What Is Work For - A Catholic Ethical Response to a Crucial Issue in U.S. Welfare Reform

Christine Firer Hinze

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarship.law.nd.edu/ndjlepp

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://scholarship.law.nd.edu/ndjlepp/vol11/iss2/12
WHAT IS WORK FOR? A CATHOLIC ETHICAL RESPONSE TO A CRUCIAL ISSUE IN U.S. WELFARE REFORM

Christine Firer Hinze*

I. INTRODUCTION

Recently-enacted federal welfare reform legislation trades heavily on the argument that the most effective way for families in economic hardship to escape poverty is through participation in waged labor. In this essay, I want to reflect on this latest incarnation of a deeply-entrenched American faith in work as an antidote to poverty in light of certain insights proffered by Catholic social thought, and feminist social analysis. I will attempt to surface assumptions about the meaning and purposes of work in relation to families operative in the present legislation and our cultural debate surrounding welfare. Then, I will evaluate these assumptions in light of modern Catholic social thought and its configuration of the relationship between work and family flourishing. Finally, drawing selectively on recent feminist scholarship, I will identify some dynamics surrounding the relation between private and public economies, and the impact of gender on each, as these are being played out in both secular and Catholic thought on work, family, and welfare. My aim is to suggest ways that a viewpoint informed by Catholic and feminist wisdom can simultaneously illumine and challenge the ways family and work are being construed for the poor, as well as for the non-poor in late twentieth century United States. Such a vantage point uncovers crucial issues that any adequate welfare reform program must find ways to address.

As we investigate the underpinnings and implications of the recent legislation, it is appropriate to focus on that segment of the poor population most directly affected by the transformation of the Federal Aid to Families with Dependent Children program into the state administered, Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) program—poor women with dependent children. Especially in urban centers, the poor parent with young children which the new TANF program is to serve will most frequently be a poor woman of color.

* Assistant Professor of Christian Ethics, Marquette University.
This fact was not lost on President Clinton as he signed the reform legislation last August. It was certainly one reason why he invited to the signing ceremony three women, Penelope Howard, Janet Ferrel, and Lillie Harden, each of whom, he noted, "have worked their way from welfare to independence." In his remarks prior to the signing, he singled out Lillie Harden, a mother from Arkansas, for special mention. During a panel presentation for the Governors ten years prior, Mr. Clinton recalled asking her, "Lillie, what's the best thing about being off welfare?" "[S]he looked me straight in the eye," he recounted, "and said, 'When my boy goes to school, and they say what does your mama do for a living, he can give an answer.'" Clinton told his Rose Garden audience, "I have never forgotten that." He praised the success of all of her children and her own success, thanking Ms. Harden for the power of her example, and that of her family.

In both his informal and official remarks, the President (known for his skill at mirroring what he perceives to be the most widely-agreed upon values of his constituency) emphasized that enabling and obliging the poor to work was a primary goal of the new law. Quoting Robert F. Kennedy, "Work is the meaning of what this country is all about. We need it as individuals, we need to sense it in our fellow citizens, and we need it as a society, and as a people," the President sought to articulate the core of agreement around which a highly contentious debate had finally coalesced enough to allow the passage of the new law. That critical mass of consensus was around the value and necessity of work as a beacon of hope for the poor, and their surest path to a second chance at recovering human dignity through self-attained independence.

II. The Meaning and Value of Work in the New Legislation

Economist David T. Ellwood argues that in the U.S., most political and philosophical rhetoric concerning poverty and its antidotes is underpinned by four values: The autonomy of the individual; the virtue of work; the primacy of the family; and a desire for and sense of community. Ellwood maintains that "[p]rograms that tap into and reinforce common values are

2. Id.
3. Id.
4. Id.
5. Id.
likely to enjoy the support of the poor and nonpoor alike[;]... [while] programs that bring closely held values into conflict are sure to be politically volatile and controversial."⁶ These four core values can be translated into goals for public policies aimed at helping the poor: "The ideal social policy system would encourage self-support and independence through work, make people responsible for their actions, strengthen families, and integrate the poor, while providing dignity and security."⁷

