

ARTICLE

Book Symposium: Asha Bhandary's *Freedom to Care* Dependency Care in a Politically Liberal Society

Elizabeth Edenberg

Department of Philosophy, Baruch College, The City University of New York, New York, New York, USA
Corresponding author. E-mail: elizabeth.edenberg@baruch.cuny.edu

Abstract

Caregiving is crucial for any society; however, it often goes unnoticed and unanalyzed within theories of justice. Asha Bhandary's theory of liberal dependency care seeks to both rectify the invisibility of care and defend principles of justice for caregiving arrangements by arguing for several important modifications to John Rawls's theory of justice. In this article, I analyze Bhandary's modifications to Rawls's theory to consider how well liberal dependency care fits into a broader political liberal framework, while still securing protection against oppression. I also evaluate the permissibility and limits of teaching children autonomy and caregiving skills in a politically liberal society.

Résumé

Les soins sont cruciaux pour toute société ; cependant, les théories de la justice les ignorent souvent dans leur analyse. La théorie d'Asha Bhandary sur la prise en charge libérale de la dépendance cherche autant à rectifier l'invisibilité des soins qu'à défendre les principes de justice concernant les modalités de soins en revendiquant plusieurs modifications importantes à la théorie de la justice de John Rawls. Dans cet article, j'analyse les modifications de Bhandary à la théorie de Rawls pour examiner comment la prise en charge libérale de la dépendance s'intègre dans un cadre politique libéral plus large, tout en protégeant contre l'oppression. J'évalue également la licéité et les limites de l'enseignement de l'autonomie et des habiletés de soins aux enfants dans une société politiquement libérale.

Keywords: care; dependency; justice; legitimacy; liberalism; political liberalism; Rawls

1. Introduction

Caregiving is crucial for any society; however, it often goes unnoticed and unanalyzed within theories of justice. Many, following David Hume, conceive of the circumstances of justice as problems of moderate scarcity and moderate benevolence. But what if we were to adjust this foundational assumption and instead see the provision of care as a foundational aspect of social cooperation, under the purview of political justice?

Asha Bhandary's (2020) theory of liberal dependency care (LDC) seeks just such a reconceptualization of the foundational problem of social cooperation that theories of justice ought to address.¹ When we ignore the centrality of human dependency

¹ In-text citations will be to Bhandary 2020 unless otherwise noted.



in life² — or set it aside as a mere private issue for families and individuals to secure on their own — this blocks evaluation of the imbalances in the provision and receipt of care from the perspective of social justice. When omitted, those who are exploited or disadvantaged because of their caregiving labour experience a form of “oppression by theoretical invisibility” because the source of their disadvantage remains hidden and is thus likely to be ignored or discounted (p. 54). Ignoring care omits a foundational aspect of social cooperation and this oversight needs to be corrected. As Bhandary highlights, “we receive dependency care as the result of social cooperation,” and caregiving arrangements are an important part of the basic structure of society to which the principles of justice should directly apply (p. 10). Because there are a wide range of social practices that can meet society’s caregiving needs, we need a clear understanding of what justice in caregiving requires, as well as clear procedures to evaluate different potential arrangements from the perspective of social justice.

Bhandary’s theory of LDC seeks to both rectify the invisibility of care and defend principles of justice for caregiving arrangements by arguing for several important modifications to John Rawls’s theory of justice. The core aspects of LDC are: (i) a new conceptual tool of the arrow of care map, and (ii) a novel justificatory structure, which Bhandary calls “two-level contract theory” (*passim*). These conceptual tools are designed to be broadly applicable to a wide range of societies and caregiving arrangements. The arrow of care map illuminates caregiving arrangements so they are analyzable according to metrics of justice. LDC’s neo-Rawlsian two-level contract theory includes both abstract evaluation of principles of justice from the original position and an evaluation of the context within which real-world theorists form their judgements about justice. Bhandary also uses the modified original position and the arrow of care map to generate four principles that serve as constraints on the just distribution of care in society without prescribing a specific distribution or set of practices. This allows LDC to maintain broad applicability to many different societies that, based on their history and cultural traditions, may arrange care differently. After building the theoretical apparatus, Bhandary outlines a set of practical recommendations for teaching citizens autonomy and caregiving skills in order create real-world change.

In this article, I analyze Bhandary’s modifications to Rawls’s theory to consider how well LDC fits into a broader political liberal framework, while still securing protection against oppression. I will focus on two core aspects of the theory: the justificatory structure of LDC’s two-level contract theory and how well LDC fits into a broader political liberal framework. I will argue that LDC is missing a justification of the second level of the contract device addressed to those who do not already embrace Bhandary’s central anti-oppression commitments. First (§2), I will outline the core theoretical structure of LDC. I will then (§3) show why the first level of LDC’s justificatory structure offers a compelling response to Eva Feder Kittay’s dependency critique of Rawls’s theory. In the remainder of the article, I will develop my critique of LDC’s novel second level of justification — teaching autonomy skills to

² Asha Bhandary defines “dependency care” as the “hands-on labor without which a person would not survive” (Bhandary, 2020, p. 4).

people in the real world. I will argue (§4) that while autonomy is included as a part of the justificatory structure of LDC, it needs its own independent justification, addressed to a pluralist society, to demonstrate why these autonomy skills are necessary to ensure LDC's legitimacy. I'll argue that the justification Bhandary offers appeals to deeper and more controversial moral premises than she claims. I'll then (§5) raise some additional justificatory questions related to the wide scope of autonomy skills LDC defends, pushing for further clarification on the nature of political justice, as Bhandary conceives it. In closing (§6), I'll respond to an objection that LDC does not attempt to be a political liberal theory. I will argue that LDC is at least implicitly committed to a broadly political liberal outlook and that endorsing political liberalism should be embraced as a feature of the view.

