant a general expectation, on the side of employers, that women will be less present in the workplace and this partly explains a gender pay gap. Like in existing societies, good jobs require freedom from private care responsibilities, making the GDL economically rational for most parenting couples, while also endorsed for principled, non-economic, reasons, by some. Under such circumstances, what justifications are there for state interventions meant to tamper with the GDL or with its effects on individuals, justifications which don't assume that gender egalitarianism is morally superior to the Gender Complementarity View and which can therefore be accepted by our couple?

The first answer, which I consider in this section, is grounded in the widely-endorsed principle of EO, which demands that the allocation of positions of advantage – such as good jobs – tracks only talent and ambition. When the GDL is sufficiently widespread, it generates statistical discrimination and implicit biases against women. The former refers to employers' rational tendency to prefer, other things being equal, male employees on account of their lower likelihood to take long care leaves, request to go part-time or even quit their jobs in order to care for children. Statistical discrimination is to be expected whenever staff turn-over is costly for employers, i.e. in access to the more desirable jobs. It doesn't depend on employers being prejudiced against women in any way; but, of course, employers often *are* prejudiced, and to the extent to which they are unaware of their prejudices, discrimination against women is very difficult to (self-)police. Employers can, and often do, harbor implicit biases, that is “relatively unconscious and relatively automatic features of prejudiced judgment and social behaviour” (Brownstein 2019.) An (admittedly controversial) wealth of literature indicates that virtually everybody holds implicit biases against women by expecting them to conform to gender stereotypes.

Statistical discrimination and implicit biases against women undermine EO by letting considerations other than talent and ambition to bear on people's access to positions of advantage. More generally, many believe that statistical discrimination against women offends against justice *qua* discrimination, although there is disagreement as to how precisely (Lippert-Rasmussen 2011).

If a critical mass of people engage in GDL, statistical discrimination and implicit bias can be generated even under conditions that are otherwise in full compliance with justice – that is, in circumstances in which employers are free from, or abstain from acting on, any conscious sexist stereotypes against potential employees. Importantly, statistical discrimination and implicit biases don't operate only against women who (will at some point) engage in the GDL, but against *all* women – or, at least, against all women of child-bearing age, assuming it is care for children that is primarily responsible for women's lower attachment to the labour market. Women whose partners raise their children, as well as women who do not have children, fall under the incidence of statistical discrimination and implicit biases to the same extent as women who take on care-giving roles. Feminists regularly note that gender norms set back women's opportunities on the labour market by discouraging their professional ambitions or by imposing on them opportunity costs; in contrast, my focus is on the setback of opportunities of women whose ambitions do *not* reflect, and whose market behavior does *not* comply with, gender norms. Political liberals must be more concerned about this case than about the discrimination of women who comply, and identify, with gender norms. This is because in the case of the latter lower opportunities for positions of advantage might be justified as the cost to be paid for one's life-work choices<sup>xi</sup>. But the same justification is not available in the case of women who do *not* adopt care-giving roles. This group of women is most obviously required to pay the cost of diminished opportunities on the labour market, merely because they happen to have certain sex characteristics; this is an unfair situation, one that is not obviously justifiable to women who are victims of implicit biases and statistical discrimination.

Formally, the argument is:

P1 Positions of advantage should be allocated by EO.

P2 The GDL generates statistical discrimination and implicit biases.

P3 Statistical discrimination and implicit biases are incompatible with implementing EO.

C1 Therefore, some of the consequences of the GDL are incompatible with implementing EO<sup>xii</sup>.

The conclusion is easy to accept as a reason by political liberals, but the policies that can be justified by appeal to it are very limited. The EO-undermining effect of the GDL is reason to combat the two specific consequences of the GDL which are the culprit – statistical discrimination and implicit biases – for instance by requiring employers to undergo anti-bias trainings if these are effective, or creating, and possibly subsidizing, institutional care of which workers can avail themselves in case they have children. But such measures are unlikely to be sufficient as long as the

GDL remains in place, and sufficiently comprehensive measures, such as the full institutionalization of childcare – say, by rearing children in well-run orphanages – are, I assume, illegitimate (Munoz-Darde 1999; Brighouse and Swift 2014). The source of the problem is the combination of childrearing in the family and the GDL. Yet, the GDL-undermining effect on EO is not sufficient to legitimize attempts to uproot the GDL itself. Although EO is a widely endorsed principle of justice, the freedom to pursue a reasonable conception of the good is likely to have priority according to a wide range of conceptions of justice. (For instance, in Rawls' own conception of justice as fairness FEO has lexical priority over the first principle protecting basic freedoms.) People who endorse the Gender Complementarity View cannot be required to live against their metaphysical and ethical convictions in order to prevent the creation of EO-disrupting biases.