The fact that Ellwood was one of the Clinton team's key advisors on welfare is reflected in the striking consistency with which Clinton has averted to those same four key values in his attempts to describe and promote the aims of the new welfare legislation. On August 22 the President enunciated these values repeatedly, declaring, "We're going to try to . . . see if we can't create a system of incentives which reinforce work and family and independence."⁸ He predicted a crackdown on parents who do not pay child support "will help dramatically to reduce welfare, increase independence and reinforce parental responsibility."⁹ He called the legislation an historic opportunity to "transform our broken welfare system by promoting the fundamental values of work, responsibility and family."¹⁰

Acknowledging concerns about budget balance, Mr. Clinton appealed to the public not to lose sight of "the fundamental purpose of the welfare provisions of this legislation . . . which can give us, at least the chance, to end the terrible, almost physical isolation of huge numbers of poor people and their children from the rest of main stream America."¹¹ But this, he declared, is only the beginning of welfare reform; in order to put into action the values the legislation promotes, "we have to all assume responsibility."¹² Referring to everyone in this society, including individuals in businesses, nonprofit organizations, religious institutions, and government, Mr. Clinton stressed:

[W]e have to build a new work and family system. This is everybody's responsibility now. The people on welfare are

⁷. Id. at 17. David Ellwood himself left his administration post profoundly disillusioned by the way political machinations surrounding welfare reform had nearly gutted his policy proposals of the support and enforcement components needed to actually promote these values.
⁸. Clinton, supra note 1.
⁹. Id.
¹⁰. Id.
¹¹. Id.
¹². Id.
people just like these three people we honor here today, and their families. They are human beings. We owe it to all of them to give them a chance to come back.\footnote{13} 

Discernable in the President’s rhetoric are not only the four key values identified by Ellwood, but also a deft attempt to weave them together amid present economic and cultural realities. Mr. Clinton’s remarks place primary emphasis on the first two values: personal autonomy and responsibility, and the virtue of work. He appeals to the second two values—the protection and strengthening of family life as well as the promotion and expression of community-mindedness—as hoped-for outcomes, but also as necessary conditions for the attainment of work and self-reliance by the poor. Hence his repeated calls for shared responsibility among the private and public sectors, by poor and non-poor individuals, as requisite for making self-reliance through work a concrete possibility for poor family heads.

The clarion call, “work, not welfare” appeals deeply to the American public and their elected leaders. It does so for a number of reasons. We perceive in such an approach to poverty the promise of ending poor families’ dependence on taxpayer assistance; of cultivating among poor citizens virtuous habits such as responsibility, self-discipline, hard work, skill development, socially-contributive activity, and giving good examples to children and neighbors; and of combatting vices such as laziness, dependency, and giving poor example to children and neighbors. Working is also expected to enable the poor to overcome social and economic marginalization, and thereby to take their places as dignified participants in American society.

The President’s presentation of the new legislation as a way of attaining all these benefits while advancing the four basic values of work, autonomy, family and community has been energetic. But it seems to me that it is precisely at the divide between the first and second pairs of cultural values lifted up by Ellwood (between autonomy and work on the one hand, and family and community on the other) that Americans’ grasp of the meaning of work, civic participation, and economic justice is, at present, seriously broken down. We are smack in the middle of a deep cultural crisis concerning how to construe and connect these two pairs of values, and about what the role of “economy” is in so doing. At present, economic and cultural practice favors the values of wage work and autonomy at the expense of family and

\footnote{13. \textit{Id.} The President’s references to welfare reform in subsequent speeches, including his State of the Union Address in February 1997, have been filled with similar statements.}
community. Grappling with the question, what do we want for the poor?, forces those of us in the middle class to ask what it is we perceive as the minimally just family and work life for ourselves. To a significant extent, our consternation about welfare reform mirrors our confusion about how to answer the later question, or our frustrated awareness that at present we are far from attaining the integration of family, work, and community to which we aspire.14