2. The Structure of LDC

According to Bhandary, the "conceptual innovations and structure of justification are the essence of liberal dependency care" (p. 72). The arrow of care map allows us to evaluate the justice of a variety of caregiving arrangements, offering a way to map the distribution of care in society (both existing and possible arrangements) so that care can be analyzed by metrics of distributive justice. LDC's structure of justification is Bhandary's two-level contract theory. The first level is the modified Rawlsian original position, using a test of hypothetical acceptability, which generates a different set of constraints on justice once the need for care is recognized as an issue of social justice. The second level is the development of autonomy skills in the real world, so that people in society are able "to articulate what they value and articulate dissent in both private and political contexts" (p. 98). In this section, I lay out these core theoretical innovations in order to set the stage for my critiques.

The arrow of care map is an important theoretical tool that illuminates how the provision and receipt of care are distributed in society. The fundamental unit of analysis is individuals, each qualifying as a self-authenticating source of valid claims within theories of justice. Bhandary's emphasis on the importance of retaining individuals as the basic unit of analysis for distributive patterns is a mark of her commitment to liberalism. It is also a significant departure from Kittay's influential connection-based approach to just dependency care, to which I will return in Section 3. After mapping the distribution of care amongst individuals, the next step requires evaluating group-based trends to illuminate when the burden of caregiving falls disproportionately on particular groups within the general population. At the third and final level of the arrow of care map, theorists use the map to evaluate the justice of the caregiving arrangements.³ For example, in most existing societies, the work of providing care falls disproportionately on people who have been historically marginalized, including women and racial minorities. But because the arrow of care map is used to map different possible arrangements, keeping an eye towards this tri-level analysis will illuminate when new groups emerge who are disadvantaged by performing a disproportionate burden of society's dependency care. The arrow of

³ The arrow of care map is outlined in Chapter 3. See also Bhandary (2020, p. 71) for an overview of the three levels of evaluation that the arrow of care map enables.

care map renders visible society's caregiving arrangements, illuminates the distribution of care amongst both individuals and social groups, and maps potential future distributions for evaluation by metrics of justice. It has much to recommend it for both theorists of justice and practitioners aiming to secure just caregiving structures in society. As such, the focus of my critique will be on the other core aspect of LDC: the novel justificatory structure.

Bhandary develops a neo-Rawlsian version of constructivism, which she calls "two-level contract theory" (*passim*), that includes both abstract evaluation of principles of justice from the original position and an evaluation of the context within which real-world theorists form their judgements about justice. The levels are (1) the theoretical evaluation of society's organization of care using the test of hypothetical acceptability from the original position, and (2) the concrete skills of people in society, including those theorists who evaluate and develop principles of justice. The arrow of care map bridges these levels, offering a way to map the distribution of care in society so that care can be analyzed by metrics of distributive justice. Bhandary leaves open which specific distributions will be chosen by a given society, provided these arrangements fall within the constraints on justice she defends. LDC is thus a theoretical framework that is well suited to help many different societies achieve just caregiving structures.

LDC's first level of justification is a modified Rawlsian hypothetical acceptability test for deciding on principles of justice that include the just provision of care. Rawls's hypothetical acceptability test is modified largely by modifying the information available to theorists in the original position. First, the basic circumstances of justice are modified to include the need to secure dependency care. Second, theorists are called to evaluate the structure and distribution of caregiving in society, illuminated through the arrow of care map (p. 97). When theorists consider how to justly structure society, given this newly illuminated information, Bhandary argues that they will arrive at a set of four constraints on the just distribution of caregiving in society (pp. 89–92). These constraints are meant to be compatible with a wide range of ways to justly distribute care in society. Once everyone recognizes the importance of receiving care to survive and meet their legitimate needs, they will endorse a "survival baseline principle" to ensure that these needs are met (p. 89). The next three principles seek to ensure that, in providing care, caregivers are not disadvantaged by their caregiving role (pp. 89–90), caregiving doesn't correlate with already disadvantaged social groups (pp. 90–91), and that caregiving is not concentrated in a small subset of the population (p. 91). These principles are designed to ensure that individuals' legitimate care needs are met without disadvantaging either those who provide care or those who share similar traits to caregivers.

The novel second level of LDC's two-level contract theory moves beyond the abstract realm to consider the context within which theorists form their perspectives and priorities. As Bhandary highlights, theorists' own experiences shape which problems of justice take priority. For example, historically, theories of justice have ignored care as a foundational aspect of social cooperation. Bhandary conjectures that this inattention to care is likely because those writing the theories were not expected to be primary caregivers, even when they had children (p. 12). The work was performed by others, leaving theorists free to focus their full attention on their academic work.