This is to say that EO has less priority than the protection of people's basic freedoms, such as the freedom to enact the Gender Complementarity View. If so, the argument from EO cannot justify policies aimed at implementing the first feminist goal: the elimination of the GDL itself.

## **6. The argument from misogyny and feminized early childcare**

At least on Rawls' conception of justice as fairness, the first demand of justice, that citizens enjoy equal basic liberties, guarantees not only formal rights, but also the fair value of political liberties. In the case of citizenship rights, it doesn't merely protect women's legal rights to participate in politics on an equal footing with men, but also their ability to make use of these rights. One of the prerequisites for this is that women can participate in political debates and run for election without being impeded by widespread animosity, hatred, or irrational mistrust against them. In cultural environments in which women's voices are silenced with impunity, their opinion devalued and routinely ridiculed, and in which they are mistrusted (in bigoted ways), women don't enjoy the fair value of their political liberties. In other words, widespread misogyny undermines their citizenship. By "misogyny" here I understand a cluster of attitudes, including hostility towards women; the tendency to disvalue their abilities; the tendency to see women as less entitled to participate in decision-making, either by discounting their interests or by discounting their ability to give reasons (what is sometimes called "epistemic injustice"), or else by seeing them unfit for positions of power merely because they are women. Because misogyny is often nested in micro-interactions, I also assume that it is impossible, let alone permissible, to effectively police most of it.

Presumably, prejudice against, and devaluation of, women as political subjects exists in all societies, albeit in different ways and to different extents. Two recent books that have been enjoying much public acclaim illustrate this thesis; one of them looks at misogyny in the public sphere throughout the history of Western civilization, the other at misogyny, public and private, in the contemporary US. The first, written by historian Mary Beard (2017) explores the silencing of women in public settings; we are told that, since Homer, this practice has been seen as permissible and, moreover, as a desirable way of affirming one's masculinity. Beard's book is about the vilifying of women who dare to affirm their views on public matters, and especially in politics. The second book, by Kate Manne (2017), is an examination of men's sense of entitlement to women's attention, validation, care and nurturing and its consequences on women. In particular, it claims that women who assume public functions traditionally reserved for men are being perceived as refusing these emotional and relational goods to men, and so they become targets of misogyny.

Neither Beard nor Manne offer any thoughts on how to uproot misogyny, or any grand theory of what it could explain it. Manne is explicitly hopeless on the first count: "What could possibly change any of this? ... I give up. I wish I could offer a more hopeful message." (2017, 300). However, a feminist explanation of misogyny has long been on offer, and, with it, a possible solution. The feminist psychoanalytical tradition provides several versions of an explanation of the pathologies discussed by Beard and Manne; the origins of this family of theories go back to Freud and understand misogyny as a revulsion against women, rooted in the facts that, as infants, we see our primary care-givers as overpowering figures and we eventually revolt against such power.

Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976), Nancy Chodorow (1978), Jessica Benjamin (1988) and Rozsika Parker (2005) have all drawn on the same main insight, explaining widespread misogyny as a by-product of early childrearing done almost exclusively by women. The assumption is that babies perceive their primary parental figure as entirely instrumental to the baby's needs. When the vast majority of primary figures are women, we tend to identify womanhood with the only source of essential goods such as affection, nurturing, safety, kindness, compassion; this fuels an unconscious, life-long resentment against women when they fail to provide such goods. Further, the enormous (perceived) power of the primary figure tends to become a target of resentment, especially during the process of the child's individuation, which requires her gradual emancipation from dependency on the primary figure. Growing up in societies where women are in charge of the domestic world, but have much less power than men in the public sphere, is an aggravating factor that leads to a general devaluation of womanhood. As we grow up, we equate women with care-giving and

nurturing because this is what we see them doing, when we are in great need of their care and are incapable of moral judgement, and then expect – often unconsciously – that they carry on doing it. We then resent their holding political power because, unconsciously, we feel threatened: even as adults, we are never fully independent, and continue to occasionally need care. Because we are primed to expect it from women, we respond with negative reactive attitudes when women deny it to us, whether or not these attitudes are warranted.