If I am right, despite Clinton’s best rhetorical efforts to tie the advancement of work and self-reliance for the poor together with the advancement of family and community in the new welfare plan, in practice, that plan is bound to uncouple them. By prioritizing “autonomy through wage labor” at the expense of “strengthening families and communities,” the legislation, as written, neatly reflects its cultural milieu. Instead of repairing the breach between these two sets of social goods, the new plan attempts to rectify older approaches—perceived as failed attempts to shore up the latter set of values, by casting its lot with the former and stressing self-reliance through wage earnings. As has historically been the case, the new public policies directed at the poor continue to reflect the same distortions and confusions that bedevil economic practices among the nonpoor.15 To a significant degree those contemporary bedevilments are rooted in the undue impact of market-based assumptions concerning three key matters: human nature and flourishing, the meaning and purpose of work, and the relationship of familial households to the larger household of the public economy.

First, and most fundamentally, the legislation is hobbled by a too-narrow construal of the human being as “homo economicus”—as wage-earner/consumer. The new plan remains beholden to the

14. This consternation can lead working and middle class citizens to resent the poor who might appear to too-easily circumvent some of the obstacles we might find personally insurmountable. Attitudes such as these arise: I don't have income security; why should they? I don't have enough time to spend with my children; why should they? I don't feel in control of my economic or familial destiny; why should they?

same market-based construal of human nature and well-being as the "broken" system it is intended to replace. The now-scrapped AFDC program was much criticized for constructing its clients as female "welfare mothers" and systematically reinforcing practices of passive dependency on state aid. AFDC operated with one narrowly market-derived perception of its recipients, that of consumers. Care for the poor was equated with assuring mothers and their children minimal access to means of economic consumption (foodstamps, welfare monies). In effect, the program treated client-families as "units of consumption manque," and sought to help the poor primarily by enhancing their ability to behave as consumers.

The new, "workfare" system aims to transform the operative image of the poor person it targets from an indefinitely dependent consumer to a temporarily disabled breadwinner. The new plan has the merit of encouraging a more activist and empowering approach to assisting poor families. But I submit that, in the end, it too remains trapped in a narrowly market-economic understanding of human work and human dignity. Care for poor families now means providing them with temporary supports whose goal is self-attained financial independence through a paid job. Clients are now to be treated as "wage-earners manque," and welfare programs' primary aim will be to help and oblige poor, child-rearing household heads (most frequently single mothers) to become breadwinners.

Second, consistent with its market-based anthropology, the new legislation reflects a narrow definition of "work" (or at least work that "counts") as "waged labor," and a near-equation of the meaning of "becoming a productive citizen" to participation in the paid labor force. In this way it both reflects and continues the practical devaluation of work performed in the non-waged sectors of home and local community. I will have more to say on this below. Finally, despite the President's rhetoric, the new plan perpetuates and may exacerbate a rift between non-market, familially based care-economics and the individually-based, competitive market economics of the workplace, with short shrift being given to the former. With a few exceptions, the placement of the "teeth" in the new legislation lends credence to the suspicion that it will do little to redress the present inequity between the value accorded to the family and community, versus the value accorded to wage earning and autonomy in the modern marketplace.

To assume that Catholics and feminists enjoy uncomplicated agreement on any issue is, at best, naive. Still, modern Catholic social thought and feminist social criticism represent two streams of thought that powerfully challenge the market-economic
approaches to people, work and social ecology that pervade the new welfare law. In the next two sections, we will consider some specific ways in which each does so.