Once we see how theorists' own experiences, intuitions, and insights impact their theory development (p. 5), we should also work to ensure that their real-world context best supports *just* theory development. According to Bhandary, "another necessary condition that is located at the second level of the neo-Rawlsian contract device" is teaching "autonomy skills for real people" (p. 5). Bhandary defends a procedural account of autonomy as a set of skills that will enable people to "articulate what they value and articulate dissent in both private and political contexts" (p. 98). She argues that both autonomy skills and caregiving skills should be taught through public education so that everyone has basic competency in autonomy skills and the caregiving skills of attentiveness and responsiveness (p. 6). The widespread possession of autonomy skills will help theorists remain alert to oppressive structures. Ensuring that all children learn at least basic caregiving skills will facilitate a more just distribution of caregiving in society and will allow for maximal individual choice in pursuing life plans by helping to ensure that the ability to care is not concentrated in particular segments of society.

3. Accommodating Dependency within Liberalism

Bhandary's LDC offers a compelling response to Kittay's dependency critique of Rawlsian liberalism. Kittay argues that, by neglecting dependency concerns, purportedly egalitarian theories of justice fail to protect the freedom and equal status of all citizens (Kittay, 1999, pp. 76–77). The root of the problem, according to Kittay, is that political theorists tend to assume that society is, or ought to be viewed as, "an association of free and independent equals" (Kittay, 1999, p. 4). This assumption "masks the inevitable dependencies and asymmetries that form part of the human condition" (Kittay, 1999, p. 14). All of us are dependent for some portion of our lives and some will remain dependent throughout their lives. Thus, Kittay offers the dependency critique as a "criterion of adequacy ... applicable to *any* political theory claiming to be egalitarian" (Kittay, 1999, p. 79). She argues that Rawls's theory fails this test because the presuppositions underlying the choice of the principles of justice and the principles themselves ignore the facts of human dependency; thus, Rawls's theory "fails to sustain the egalitarian vision that purports to inform it" (Kittay, 1999, p. 113; see also p. 82).

Bhandary takes up Kittay's challenge by offering an important set of modifications to Rawls's theory to show how Rawlsian liberalism can in fact accommodate dependency care as an issue of justice. While Bhandary follows Kittay in arguing that dependency is a central issue for political justice, LDC retains the element of Rawls's thought that Kittay argued was the root cause of Rawls's failure to address dependency and dependency care — the individualism of liberal theory.

Kittay rejects the individualism at the root of liberal theory because she argues that it elides the fact of human dependency. She argues that "as long as the bounds of justice are drawn within reciprocal relations among free and equal persons, dependents will continue to remain disenfranchised" (Kittay, 1999, pp. 76–77). Instead of viewing the fundamental unit of analysis as a free and equal individual, Kittay defends a connection-based equality (Kittay, 1999, p. 28, pp. 66–67), using the image of "some mother's child" as the claim by which all persons can be conceived of as equals

(Kittay, 1999, p. 25). A connection-based equality “assumes a fundamental need for relationship” and gives rise to a set of claims “due to us by virtue of our connection to those with whom we have had and are likely to have relations of care and dependency” (Kittay, 1999, p. 66).

By contrast, Bhandary defends the importance of retaining the assumption of mutually disinterested parties in the original position and defends the primacy of individuals (rather than relational entities) as the primary claimants for political justice. This is what makes Bhandary’s theory unabashedly a liberal theory — but one that can nevertheless address dependency as a core issue of justice. Bhandary follows in the tradition of feminist liberals like Marilyn Friedman (2003) who caution that emphasis on relational identities — rather than individuals — can reinforce women’s subordination. Bhandary compellingly argues that it is important to retain the separation of individuals and assumption of mutual disinterest within the theoretical exercise of evaluating the just distribution of care in society from behind the veil of ignorance (p. 78).

Retaining this theoretical separation of individuals provides the best protection against continued oppression of those most likely to be oriented towards others in society. Retaining the independence of parties ensures that each individual’s legitimate needs are identified separately because many times the legitimate needs of caregivers and dependents are at odds. Furthermore, by assuming mutual disinterest of parties when theorizing about justice, the work involved in care is recognized without building it in as a natural outgrowth of love. The individualistic assumption is an important theoretical tool, even though it diverges from people in the real world who are bound by deep relational ties (p. 31). Furthermore, contra Kittay, if the base unit of evaluation is the mother-child relationship that Kittay defends, this will fail to track when the two interests come apart (p. 39). Instead, Bhandary argues that both dependents and dependency workers should be recognized as self-authenticating sources of valid claims so that each is given equal standing and equal consideration in the procedure (p. 41). This individualism at the theoretical level will better track inequality in the provision and receipt of care and is a crucial protection against the exploitation of caregivers (p. 41).

So how, one might ask, can a Rawlsian theory meet Kittay’s dependency challenge if LDC retains the individualism Kittay thinks is the root of Rawls’s problems? Bhandary’s answer is to change the information available to theorists when deciding on principles of justice from the original position. As we saw above, the two-level justificatory structure and the arrow of care map work together to illuminate the distribution of care in a society and ensure that theorists are attuned to the centrality of care as an issue of justice. Bhandary’s arrow of care map illuminates the many ways that societies can structure caregiving so that these arrangements can be subject to evaluation as a matter of distributive justice. Without this, existing patterns of exploitation in societies’ caregiving arrangements are likely to persist. The modifications at the first level of LDC’s justificatory structure, including the modified original position, the arrow of care map, and the four constraints on justice, fit well within Rawls’s justificatory structure. What changes is the focus of theoretical attention away from merely economic structures and towards the underlying practices of care that enable people — and thus social structures — to flourish. These initial

modifications are important for ensuring that theorists seek to design a social order that will justly meet the needs of dependents and dependency care workers without exploitation. The second level of LDC's justificatory structure also adds to the information available to theorists when reasoning about justice. It requires the wide development of autonomy skills in society so that theorists are attuned to a vast range of individuals' needs and values, including the need for care.