If this psychoanalytical feminist analysis is correct, then a significant part of the cluster of bigoted attitudes that constitute misogyny can be explained by the GDL. As long as women-only are raising children, they alone are the target of individuation-advancing resentment. Misogyny is incompatible with equal citizenship because it makes it difficult, if at all possible, to be receptive to what women have to say about public matters, and to accept them as legitimate holders of power. An obvious solution then is to ensure that a majority of infants have both women and men as primary figures – as all the feminists working in this tradition have advocated. This, of course, would mean ending the GDL, or, at the very least, abolishing its core: having most of the hands-on rearing of children done by women. (Another solution would involve the overcoming of adults' resentment for instance *via* generalized psychotherapy. I don't consider this possibility any further, since much of the resentment – on this account – is unconscious and not recognizable, as such, by most individuals. Eradicating it from the minds of adults seems an even more utopian enterprise than de-gendering early childcare.)

Formally, the argument is:

P4 Childrearing by women-only, which is the main element of the GDL, unavoidably generates widespread misogyny.

P5 Widespread misogyny is incompatible with equal citizenship.

C2 Therefore, women's overwhelming specialization in childcare is incompatible with equal citizenship.

Unlike in the conclusion of the argument from EO, the conclusion of this argument could indeed justify policies aimed at realizing part of the first feminist goal: the dismantling of the GDL. In fact, it could justify *more* than that: if women were to overwhelmingly specialize in childrearing even in the absence of GDL-promoting norms, C2 would be a political liberal reason to object to such specialization. Assuming that a strong causal connection between child-rearing by women-only and misogyny could be established with a high level of confidence, this would of course not necessarily entail a prohibition on *adults* living in accordance with the Gender Complementarity

View – or what is left of it after bracketing childrearing. It would merely require a reform of childrearing whereby the state offsets the disproportionate involvement of mothers in the care of their young children by strongly encouraging fathers to care; or, more generally, by supplementing (and possibly partly replacing) care by women with care provided by men within and outside of the family.

There are two obstacles to reaching this conclusion, at least at the present moment. The first one is that the first premise relies on a metaphysical view that is, and is likely to remain, controversial. Many disagree with the Freudian conception of the person. I return to this problem after addressing the second.

The second obstacle is that the first premise is highly speculative, and difficult to test. A straightforward way to test it – as John Stuart Mill (1869) has noted – we would need to compare levels of misogyny in existing societies, which are dominated by the GDL, with those in societies where women and men share equally the hands-on childcare during children's first years of life. But the latter never existed, and so the straightforward test is unavailable. However, given the importance of equal citizenship, political liberals should take the possibility that childrearing by women-only generates misogyny seriously, and seek permissible methods to test it. For instance, there may be ways of establishing a causal connection between feminized childrearing and widespread misogyny by using statistical regression to provide social-scientific evidence that more gender-neutral childrearing ameliorates misogyny<sup>xiii</sup>. The level of feminization of early childcare differs across societies and social groups, so such evidence should be possible to gather. In the presence of appropriate evidence, the existence of such a causal connection could be accepted without also accepting the causal mechanism postulated by the theory – or, indeed, any particular explicative mechanism.

The last claim should also provide the key to solving the first problem. As long as psychoanalysis remains controversial, it is not a theory on the basis of which one can give public reasons; but, for the purpose of justifying gender-egalitarianism, it might be enough to test the *empirical* claim put forward by feminist psychoanalysts. Political liberals can take such evidence as authoritative without also endorsing psychoanalytic theory, whose value in this case would be merely to signal the potential causal relation – relation which, if established, is highly relevant to the issue of equal citizenship. Doing this, i.e. distinguishing the empirical evidence from the background theory that inspired it, is not without precedent. For instance, reasonable citizens may disagree about the truth of Darwinian theory and yet agree that states may subsidize the

development and distribution of vaccines on grounds of their effectiveness in providing benefits to individuals and serving public health aims<sup>xiv</sup>. Similarly, the *status quo* of some states subsidizing subsidize mental health therapies that rely on psychoanalytical theory as long as they sufficiently prove effective (relative to alternative) does not seem problematic. If this proposal is plausible, then the argument from misogyny and feminized early childcare really is an argument for a very particular kind of state action: namely, enterprising a thorough investigation of the putative causal connection stated by its first premise.