III. Justice for Poor Families Within a Dignified Ecology of Work: Insights From Catholic Social Thought

Pope John Paul II has declared that "... [H]uman work is a key, probably the essential key, to the whole social question, if we try to see that question really from the point of view of man's good."\textsuperscript{16} These words appear to lend support to the new American gamble that the path to well-being for the poor lies through work. Indeed, in a Catholic approach to family poverty, all four of the American values identified by Ellwood—self-reliance, work, community and family—must be affirmed. As theologian Pamela Couture points out, however, how these basic values work in the social imagination and how they get played out in public policy depends on how they are grounded and interpreted. For instance, she asks whether "autonomy of the individual" is grounded in the anthropology of laissez-faire economics, or "in the Christian claim that the worth of every individual should be respected by the common community?"\textsuperscript{17} Does promotion of "the virtue of work" understand work in economic terms that regard only paid, public work as real or valuable, or does it affirm the "God-given vocation of every individual in domestic and public work"?\textsuperscript{18} Does affirming the "value of family and community" get translated into policies that actively support and honor poor people's care-taking and participation in these realms?\textsuperscript{19} For those seeking to expand understandings of human nature and flourishing, work and social ecology beyond those found in present approaches to economic life, modern Catholic social thought offers a rich trove of moral and theological insight. For our purposes, five points in this recent religious tradition emerge as especially relevant.

First, Catholic social teaching advances a realistic, positive construal of \textit{work} as a necessary and salutary avenue to material sufficiency, personal development, and communal participation. Work is a "universal calling" that, even with its inevitable toil, "is a

\textsuperscript{17} Pamela D. Couture, \textit{Blessed Are The Poor? Women's Poverty, Family Policy, and Practical Theology} 170-71 (1991).
\textsuperscript{18} Id.
\textsuperscript{19} Id.
good thing” for human beings, something worthy, that corresponds to human dignity:

Work is a good thing for man—a good thing for his humanity—because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed in a sense becomes “more a human being.”

All work has a threefold moral significance. First, it is a principal way that people exercise the distinctive human capacity for self-expression and self-realization. Second, it is the ordinary way for human beings to fulfill their material needs. Finally, work enables people to contribute to the well-being of the larger community. Work is not only for one’s self. It is for one’s family, for the nation, and indeed for the benefit of the entire human family.

Second, affirming that it is through work that people normally access their right to a share in the goods of creation meant for the well-being of all, this tradition specifies that in modern industrialized economies, just recompense for work will normally take the form of a “family-supporting living wage.” In the 20th century United States, Catholics such as John A. Ryan have championed the right to a decent livelihood for workers and their families, to be accessed through the expenditure of reasonable amounts of waged labor [equivalent to one full time adult worker per two-adult household]. For combating poverty, the U.S. bishops declare that “[t]he first line of attack... must be to build and sustain a healthy economy that provides employment opportunities at just wages for all adults who are able to work.”

Third, Catholic insistence that justice requires that decent levels of material sufficiency be accessible to all citizens is articulated within a multifaceted understanding of mutually interdependent relations—today we might speak of a complex social ecology—among persons and community, and among various social spheres, in particular the familial, the economic, and the

---

22. Elsewhere I argue that a feminist revision of the family living wage agenda holds promise for those seeking to specify the coordinates of a new relationship between family and public workplace today. See Christine Firer Hinze, Bridge Discourse on Wage Justice: Feminist and Roman Catholic Perspectives on the Family Living Wage, in Readings in Moral Theology No. 9: Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition 511 (Charles E. Curran et al. eds., 1996).
23. Economic Justice for All, supra note 21, para. 193. See also John A. Ryan, A Living Wage (1906).
political. The Catholic principle of subsidiarity underscores the sorts of mutual assistance that should obtain among these spheres, with larger organizational domains respecting the integrity, but helping when needed, smaller or more local units. Edwin Kaiser summarizes this well:

True subsidiarity is positive. It demands that society furnish its members (groups, branches, individuals) with the possibility of attaining material security in a sound social structure: this means full membership with right and power of self-development, which transcends the capacity of the individual to establish but not to perfect by cooperative action. . . . Thus society does not restrict but rather lays the foundation for personal responsibility in a climate of freedom.