Too often, the labour that goes into the provision of care is overlooked because it is frequently naturalized. In our society, the idea that care is a gift grown out of love helps render the work and sacrifice involved in providing care invisible as a social contribution. It also prevents it from being evaluated as a matter of social justice. Even the term 'care-giving' embeds the idea that this is a gift of natural affection and not work (Edenberg, 2022). Like many philosophers, Rawls assumes that care for dependent children is provided out of the "natural affection and good will of mature family members" (Rawls, 1997, p. 790). He thus naturalizes care, eliding the work involved, and places care squarely in the private realm of the family.

Once caregiving is seen as growing out of love, its place beyond the reach of political justice is secured. No state can force an individual to develop affection for another individual. However, the state can readily ensure that individuals' basic needs are met when they are unable to do so themselves, as is needed for dependency care. As Bhandary rightly highlights, "[c]aregiving does not occur by fiat of love" (p. 10).⁴ Parents' love for their children is wonderful — but this love does not itself meet the child's need for food, shelter, and education. Caregiving is active work that requires intentional, intelligent action (Chapter 6). In addition, the expectation to be caring can perpetuate social inequalities and "graft the substance" of the dependent onto the caregiver (p. 78, citing Frye, 1983). This is another reason that retaining the independence of caregivers and arguing for the improvement of autonomy skills are important steps in ensuring that caregiving does not render one vulnerable to exploitation or oppression.

4. Level Two of LDC's Justificatory Structure

Rawls's own theory of justice has two parts: the description of the initial choice situation, and the principles derived from the original position. Bhandary follows this structure at the first level of justification, modifying what is known to parties in the original position. This different informational context leads theorists to generate principles of just care. Bhandary adds a second level to Rawls's justificatory structure in order to address the extent to which theorists' skewed intuitions about care undermine the justice of their theories (p. 5, p. 75, p. 98). After all, theorists' own experiences inform their intuitions about theories of justice. Thus, theorists not only need to achieve clarity on their own values, they also need to improve their understanding of the "range of practices, reasons, and values people embrace" (p. 99). People supply this crucial information "via the ways we live, communicate, create, collaborate, and dissent" (p. 99). The second level of LDC's justificatory structure requires that real

⁴ Unlike Eva Feder Kittay's (1999) account of dependency work, Bhandary argues that dependency care need not include affective connections.

people develop autonomy skills to enable them to gain a “critical understanding of their own values and cares” (p. 95). This capacity for people to articulate their values “as separate individuals” and articulate dissent to social practices “is vital to a functioning society, and it is one of the necessary safeguards against deeply sedimented oppression” (p. 98).

Attention to the influence of theorists’ experiences and social context on their theories of justice is an important step towards bridging ideal and non-ideal political theories. The second level of LDC’s justificatory structure keeps this issue in view. It is also a forward-looking theory, designed to remain alert to possible new forms of oppression. But while the rest of the theory sits well within a broadly politically liberal approach and is specifically designed to be capacious enough to be used by different societies to organize the provision of care, this second justificatory level of LDC brings with it some justificatory problems of its own.

The framing question that Bhandary asks when developing LDC’s account of autonomy is: “Can liberal dependency care endorse an account of autonomy while remaining culturally sensitive and applicable to a broad range of societies?” (p. 99). Bhandary’s solution is to defend a content-neutral, procedural account of autonomy as a set of skills that enable people to pursue a wide range of choices and ways of life (p. 101, pp. 104–105). Bhandary’s positive account of autonomy is a Meyersian-Millian theory, emphasizing a broad set of skills designed to enable thoughtful actions for embodied human beings (p. 101).⁵ LDC autonomy emphasizes procedural aspects of autonomy, including skills like critical capacities of observation, communication, introspection, self-nurturing, and self-control.⁶ These skills enable people to critically evaluate their contexts as well as articulate and pursue their values, whatever they are (p. 106, p. 110). In this sense, Bhandary’s account is content-neutral, rather than substantive (Friedman, 2003), meaning that, once these skills are exercised, individuals qualify as autonomous no matter which values they choose to pursue. This content-neutrality is important in order to ensure LDC autonomy’s compatibility with political liberalism because it leaves open a wide range of choices about the good.

Using Amy Baehr’s helpful classification of types of liberalism (Baehr, 2004), Bhandary argues that LDC’s commitment to autonomy is “shallow yet wide” (p. 102). She argues that LDC autonomy is “shallow” because it does not rely on foundational truth claims, but wide rather than narrow because autonomy skills apply broadly to citizens’ lives in both the political and private spheres (p. 102). We’ll first look at ways that LDC is not quite as shallow or content neutral as it seems. In the next section, we’ll look at some additional justificatory challenges that come with LDC embracing autonomy as a wide skill, useful for individuals beyond the narrow political sphere.