## **7. The argument from permissible child-rearing**

The political liberal explanation of why states cannot legitimately interfere with the GDL starts from the observation that domestic arrangements between consenting adults should be – and in liberal societies usually are – voluntary. Within such associations, people are free to pursue their conception of the good even if, like the Gender Complementarity View, it imposes significant material and opportunity costs on women who endorse it. This is of the same kind to a protected freedom to live according to one's religious views, which also restricts one's (labour market) opportunities.

But families are voluntary associations – when they are – only for adults: children are assigned particular parents, whose parental rights are guaranteed by the state. Children are not asked for consent and have no exit rights from the relationship with their parents. This is not in itself objectionable: children lack the normative power to give, or withhold, consent. Paternalism over them is legitimate and justice requires that some adults are assigned authority over them; yet, such authority must be justified by appeal to the interests of the child. Children, I assume here, are right-holders; they may not be used as mere means to securing other people's interests. For this reason, parental authority may not be exercised in order to advance parents' interests – for instance, in order to make possible the parent's pursuit of a particular conception of the good or by putting children in the service of controversial ethical values endorsed by the parent (Clayton 2006; Brighouse and Swift 2014). This view is not (yet) widely endorsed, and it is at odds with the current toleration of parental attempts to foist on their children their own values. I think, however, that it is the only view compatible with recognizing children's full moral status as ends in themselves: allowing parents to express their controversial values through their children is akin to letting them use the children as a means to either honor the values themselves, or to serve their own interest in self-extension or self-expression. This is not to deny that good parents usually wish their children to adopt their values for



the sake of the child's own wellbeing; this justification, however, is not available to them within the remit of public reason as long as the values at stake are controversial amongst reasonable citizens. Moreover, the claim that children may not be used as vehicles for adults' controversial values extends beyond parental authority, to the legitimate exercise of authority over children by other adults who have power over particular children, and to adults as a whole.

On this basis, two different arguments can be brought to the conclusion that particular adults, and adults collectively, lack the permission to foist GDL-promoting norms on children. By "foisting" here I mean, for now, intentional enrollment, such as explicitly asking children to conform to controversial ethical ideals, as well merely nudging or encouraging them, intentionally but in non-explicit ways, to do so. The two arguments are rooted in alternative views about permissible childrearing, one of which requires full neutrality, the other limited neutrality. The first version of the argument rests on the more general claim that adults lack permission to foist *any* conception of the good on children. The second version rests on the less demanding claim that adults lack permission to foist on children conceptions of the good that are detrimental to children's future access to goods which are part of the *distribuendum* of justice.

Both arguments accept the *desiderata* of political liberalism: that states ought to display neutrality of aim between different conceptions of the good pursued by adults. Matthew Clayton (2006) extends this requirement to relationships between adults and children, arguing that neutrality in upbringing is justified on grounds of the relevant similarities between the relationship between citizens and their states and that between children and adults who have authority over them. On his account, parents and other adults who are in the position to influence children's values and how their lives go ought to refrain from attempting to influence children's formation of a conception of the good. The reasons are similar to those that support state neutrality: in both cases, a powerful agent – the state, respectively parents – is in a relationship with a much weaker party – citizens, respectively children – who cannot exit the relationship but at very great cost of themselves. Just as states can and may coerce their citizens in order to implement justice, parents can, and may coerce their children to ensure their development into future autonomous individuals endowed with the two moral powers. Parents' role is to teach their children about their, and other people's, rights and duties, and to equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to eventually make up their own minds about how to lead their lives. But respect for children as future autonomous agents forbids parents from intentionally transmitting their own, or ideas about what makes life good – including ethical values. On Clayton's view, parents are even barred from revealing their enthusiasms to their