. . . The State must create the preliminaries for a blossoming community life; the community, in turn, must bear the same responsibility for the family; the family, for its members. . . . Subsidiarity is not relief from responsibility but its very basis and source.24

Fourth, 20th century Catholic teaching on work and economic justice has been committed to articulating public policy directions that actively integrate the values of self-reliance, work, family and community. In the Catholic family living wage agenda, for instance, the caretaking familial economy and the competitive market economy were reconciled through an assignment of gender roles; cooperative attention to the values and practices of domestic and public economies was secured through the partnership of husband-breadwinner and wife-homemaker. More recent treatments of poverty and worker justice continue to warn against ignoring or abandoning the work of the home.25

Fifth, perhaps most radically, recent Catholic teaching has made it abundantly clear that solidarity with the poor and economically vulnerable, the protection and vindication of their rights and dignity, is the indispensable starting point, and must

24. EDWIN G. KAISER, THEOLOGY OF WORK 479-80 (1966); cf. NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, supra note 21, para. 99. Kaiser continues, drawing analogies between God's bounty that respects human freedom and demands responsible cooperation and the role of higher levels of organization in helping individuals. "Whatever the individual can do for himself ordinarily, he must be left to do. Only by way of exception may higher society intervene. Its help in such instances is substitute (Ersatz) assistance, permissible because of some defect or lack in the individual or in an unusual condition which must be corrected. Societal help must correspond to a real need, correspond properly." Id. at 480.

25. See, e.g., ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, supra note 21, paras. 204-05.
be the ongoing *leitmotif* for any welfare policy or practice. The unfolding of new state welfare legislation will be most surely guided by persons—including religious leaders and intellectuals—who are both informed by genuine policy and economic expertise *and* in active solidarity with those most directly affected by the new policies, and who struggle to learn from the poor. As the principle of human dignity that has animated a century of modern social teaching is enhanced and radicalized by Catholic social teaching's dialogue with liberationist theologies, we see a renewed stress on solidarity with the poor, leading to active challenge of unjust social structures. But far from pitting the interests of the poor exclusively over-against the interests of the non-poor, policies concerning work and family for the poor are approached within a commitment to a genuine, complex common good from which no one is to be excluded.

26. Attempting to track and advance the incorporation of the option for the poor in Catholic social and economic ethics, David Hollenbach writes, “All persons have material needs and wants which demand respect, and basic rights. But in the actual pushing and shoving of economic life, the wants of some are gratified at the expense of the basic needs of others.” Hollenbach argues that to counteract patterns of privilege and marginalization, which prevent persons from realizing social rights pertaining to their basic needs, freedoms, and relationships, Catholic economic ethics must promote three normative ethical standards, which should also act as strategic priority principles for the advancement of public policy:

1. The needs of the poor take priority over the wants of the rich.
2. The freedom of the dominated takes priority over the liberty of the powerful.
3. The participation of marginalized groups takes priority over the preservation of an order which excludes them.

As these norms suggest, commitment to realizing rights and dignity of the poor implies significant social and economic changes that may start with reformist strategies, but must go beyond them to true renovation/transformation. Hollenbach makes this clear when he argues that public policy must concretely and deliberately set out to counteract the privilege of the rich whenever this denies minimal necessities to the poor. “Conflict between the needs of some and the wants of others...is one of the predominant characteristics of contemporary society. An adequate human rights policy cannot avoid this conflict if it is to be responsive to the actual situation. Therefore, a choice must be made between protecting privilege and guaranteeing minimum standards of living for all.” David Hollenbach, *Claims in Conflict: Retrieving and Renewing the Catholic Human Rights Tradition* 204-05 (1979).

27. See, e.g., *Economic Justice for All*, supra note 21, para. 79. Elements of the Catholic perspective sketched here are compatible with many points elucidated in other recent Christian ethical analyses of welfare. For instance, there are points of contact with the argument advanced by Stanley Carlson-Thies, that the welfare crisis reflects a deeper cultural “crisis of responsibility” concerning poverty and the best way to combat it. His co-edited work, *Welfare in America*, in particular the contribution of Dutch economist Bob Goudzwaard, offers resources for continuing dialogue. See *Welfare in America*:
IV. Exposing Deeper Power Dynamics: Contributions of Feminist Critical Social Theory