In arguing that LDC’s commitment to autonomy is shallow, Bhandary illustrates the contrast with specific versions of comprehensive liberalism that have been subject

⁵ Bhandary draws on and adapts Diana Tietjen Meyers’s skills-based conception of autonomy (Meyers, 2002, 2014), merging it with an adaptation of John Stuart Mill’s discussion of self-determination in *On Liberty* (Mill, 1978).

⁶ For a full discussion of LDC’s set of skills that Bhandary adapts from Meyers and Mill, see Bhandary (2020, pp. 107–110).

to critique. LDC's account of autonomy is not grounded in the "metaphysical truth of reason as the origin of morality and autonomy" (p. 102), does not take a stance on free will (p. 101), respects those who live according to the "dictates of religious authority" (p. 105), and leaves open which values and lifestyles people choose when exercising autonomy (pp. 104–105). Bhandary emphasizes LDC's compatibility with political liberalism by arguing that a "crucial feature of" LDC autonomy "is that it does not locate ultimate value in rationality and is consequently compatible with theism" (p. 110). Furthermore, in contrast to perfectionist liberals, LDC retains a core political liberal assumption that the state ought not promote the ideal of individuality for all of life and does not require people to "pursue lives of maximal individuality" (p. 101).

However, avoiding these specific controversial stances is not the only way in which one can be a comprehensive (rather than political) liberal. Political liberalism's shallow justification eschews comprehensive commitments to *any* particular metaphysical doctrine and instead grounds the justification in minimal values derived from our common culture (like freedom and equality) for the narrow purposes of our shared political lives.

LDC's account of autonomy may not sit quite as shallowly as Bhandary maintains. It still rests on controversial values that may not be broadly accepted. To see this, let's examine the purpose of including autonomy skills for real people as the second legitimacy requirement in LDC's two-stage contract theory.

The function autonomy plays within LDC's justificatory structure is to ensure that LDC remains alert to oppression, including the ways oppressive systems reinvent themselves to resist fundamental change (p. 101). Bhandary's theory is, at its core, an anti-oppression theory (p. 101). LDC's account of autonomy is designed to keep "the existence or possibility of future forms of oppression in its sights" because it enables individuals to identify "oppressive social practices, institutional structures, and norms" (pp. 101–102). The purpose of teaching autonomy skills is to enable people to recognize oppressive structures and avoid becoming tools of other people and of oppressive regimes (p. 106).

Bhandary might object that there is no way to avoid embedding values into accounts of autonomy (p. 105). She is clear that "[a]ll accounts of personal autonomy include some values in their procedures" (p. 105). Nevertheless, LDC is content neutral in the relevant sense because "it maintains a core idea of self-governance without prescribing or proscribing any particular actions in the concept itself" (p. 105). While content neutral — i.e., leaving open the pursuit of many different values — it cannot serve its justificatory function unless at least some people use their autonomy to identify and resist oppression.

Against more substantive feminist versions of autonomy,⁷ Bhandary argues that it is important to allow for those living in oppressive structures to still be autonomous (pp. 102–105). However, LDC aims to equip people to identify and resist oppressive structures. The skills LDC autonomy teaches "must include resources to identify deformed desires" that influence people's internal desires and expectations in an

⁷ See, e.g., Marina Oshana (1998, 2014) for a substantive feminist account of autonomy, which Bhandary uses as a contrast to her own view.

oppressive system (p. 105) and “fasten us to the established order of domination” (Bartky, 1990, p. 42; quoted at Bhandary, 2020, p. 105). To combat internalized oppression, one must develop a set of autonomy skills that helps her to consider which policies enable her to “be a claimant with self-respect” who gives weight to her own self-worth, needs, wants, and values (p. 12). Ensuring that people are able to identify existing inequalities is an important prerequisite for building just contractarian theories (p. 12; citing Cudd, 2015). This is the reason that teaching real people autonomy skills is a crucial part of LDC (p. 12).

We can see that, while Bhandary eschews claims about morality being grounded in rationality, LDC autonomy is grounded in a deep commitment to fighting oppression. As Bhandary argues, “liberal dependency care is an anti-oppression theory” (p. 101). While I agree with this foundational commitment as a core part of any theory of justice, I am also a feminist liberal committed to addressing oppression. For feminists, the capacity to identify and resist oppressive structures is vitally important in order to ensure theories of justice are truly just for all people. However, this is a deep value commitment, and one that may not be accepted by all reasonable comprehensive doctrines. There are a number of feminist political liberals who aim to show that any reasonable comprehensive doctrine should not be built on a foundation of oppression (e.g., Nussbaum, 1999; Schouten, 2019; Watson & Hartley, 2018). Yet these theories all seek to justify why more common foundational commitments to freedom and equality also require resisting oppression.

LDC is missing the justificatory step required to show why any reasonable comprehensive doctrine should accept that autonomy skills for real people are necessary for LDC’s legitimacy, especially when these skills are designed to keep people alert to oppression. Bhandary shows why attention to the skills of real people has an important influence on theory development. She argues that any theory of justice seeking to target oppressive structures should also pay attention to real people’s capacities to identify and resist oppression. What is missing, however, is a justification open to any reasonable comprehensive doctrine to show *why* teaching these autonomy skills can be justified to a diverse and pluralistic society. I think this justificatory step can be filled in, but doing so would need to specifically show why those who are not already committed to Bhandary’s feminist views should nevertheless endorse the second level of LDC’s justificatory structure.