children, lest they put undue pressure on children to embrace their views. Clayton provides two reasons why children's future autonomy is violated by parental behaviors that intentionally steer the children's lives towards particular virtues and life goals (Clayton 2006 104-5). First, because most children grow up into autonomous beings who can make retrospective claims concerning their treatment during the times when they were not yet (fully) autonomous. An adult looking back at her parents' attempts to instill certain traits or values in her has reason to complain that, as a child, she had once been made to serve a conception of the good life that she is now rejecting. If she was required to live according to this conception of the good, she can complain that her ethical independence has been compromised because part of her life has been, under others' undue influence, led according to a conception of the good that she has come to reject once in possession of full autonomy. Because children lack the wherewithal to resist adults' attempt to influence them, all intentional enrollment into controversial conceptions of the good count as undue influence (Clayton forthcoming). Second, children whose parents try to steer them towards particular virtues and goals are likely to face unwarranted psychological costs in reassessing their commitments to the goals in question, i.e. in revising their conception of the good (Clayton 2006 104-5). Since GDL-promoting norms are a contested element of a conception of the good life, a principle of neutrality in childrearing makes it impermissible for parents and other authority figures to foist such norms on children.

Formally, the first version of the argument is:

P6 State neutrality: it is morally impermissible for states to encourage their citizens to adopt any controversial conceptions of the good.

P7 The relationship between some adults and children is similar to that between states and citizens in respects that are relevant to the exercise of power.

C3 Therefore, childrearing neutrality: it is morally impermissible for adults to foist on children any controversial conception of the good.

P8 GDL-promoting norms represent a controversial conception of the good.

C4 Therefore, it is morally impermissible for adults to foist GDL-promoting norms on children.

The extent to which respecting C4 would prevent the intergenerational transmission of gender norms is an empirical question, and one very much open to debate. If children's acquisition of norms was merely a matter of copying what parents and other adults do, in the absence of any instruction and nudging, this would perhaps be a modest conclusion. But it is more plausible that

gender norms would wither over time if children were never instructed into gender norms, never expected to confirm to their parents' and teachers' sexist standards, and never had their curiosity met with sexist explanations. Further, Clayton's account could be extended to argue that, since adults who exercise authority over children have a duty to protect children's autonomy-formation, they are required to equip children with the means to resist undue influence. Parents and teachers ought therefore to draw children's attention to others' attempts to coercively instill gender norms in them, and empower them to resist. Both peer pressure from other children, and aggressive gendered advertising are likely to count as coercive influences because children have very limited opportunities to choose their social environments.

Few are fully persuaded by Clayton's views about the translation of the neutrality requirement to the case of children. As Norvin Richards (2018) noted, one difference between the state-citizens relationship and the parent-child relationship that seems crucially relevant: while the state is not responsible for the wellbeing of its citizens, parents, or perhaps adults more generally, are partly responsible for how well their children's lives go.

For this reason, many will find it tempting to relax C3 to a requirement that adults not foist on children conceptions of the good that are detrimental to children's wellbeing. Where the previous version of the argument embraced neutrality in childrearing, this one is perfectionist. Perfectionists believe that it is, in principle, permissible to try and encourage people to pursue conceptions of the good that are conducive to flourishing. When the people in question are adults, and the foisting agent is the state, there are powerful reasons to resist perfectionism, which seems incompatible with respect for autonomy (Quang 2011). But – against Clayton – it is less likely that the same worry applies to children in their relationship with authority figures<sup>xv</sup>.

Is it coherent to require states not to interfere with, nor pass judgements about, adults' pursuit of reasonable conceptions of the good, and at the same time require them to refrain from intentionally enrolling children in conceptions of the good that are detrimental to their flourishing? I am not convinced that there is a principled tension between the two requirements. A restriction of parental rights according to which parents are not permitted to rear their children in (reasonable) conceptions of the good that set back children's interests is a direct consequence of the requirement to treat children as right-holders whose interests cannot be sacrificed for the sake of advancing other people's conception of the good. That is, taking children's personhood seriously is not compatible with allowing adults to instill in them detrimental values, whether in the name of allowing adults to pursue their conceptions of the good or in the name of serving those values.