The understandings of human dignity, human work, and the wholistic ecology of work and family promoted by Catholic social thought resist reduction to the terms of the capitalist marketplace. Add to this its emphasis on an option for the poor, and a Catholic perspective offers a substantial critique and alternative to major facets of the new legislation. But comprehending the obstacles to effective welfare reform demands something further: a more acute analysis of less obvious discourses and practices—particularly surrounding race, class, and gender—that guide and reinforce particular distributions of value and power in the familial and the public economic spheres. By attending to these subtexts, especially those involving gender, recent contributions in feminist social theory can provide our Catholic analysis with some crucial enhancements.

Feminist critical analysis illumines the extent to which current economic arrangements mire all families, whether poor, middle or working class, in a socially-constructed conflict of economies, between values and practices surrounding individual autonomy and wage labor on the one hand, and the affiliative values attending family and community life on the other. Our roles as family and local community members entail collaborative, relational, and nurturant languages and practices. But these are fundamentally at odds with the individualist, competitive and acquisitive practices demanded by our roles as wage earners in the modern public market. Up until very recently, an ingenious but tenuous compromise had designated the local-familial sphere as the preserve for caretaking values in a non-economic "private" realm, placing it opposite the wage-earning sphere, the

---


28. As noted earlier, certain aspects of the new legislation could potentially promote the dignified integration of persons, families and work that a Catholic view advances. Among them are the stipulations that in meeting work requirements, a state may opt to count toward meeting the work requirement single parents, with a child under age 6, if the parent works at least 20 hours per week; and that states may count toward the work requirement participation in community service programs. Jeffery L. Katz, Welfare Overhaul Law, 54 Conc. Q. Wkly. Rep. 2696, 2698.

public economic world of work and money.\textsuperscript{30} Over most of the past century, this public/private division has been reinforced through gender roles, with women assumed to be the primary exemplars and guardians of the nurturant-communal values of home, and men of the individualist-competitive values of the marketplace. But besides constricting the human development of men and women by confining them to their “natural” spheres, this widely taken-for-granted division and juxtaposition immunized the wage-earning world from affiliative communal values, and obscured the familial household as a site of real, socially valuable work. Discrimination between the public value and power attached to the values and practices associated with “men’s” and “women’s” work has had profound ramifications for the economic well-being of women and their children.

Societal changes over the past three decades, while in many cases increasing women’s access to individual autonomy through waged-work participation, tended to leave intact the older cleavage between caring practices and values as marks of domestic household economy, and competitive-individualist practices as virtues of public waged economy, as well as the gendered aspects of each sphere. Women poured into the waged workforce while men stayed there, creating an unprecedented upsurge in adult participation in the public waged economy. Though study after study shows that wage-earning women continue to exert herculean efforts to also maintain the caring values of domestic economy, the inevitable upshot has been to drain attention and energy from the vital caring labor received by family and local community. Mainstream families are plagued by a “time famine;” in working poor families lack of time is further aggravated by lack of other resources.\textsuperscript{31}

By exposing some of the deeper structural and ideological dynamics at play, this analysis helps explain why the present welfare legislation frames the meaning and purposes of work predominantly in terms the first pair of values identified by Ellwood, but not the second. “Real” work is construed as labor in the public workforce performed for pay. The aim of laborforce


participation is primarily to provide, through a paycheck, a means of independent economic support, so that poor families can move from being socially isolated, degraded, "dependent" welfare consumers, to socially participative, dignified and morally praiseworthy "self-sufficient" wage producers. Being a "productive member of the community" is equated with having a job, pulling your own weight, and paying your own way. The household head without a paying job, (e.g., a single mother or father caring for children or a frail/elderly family member) by implication, is unproductive, non-participative, not self-reliant, and deprived of active citizenship. On this view, waged labor is virtually the sole gateway to genuine community membership. Activating one's citizenship, indeed one's human dignity, is impossible unless one is a jobholder.\textsuperscript{32}

This critical feminist analysis, then, sounds a serious warning note: in the present welfare scheme, there exists the real danger that, just as is the case among middle and working classes, the distinctive tasks of the nurturant domestic economy will be ignored or pushed aside in our effort to ensure that the poor household head, that is the poor single woman, becomes a participant in the individualist competitive market economy. In our efforts to evaluate and refine policy, we need to honestly and systematically ask ourselves: what has been the work that women have typically performed in the domestic household, and what is that for?\textsuperscript{33} What personal, familial, and societal values has women's work carried and preserved, and how are that work and those values accounted for in the present reconfiguration of the welfare system?