5. The Width of Political Justice

Let’s return now to Bhandary’s classification of LDC as both shallow and wide. Thus far, I’ve given some reason to suggest that LDC may not be quite as shallow as Bhandary maintains because it is rooted in a deep feminist commitment to combating oppression in all of its forms. Additional justificatory challenges arise because of the ways in which autonomy skills are wide rather than narrow. To see why this might be especially challenging, let’s look at the justification for teaching children autonomy skills that have wide applicability beyond the political sphere. This question gets us to the broader question about where LDC draws the boundary for the proper scope of political justice.

While LDC holds that autonomy skills are needed for real people in their political capacities, the skills included in LDC autonomy will also be useful in people's private lives well beyond the reach of the political realm. This "unintended consequence makes [LDC's] commitment to autonomy a wide one" (p. 102). I agree that LDC's set of autonomy skills is likely to be wide rather than narrow because there is no clear way to limit the use of skills like critical observation, communication, and self-control to the political domain. As an all-purpose set of skills, LDC autonomy is not easily limited to the political realm by design. This marks a notable difference from Rawls's and Martha Nussbaum's defence of a narrow political version of autonomy (p. 100), as well as from other contemporary political liberals who continue to embrace the scope limitations of justice to those issues impacting our lives as citizens.⁸

A key aspect of LDC's justificatory structure is teaching real people autonomy skills. Bhandary argues that this is likely best served through some form of public education. However, some have worried that political liberalism's civic education is unable to remain distinctively political if its impact extends widely beyond the political sphere. Rawls raises a version of this challenge to his own defence of political liberal civic education, worrying whether it was "in effect, though not in intention, to educate [children] to a comprehensive liberal conception" of justice (Rawls, 2005, p. 199). Rawls defends his own view by suggesting that political liberalism "has a different aim and requires far less" than comprehensive liberalism (Rawls, 2005, p. 199). He specifically eschews teaching children comprehensive versions of autonomy (Rawls, 2005, p. 199). He opts, instead, for an education designed to enable children to learn their constitutional and civic rights, develop political virtues, and enable them to become fully cooperating members of society (Rawls, 2005, p. 199). While he recognizes that there are some similarities between the values of political and comprehensive liberalism, he argues that the "great differences in both scope and generality" distinguishes political liberal civic education from comprehensive liberalism (Rawls, 2005, p. 200). However, critics have been unconvinced, arguing that political liberalism is really just another version of comprehensive liberalism in disguise (Callan, 1997; Gutmann, 1995). If the unavoidable consequence of teaching children to be good political liberal citizens has the same impact as educating them within comprehensive liberalism, the distinction makes little difference.⁹

The concern that political and comprehensive liberalism converge in their public education may be even more applicable to Bhandary's LDC than to Rawls's political liberalism. As Amy Gutmann explains, political liberalism seeks to be more inclusive of social diversity by arguing that "individuality and autonomy are not necessary for good citizenship" and "by limiting its aspirations to politics" (Gutmann, 1995,

⁸ C.f. Rawls (2005), Nussbaum (2011), Watson & Hartley (2018), and Schouten (2019), all of whom embrace Rawls's narrow political scope for their theories. In a forthcoming book, Blain Neufeld argues for a reinterpretation of Rawlsian political liberalism as a theory of political autonomy for a civic people (Neufeld, *in press*). By contrast, Bhandary adds a wide set of autonomy skills as a necessary part of the justificatory structure of LDC.

⁹ I survey the debate concerning the differences between political liberal and comprehensive liberal approaches to civic education in Edenberg (2016). See also Neufeld (2013) for a helpful overview of these debates.

p. 559).¹⁰ Bhandary, by contrast, embraces the wide scope of autonomy skills and argues that teaching people autonomy skills is a necessary element of LDC's justificatory structure.¹¹ Yet, in so doing, LDC embraces the key aspects of liberalism that make public education for liberal values particularly controversial. While Bhandary carefully avoids advocating that autonomy should be used as an ideal to guide all of life and argues for the compatibility of LDC autonomy with religious ways of life, the skills she defends will extend broadly beyond a narrow sense of autonomy as a citizen in the political sphere. The question is whether this can be justified to those who object to liberalism on these grounds.

The content of public education is often under heightened scrutiny. We need only look at the vehemence with which people react to aspects of public education that conflict with their ideals and worldviews. From objections to teaching critical race theory in public schools, to mask mandates, to evolution, to teaching tolerance for diversity, when an issue is one of public education, it is bound to be subject to extra scrutiny and public outcry when there are disagreements. As such, public justifications are crucial for showing why public education itself or particular aspects of it are justified. On a political liberal framework, these justifications should appeal to public values.

After all, the point of teaching children both autonomy skills and caregiving skills is to equip everyone to be capable of providing care and of defending their own self-worth as individuals. Both skills are important in order to address the oppression that typically accompanies caregiving in our current society. When only some people (typically, women) are trained to be attuned to the needs of others, they will inevitably take on more of the burden of providing care because they are more acutely aware of the myriad of needs of others. This is why teaching boys how to care is an important step towards developing a world that will allow for a more just distribution of care in society (see Chapter 7). Likewise, there is a vulnerability that accompanies being constantly attuned to other peoples' needs. If caregivers are not trained to value their own worth by learning a broad set of autonomy skills, their own needs and values may not be met.