More worrying, for this argument, is the thought that in a diverse, liberal, society, there is no authority that may publicly adjudicate which reasonable conceptions of the good are true, and hence conducive to flourishing, and which are not. Some people, of course, claim that gender roles themselves are conducive to flourishing; yet, this is precisely what gender traditionalists deny. Hence, knowledge of true flourishing – or at least of conditions that are detrimental to it – is necessary if children are to be protected from false, pernicious conceptions of the good. If states take a stand on this matter, the worry is that they will thereby, implicitly and unavoidably, pass judgements about the value of their citizens' conceptions of the good. Whether doing so for the sake of protecting children from wrongful enrollment in certain conceptions of the good does or doesn't violate the spirit of political neutrality may depend in particular interpretations of the neutrality requirement. I hope that one version of the perfectionist account of childrearing can successfully meet Clayton's changes, namely one that requires children to be exposed, in their value-formation, to several influential adults who hold different views of the good life (Gheaus forthcoming); but since I cannot properly make that case here, I revert to a more modest argument in the remainder of this section.

Even if political liberalism turned out to be inconsistent with perfectionism for children, for the purpose of this paper it is enough to note that political liberals can accept a more modest claim that perfectionist parenting must also endorse: that intentionally socializing girls into GDL-promoting gender norms is impermissible because it is detrimental to their future interests *by political liberals' own lights*. Namely, it is detrimental to the extent to which gender norms impair girls' access to primary goods, which political liberals themselves identify as part of the metric of justice: opportunities for positions of advantage, income, discretionary time and, in societies like ours that often disrespect caregivers, the social bases of self-respect. *This* is an argument that political liberals can accept. (Further, if the feminization of early childcare turns out to be responsible for widespread misogyny, as the discussion in the previous section suggests, GDL-promoting gender norms are also detrimental to girls' future enjoyment of the fair value of their political rights.) If so, even if they would be wrong to require full neutrality in childrearing, political liberals can support a demand that parents, other influential adults, and maybe adults collectively, refrain from intentionally enrolling girls in GDL-promoting norms.

Formally, the second version of the argument is:

P9 It is morally impermissible for adults to foist on children conceptions of the good that are detrimental to their equal access to primary goods.

P10 GDL-promoting norms represent a conception of the good that is detrimental to girls' equal access to primary goods.

C4 Therefore, it is morally impermissible for adults to foist GDL-promoting norms on girls.

Since the reason for C4 is to protect girls' equal access to the primary goods to which they are entitled, it warrants a more generous interpretation of "foisting", one that is not restricted to children's *intentional* gender socialization. Assuming, for instance, that children tend to emulate their parents' behavior and beliefs even when not explicitly instructed to do so, the set-back in women's interest in all-purpose goods justifies active attempts to dissuade girls from copying gendered behaviors.

C4 is silent about the permissibility of adults themselves engaging in a GDL. It merely prohibits adults from (intentionally) socializing girls in GDL-promoting norms. However, these two realities may be impossible to separate in practice, if children ought to be raised in the family and if people who embrace the GDL have a right to raise children<sup>xvi</sup>. It is beyond the scope of my paper to discuss these complications, which are nevertheless crucial to the implementation of the ideal I defend here. I limit myself to noting that the conclusions of the third argument can most readily justify state's attempts to prevent, offset and mitigate the current influence of gender norms in children's or, at the very least, girls', socialization. In societies where sufficiently many parents and other adults involved in childrearing breach their duty and use their authority to intentionally encourage children to internalize gender norms, states have a remedial duty to counterbalance such influences. It can discharge this duty by providing institutional rearing – in day care, kindergartens and schools – that is not only free of gender norms itself, but which is also intended to help children reflect on, and possibly reject, the undue influence that is being exercised over them. The regulative ideal, as far as neutrality in childrearing indicates, is a society in which adults who endorse GDL-promoting norms don't teach them to children, and which protects children from others' attempts to gender them.

Appeal to the same reason – providing children with the conditions needed to adopt or reject gender norms without due influences – shows that children are also entitled to protection from intentional gendering which is ultimately driven by different aims. Markets in toys, educational materials or clothes that unjustifiably differentiate their products according to gender, and the advertisement of these and other products in gendered ways, are ultimately motivated not by an intention to foist gender norms on children, but by economic reasons. Nevertheless, given that children are not in the position to protect themselves from advertisements or to avoid the markets in

toys, educational materials and clothes of their societies, they are being owed protection from the powerful gendering messages carried by such markets and advertisements. One possible example of such protection is banning advertisements with gendering messages; the endorsement of any specific measure would, of course, require further argument.

