

Report from the Institute for

Volume 11

Number 1

PHILOSOPHY & PUBLIC POLICY

Winter

1991

School of Public Affairs • University of Maryland
College Park, Maryland 20742 • 301-405-4759

Women's Work

“The exodus of women into the economy,” writes sociologist Arlie Hochschild, “has not been accompanied by a new view of marriage and work that would make this transition smooth. Most workplaces have remained inflexible in the face of the changing needs of workers with families, and most men have yet to really adapt to the changes in women.”

So far, that's true. But growing demand for a more flexible, family-friendly workplace has at least put issues like parental leave on the bargaining table. While certain feminists have argued that such modest reforms will do little to improve women's status, most people agree that women stand to benefit from them. The only question is how much they will benefit.

A greater worry is whether the newly flexible workplace, combined with recent trends in family law, might actually leave many women *more* vulnerable than they were before. It's fine to sacrifice some money and career growth for the sake of home and family; it's good when businesses will let employees take leave, or share jobs, or work part-time. But in the age of no-fault, low-alimony divorce, women who make these sacrifices may pay dearly for them in the long run. We seem to have entered a period where policymakers want employers to take family ties seriously, yet want marriages easily dissolved, and preferably with no strings attached. How did we end up in this double-bind?

The law traditionally viewed production and reproduction—that is, work and family—as fundamentally separate and incompatible realms. Indeed, the strict separation of the “private” domestic sphere from the “public” world of work and politics was thought necessary not only to promote economic growth, but also to safeguard the family's place as a “haven in a heart-

less world.” The legal and ideological separation of the two realms was also a cornerstone of the system of gender hierarchy that permeated virtually all aspects of life.

This sharp division between work and family hurt women and men alike. It hurt women by severely restricting their participation in the paid labor market and thereby ensuring their continued economic dependence on men. It hurt men by denigrating their nurturing capacities and limiting their role in the family

To make its research readily available to a broad audience, the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy publishes this quarterly newsletter. Articles are intended to advance philosophically informed debate on current policy choices; the views presented are not necessarily those of the Institute or its sponsors.

In This Issue

WOMEN'S WORK

Jana Singer 1

WHAT'S IN A RISK?

Robert Wachbroit 6

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND FAIRNESS

Robert K. Fullinwider 10

PROTECTING CHILDREN, BORN AND UNBORN

Bonnie Kent 13