However, some people reject the value of autonomy, specifically its role in giving people tools to question and critically reflect on their circumstances and values. For example, religious objections to liberal practices are often grounded in the dangers of children questioning the 'true' path towards salvation. We can also imagine people whose worldviews are built on strong gender hierarchy might object to teaching everyone autonomy skills and teaching boys how to care. If caregiving is thought to be the natural woman's role, then it might be considered inappropriate to step beyond these gender boundaries.¹² How might LDC justify the value of teaching

¹⁰ Amy Gutmann ultimately argues that even without aiming to teach children autonomy, teaching them the skills of citizenship in a diverse democratic society will likely teach many of the skills of autonomy in the process (Gutmann, 1995, p. 563).

¹¹ Gina Schouten (2019) also defends teaching comprehensive autonomy skills as a part of her political liberal theory. Much of her book seeks to justify why these comprehensive skills still have a shallow justification grounded in political liberal stability.

¹² Bhandary could claim that gender hierarchy should be excluded as unreasonable. In Edenberg (2018), I discuss why this line of response may not be satisfactory.

autonomy and caregiving to individuals who do not already endorse the value of both for egalitarian and/or feminist reasons?

To stave off objections about care becoming an issue of justice, Bhandary often emphasizes some level of distance from the state's coercion. As she explains, "[o]n my view, for an issue to be a matter of justice does not mean that guns and incarceration can be used if a person fails to fulfill a corresponding responsibility. It also does not mean that the 'state' then performs the labor" (p. 11). However, while the state may not be the first responder in performing the labour of caregiving, the state does play an important role in enforcing proper caregiving structures and addressing failures to meet individuals' legitimate care needs as deviations from justice. This underlies the claims that the distribution of care is a matter of justice rather than simply benevolence. If a person's legitimate needs are not addressed, and this qualifies as an injustice, the state should play a role in ensuring that these needs are met. Insofar as the distribution of care is an issue of justice (rather than naturalizing care or demoting it to a mere private matter), the state can play a role in supporting legitimate entitlements to care.

In addition, public education is an exercise of the state's coercive authority. One of the key features of Bhandary's theory is that it marries a robust theoretical structure for securing just caregiving arrangements with a practical approach to understanding the real world (through the arrow of care map) and a pragmatic approach for creating lasting change (through the public education programs teaching autonomy and caregiving). I agree that building a more just future must start with teaching the next generation the skills needed to identify and resist oppression, to recognize their values, and to provide care. But for all of its pragmatism and slow change, public education is still a coercive exercise of the state's authority. Just as the state can ensure that children are learning at least some basic levels of education even when parents opt out of the public school system, the same may apply to Bhandary's proposals to teach autonomy and caregiving skills. The state may presumably step in to force parents to ensure that a minimal level of autonomy and caregiving skills are developed if this is part of the justification of the theory.

As with the previous section, I think there are excellent arguments to be made for why teaching children both autonomy and caregiving skills is important for political justice. However, these arguments should be made explicit and framed towards those who do not already endorse Bhandary's deeper feminist values.

6. Conclusion

Many of my objections take for granted that a political liberal justification is needed to secure the second level of LDC's justificatory structure. Bhandary may object that LDC is not designed to be a political liberal theory, so these objections do not hit at the core of the theory.¹³ LDC takes inspiration from Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls, 1999). From such starting points central to justice as fairness, rather than political liberalism, Bhandary aims to build a theory of justice for caregiving

¹³ In a workshop on this symposium, Bhandary raised this objection to an earlier version of this article.

arrangements. This is not meant to be a project in Rawlsian exposition, nor is it explicitly framed as a politically liberal theory. Why foist this external standard on LDC?

I will close by showing that LDC is, in many ways, committed to the broadly political liberal project of securing and justifying principles of justice for a diverse and pluralistic society. I will argue that this is a feature of the view that should be embraced.

One way to understand political liberalism is as a narrow project that builds on and adapts Rawls's own theory of political liberalism and public reason. I'd argue that another way to understand the political liberal project is that of being broadly committed to the central aspiration behind Rawls's political turn. The broader political liberal project, as I see it, is dedicated to securing justice for a society characterized by reasonable pluralism. It is this broader project that I think is important for ensuring that political philosophy can develop principles of justice that can guide our modern world. And it is this broader project that LDC embraces.

LDC sets its scopes to be broadly applicable to a wide range of societies, neutral among a wide range of views, and remain flexible enough to show how a wide range of caregiving arrangements in society might nevertheless be just. The arrow of care map is meant to apply to "every human social form in all foreseeable worlds" (p. 56). LDC's justificatory structure is designed to maintain "neutrality among reasonable conceptions of the good" (p. 8). The question that frames Bhandary's development of LDC autonomy is whether LDC can "endorse an account of autonomy while remaining culturally sensitive and applicable to a broad range of societies" (p. 99). Furthermore, Bhandary rightly argues that LDC has "cross-cultural applicability to identify fair terms of cooperation" and a "fair distribution" of care (p. 161). In addition, in the applied portion of the book, Bhandary shows how to balance the need for cultivating autonomy and caregiving skills in liberal societies, like the United States, that prioritize individual choice (Chapter 7); but she also extends her analysis of care to societies that reject the prioritization of individual choice and instead prioritize caregiving structures like arranged marriage (Chapter 8).