The Catholic understanding of work as an avenue through which the dignity and responsibility of human personhood may be realized amid a web of interdependent relations seriously challenges welfare approaches that treat wage labor as the means to escape dependence on others. Feminist scholars who lift up an underlying struggle between construals of domestic and public economy concur with the Catholic emphasis on inter-

\textsuperscript{32} On this count, Hannah Arendt's analysis in the 1950s appears disturbingly accurate: citizenship in our day has been reduced to laborforce participation. We have become, in her words, no longer a civic community, but "a society of jobholders." See Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (1958).

\textsuperscript{33} Mary Ann Glendon raises many of these same concerns in her recent writings. See, e.g., Mary Ann Glendon, Feminism and Families: An Indissoluble Marriage, Commonweal, February 14, 1997, 11, 12-14. While agreeing with Glendon on many points, the brunt of my argument here is that family and welfare policy too frequently divorces itself from feminism. Glendon's concern is the obverse: the tendency of feminism to divorce itself from family concerns.
dependent communities. But they underscore, in a way official Catholic teaching does not, the historical linkage of certain economic practices with gender roles, and reveal ways that the ascendance of a masculine-keyed, individualist-competitive model of economy in capitalism marginalizes and finally undermines a feminine-keyed, communal-caring economics connected with the domestic household and local community. Today there is controversy concerning the extent to which it is women who should remain the primary bearers of this care-communal economy. However, a wide swath of consensus exists concerning the importance of preserving and continuing to foster the communal-caring economic attitudes and practices historically associated with families and local communities. Despite pro-family and pro-community rhetoric, however, economic and welfare practices continue to be founded on a deficient anthropology that construes the worker-consumer as the isolated, self-interested *homo economicus*. This being the case, policies that attempt to alleviate family poverty through wage work, most glaringly by expecting the single parent of young children to engage in poorly paid full time employment, may do little to stem the continued deterioration of families and neighborhoods that blights many local communities today.

President Clinton seems to at least sense this deeper knot of problems when he comments that, ". . . most American families find that the greatest challenge of their lives is how to do a good job raising their kids and do a good job at work. Trying to balance work and family is the challenge that most Americans in the workplace face. . . . That’s just what we want for everybody. We want at least the chance to strike the right balance for everybody."34 Frequently, this President edges toward “talking the talk” of a new social ecology that weds care and market economies; for the poor and non-poor the question is whether, amid current economic culture, new welfare policies have any real chance of “walking the walk.”

As this welfare legislation is implemented in the states, poor families will be best served by policies that do, in fact, explicitly recognize, honor, and support *both* the work of home and neighborhood participation in the communal-caring-domestic economy, *and* the work of wage earning in the individualist-competitive-public economy. If dignity for poor families and work as the means to escape poverty continue to be framed predominantly in terms of wage labor, we can expect the outcome of the new policies to continue to mirror, in intensified

form, the deterioration of family and local community being experienced across the board.