## **8. Conclusions: two aims of gender justice**

The overall conclusion of this paper is moderately optimistic with respect to the convergence of political liberalism and the feminist commitment to the dismantling of the GDL. As far as the arguments I propose go, political liberals may be right that states ought not to try and dissuade *adults* from leading lives that are informed by gender norms. I provided no justificatory ground for making it harder, or costlier, for adults who endorse the Gender Complementarity View to follow their conception of the good. (Although this conclusion would be significantly should we be able to establish that the feminization of early childcare unavoidably generates misogyny.) Yet, children, who by assumption have not yet formed *their own* conception of the good, must be protected from adults' or, indeed, market institutions', encouragements that they adopt gender norms. If so, then political liberals must acknowledge two aims of justice concerning GDL-promoting norms.

The first aim is forward-looking and states that children are owed protection from undue influence in the formation of their ambitions and values. In particular, they have a right to be free from authoritative adults' attempts to make them comply with, and internalize, gender norms, and from the powerful gendering influence of markets in toys, educational materials, and clothes or of advertisement. It is difficult to imagine the extent of institutional reform that could successfully accomplish this aim in its entirety; this paper is merely concerned with its principled justification.

Because it is hard to imagine that the first goal could be achieved, at least in the foreseeable future, the second, backward-looking aim is particularly important: It requires that individuals who have been wronged by a failure to implement the first aim are owed, at least in some cases, reparation. In particular, women are owed policies that offset certain disadvantages incurred as a result of gender norms, even if the women in question have internalized, and even endorse, these norms. As I mentioned in the introduction, such policies include split pay-checks and pension-checks, and caretaker resource accounts meant to compensate caregivers' disadvantages in terms of wealth and discretionary time.

More specifically, individuals who came to endorse gender norms as a result of wrongful childrearing are owed compensation for those disadvantages that are not integral to their pursuit of a gendered lifestyle. Here the assumption is that it would be disrespectful to offer compensation for costs that are integral to values that people endorse, but not for costs that are merely incidental to pursuing those values (Cohen 1999). For instance, one may expect women who endorse the GDL to also endorse the lesser opportunities they have for jobs that require very high time commitments and flexibility, as a justified and integral consequence of devoting much of one's life to caring for others. But, presumably, there is no presumption that they should endorse being economically dependent on abusive spouses, or being at high risk of poverty during old age, or even having, overall, lesser shares of primary goods such as income, time or the social basis of self-respect.

One important question that would need to be settled by a full account of gender justice in non-ideal circumstances is which agents owe compensatory duties to women who, while children, have been wrongfully socialized in gender norms and to all the women who are victims of statistical discrimination and implicit biases as a result of *other* people's socialization in gender norms. To the extent to which these individuals incur disadvantages as a result of breaches of duties by the adults who raised them, or by market practices, it is tempting to think that the primary duty of reparation is born by the wronging agents: parents, but also schools and possibly other authority figures in children's lives, as well as those who are (perhaps, collectively) responsible for gendering advertisement and markets. Yet, a proper treatment of the matter would require an elaborate view of of duties to protect children from wrongful exercises of power over them. Such a view may include an account of whether, for instance, states themselves must ensure that schools do not function as gendering agents, or whether state interference with the marketing of clothes, toys and past-times as being "for boys" or "for girls" is justified. If so, then there are many more agents who wrong children by foisting gender norms on them than parents and educators, although the precise ascription of duties and liabilities may not be straightforward.

All this, of course, allows for the possibility that some people will endorse the Gender Complementarity View in spite of having been successfully protected, as children, from intentional enrollment in sexist beliefs. Imagine a society in which the Gender Complementarity View is just one amongst the several available accounts of how one's sexual characteristics matter, or don't matter, to living a flourishing life, and which doesn't encourage any child to adopt it. Adults who adopt the Gender Complementarity View as autonomous choosers, without any history of undue influence, have no claims to compensation for the disadvantages that are integral to their pursuit of

a life shaped by gender norms. (Similar to the way in which an adult who had no religious upbringing, and who embraces a particular religion, cannot claim compensation for the various lifestyle limitations they thereby incur.) It is also possible that some people who live in sexist societies would have endorsed the Gender Complementarity View – counterfactually – even if they had been raised free from gender roles and beliefs. To the extent to which they *have* in fact been subjected to such socialization, they come under the remit of the feminist project’s second goal: the compensation of disadvantages that people suffer as a result of gender norms<sup>xvii</sup>.