These cross-cultural commitments frame Bhandary's approach to developing principles of just care, taking inspiration from the many ways different societies can and do structure caregiving arrangements. She does not constrain her analysis of care to the gendered division of labour, nor does she constrain LDC to be only applicable to societies that prioritize Western liberal values of individual choice. LDC is designed to show how any society could be restructured to secure a just distribution of care. This broad view frames every aspect of the book and is an important feature that contributes to the power and promise of Bhandary's theory.

With this broad commitment to designing an inclusive and flexible methodology for designing just caregiving arrangements across a wide range of societies comes a higher, and more difficult, justificatory burden. Both steps of LDC's justificatory structure must themselves be justified to all those who qualify as reasonable. The second step of LDC's justificatory structure — seeking autonomy skills for people in the real world — is grounded in Bhandary's deep commitment to combatting oppression. This anti-oppression commitment might itself need to be justified to all reasonable views. In addition, teaching children a set of widely applicable autonomy skills also needs to be justified to those who may be sceptical that doing so may smuggle in

more comprehensive liberal commitments than would be justifiable to all reasonable views. These are the key justificatory burdens that LDC currently leaves unanswered. By filling out the justification, LDC will build on its already powerful set of tools for securing just principles of dependency care.

Acknowledgements. Many thanks to Asha Bhandary, Lavender McKittrick-Sweitzer, Helga Varden, and Tiina Vaittinen for helpful discussion about this article. Thanks as well to Jill Flohil for her excellent editorial assistance in preparing this article for the symposium, and to the anonymous referees for their time and feedback.

References

- Baehr, A. (2004). Introduction. In A. Baehr (Ed.), *Varieties of feminist liberalism* (pp. 1–20). Rowman and Littlefield.
- Bartky, S. L. (1990). *Femininity and domination: Studies in the phenomenology of oppression*. Routledge.
- Bhandary, A. (2020). *Freedom to care: Liberalism, dependency care, and culture*. Routledge.
- Callan, E. (1997). *Creating citizens: Political education and liberal democracy*. Clarendon Press.
- Cudd, A. E. (2015). Adaptations to Oppression. In M. Oshana (Ed.), *Personal autonomy and social oppression*, 142–160. Routledge.
- Edenberg, E. (2016). Civic education: Political or comprehensive? In J. Drerup, Gunter Graf, Christoph Schickhardt, & Gottfried Schweiger (Eds.), *Justice, education, and the politics of childhood* (pp. 187–206). Springer.
- Edenberg, E. (2018). Growing up sexist: Challenges to Rawlsian stability. *Law and Philosophy*, 37(6), 577–612.
- Edenberg, E. (2022). Gender justice, Rawls, and the common good. In R. Luppi (Ed.), *Rawls and the common good* (pp. 96–121). Routledge.
- Friedman, M. (2003). *Autonomy, gender, politics*. Oxford University Press.
- Frye, M. (1983). *The politics of reality: Essays in feminist theory*. Crossing Press.
- Gutmann, A. (1995). Civic education and social diversity. *Ethics*, 105(3), 557–579.
- Kittay, E. F. (1999). *Love's labor: Essays on women, equality, and dependency*. Routledge.
- Meyers, D. T. (2002). *Gender in the mirror: Cultural imagery and women's agency*. Oxford University Press.
- Meyers, D. T. (2014). The feminist debate over values in autonomy theory. In A. Veltman & M. Piper (Eds.), *Autonomy, oppression, and gender* (pp. 114–140). Oxford University Press.
- Mill, J. S. (1978). *On liberty*. E. Rapaport (Ed.). Hackett Publishing Company.
- Neufeld, B. (2013). Political liberalism and citizenship education. *Philosophy Compass*, 8(9), 781–797. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12064>
- Neufeld, B. (in press). *Public reason and political autonomy: Realizing the idea of a civic people*. Routledge.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (1999). The feminist critique of liberalism. In M. C. Nussbaum (Ed.), *Sex and social justice* (pp. 55–80). Oxford University Press.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2011). Perfectionist liberalism and political liberalism. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 39(1), 3–45.
- Oshana, M. (1998). Personal autonomy and society. *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 29(1), 81–102.
- Oshana, M. (2014). A commitment to autonomy is a commitment to feminism. In A. Veltman & M. Piper (Eds.), *Autonomy, oppression, and gender* (pp. 141–162). Oxford University Press.
- Rawls, J. (1997). The idea of public reason revisited. *The University of Chicago Law Review*, 64(3), 765–807.
- Rawls, J. (1999). *A theory of justice* (revised edition). Harvard University Press.
- Rawls, J. (2005). *Political liberalism* (expanded edition). Columbia University Press.
- Schouten, G. (2019). *Liberalism, neutrality, and the gendered division of labor*. Oxford University Press.
- Watson, L., & Hartley, C. (2018). *Equal citizenship and public reason: A feminist political liberalism*. Oxford University Press.

Cite this article: Edenberg, E. (2023). Dependency Care in a Politically Liberal Society. *Dialogue* 62(2), 231–245. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217322000166>