The preceding analysis strongly suggests that there is no way to avoid welfare policies that privilege work and autonomy values at the expense of family and community values, unless Americans can find ways to "rewrite a social contract, updating classical economics to honor and include and honor the so called 'feminine economy'." As Shirley P. Burggraf argues, "In a world in which people are free to choose between caring and competitive roles, an economic system that disproportionately rewards the competitors and beggars the caretakers will eventually lose its ability to compete because resources are increasingly diverted away from society's basic function of providing a civilized context for human life."35

V. Conclusion

Catholic and feminist social criticism lend their combined weight to a crucial claim: if social policies are truly to help poor families attain the values connected with economic self-reliance and participation in work, they must embody concrete strategies for acknowledging and sustaining family and community relations and responsibilities. And such strategies must be founded on a more holistic understanding of dignified human living as wedding both domestic and public relationships, economic participation and accountability. Catholic and feminist social thought converge in another vital point: both make it plain that economically advantaged citizens committed to the genuine empowerment of poor families must face the possibility that extant economic and cultural power structures, generally comfortable for us, may be unjust and in need of more than tinkering to fix.

35. Fred Miller Robinson, Splitsville, N.Y. Times, Jan. 26, 1997, sec. 7 at 21 (reviewing Shirley P. Burggraf, The Feminine Economy and Economic Man (1997)). I hope it is clear that, in my view, the term "feminine economy" is a historically-rooted shorthand for the economy of care associated with domicile and local community.

36. Id. at 21. Both Catholic and feminist social thought insist that work and economy remain instrumental in the service of people and their dignified flourishing in community. A further question arises: is it inevitably the case that one form of economy must be primary in the practices of social life? Must the care economy serve the acquisitive economy, or vice versa? Or is a genuine interdependent partnership possible? Before coming to any oppositional conclusions, Catholics and feminists, I believe, would favor vigorous and extensive attempts to forge such a partnership.
This last point opens up a difficult prospect. Jean Elshtain is right when she observes that we Americans "are more open to the possibilities of government action if extant power arrangements remain undisturbed." 37 Indeed, middle and working-class reformers earlier in the century, including John A. Ryan, sidestepped the question of radical transformation and instead advanced reform efforts that traded on the "shared and unexamined assumptions" that underpinned the cultural and economic arrangements of the day. This ameliorist approach thereby allowed "the deep structure of society—its organization around the capital/labor relationship on the one hand and around the inherited, largely unconscious structure of relations between the sexes on the other—to mediate between a series of disparate reforms and to establish their long-run meaning and relationship." 38 But today, it is those very assumptions and structures that demand critical scrutiny. Christians and others who would stand with the dispossessed must redouble efforts to expose them, to understand their ambiguous influences on families of every economic stratum, and to begin, personally and communally, to plot and enact necessary transformative strategies. A sincere, religiously-motivated commitment to welfare reform will lead, ineluctably, to deeper questions of societal transformation, particularly the redistribution of economic and social power. As Elshtain's words suggest, opening up this frankly more radical line of inquiry and response is frightening, and fraught with difficulties that include the likely resistance of many citizens. But open it up we must. It is our best chance for approaching what the present legislation only barely begins to seek: a future in which a better partnership between domestic and public economy is embodied in family and workplace, and sustained by a civic realm that carries and conveys a wholistic understanding of human dignity and interdependence.

I close by paraphrasing Eli Zaretsky. 39 Neither the attempt to engage poor women in the competitive-individualist market

39. Zaretsky writes, "Neither the attempt to extend the traditionally male ideal of individual independence to women nor the attempt to extend the traditionally female ideal of nurturance to men can be based on an economic
economy, nor the attempt to oblige poor men to pay their dues [construed in the new law as "paying" child support] in the care-taking familial economy can succeed in a milieu dominated by an economic system that fosters a one-sided model of economic independence and a correspondingly hollow rhetoric of community. Authentic independence through participation in the public economy must be founded in the prior acceptance of our human dependence on others, and active recognition of the fact that a dignified livelihood for families, whether poor or not, requires a society that honors and supports participation in both the public and domestic economies. Only a disciplined, realistic embrace of this more complete understanding of human life, work, and well-being can guard policies aimed at alleviating material poverty against tragic defeat at the hands of our own more profound impoverishment of values, vision and hope.

system that fosters a one-sided ideal of economic independence and a correspondingly hollow collectivity. True independence, for both sexes, is based on an acceptance of our dependence on others and is realized through our ability to nurture and give to others without conflict within ourselves." Zaretsky, supra note 38, 218-19.