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- i Elsewhere (Gheaus manuscript) I explain the difference between gender norms that are and gender norms that aren't justified. The present argument concerns only the latter.
- ii Throughout this paper I make a number of claims about the GDL and the ways in which it generates disadvantages for women. For an overview of recent empirical literature substantiating these claims as applied to both developed and developing societies, see Schouten (2019).
- iii For instance, they are expected to be the main breadwinner, leaving them with less time and, possibly, skills for a flourishing personal relationships. They also face discrimination in child-rearing professions.
- iv Although some defend, as "gender justice", the view that we ought to mitigate, when possible, some of alleged inborn shortcomings in people's ability to realize (to some extent) the central goods of the opposite gender role. So, for example, if men are, for biological reasons, less able to nurture others than women, we owe them more training in this respect. See Gheaus (2012.)
- v To be subject to a stereotype threat is to tend to conform to the negative stereotypes associated with your socially salient group in those situations in which you are reminded of your belonging to the group in question. See, for instance Stricker and Ward (2004).
- vi At least when they raise children; see Okin (1989), who calls the family "the first school of justice".
- vii That is, at least in infancy and during periods of sickness; and, for some people, during frail old age or while afflicted by disability. Care is, in this sense, an all-purpose good, one that individuals have reason to want no matter what other things they desire. For this reason, some feminists have argued that it should be on the list of primary goods – i.e. part of the metric of justice. See Kittay (1999) and Brake (2010). It is a disturbing anomaly that the production of such an essential good fails to attract social respect for those who provide it.
- viii Harley and Watson (2018) in particular make a convincing case that political liberalism requires the dismantling of gender hierarchies, as incompatible with equal citizenship. I assume – like Schouten (2019) – that the GDL may survive such hierarchies, and remain objectionable for some of the reasons explained in section 3.
- ix For a defense of this view see Lloyd (1995). For literature overviews by authors who ultimately defend the thesis that political liberals ought to enact GDL-undermining policies, see Hartley and Watson (2018) and Schouten (2019).
- x Which, as Neufeld (2009) notes, political liberals should support as long as marriage is a state-regulated institution, and welfare policies and economic institutions function on the assumption that domestic and care work is largely performed informally by women.
- xi Many feminists reject this justification, because they believe that justice requires an opportunity to combine attractive careers with childrearing (Fraser 1994; Gornick and Meyers 2003; Gheaus 2012; Hartley and Watson 2018). But this conception of justice cannot be accommodated by political liberalism, on account of its likely perfectionist nature.
- xii If implicit biases against women as workers and statistical discrimination against them are unavoidable consequences of the GDL, then the GDL itself is incompatible with EO. I don't think the stronger conclusion is supported.
- xiii I am grateful to several readers and members of audience for this suggestion: Elizabeth Brake, Louis Larue, Erik Malmquist, Christian List and Tweedy Flannigan have independently made it, with encouraging confidence in the prospects of this strategy.
- xiv Thank you Steven Wall for this example.
- xv See Fowler (2014; 2020.) Another view that attempts to combine the requirements of state neutrality and perfectionism towards children is implicit in Brighouse and Swift (2014), who believe that parents are morally responsible for the wellbeing of children *qua* children.
- xvi It may be for this reason that both Schouten (2019) and Fowler (2020) seem to assume that their arguments concerning a tension between the GDL and children's acquisition of autonomy requires parents to abstain from engaging in a GDL. By contrast, I don't reach this conclusion.
- xvii I am grateful to Constanze Binder, Elizabeth Brake, Matthew Clayton, Christina Easton, Tweedy Flannigan, Christie Hartley, Louis Larue, Holly Lawford-Smith, Christian List, Erik Malmquist, Gloria Mähringer, Andrew Mason, Tim Meijers, Tom Parr, Georg Schmwzerck, Gina Schouten, Adam Slavny, Adam Swift, Laura Valentini, Steven Wall, Lori Watson, audiences in Umea, Utrecht, London, Rotterdam, Stockholm, Kingston, Gotheborg, Arizona and München, and an anonymous reviewer for helpful feedback.