

Reflections: My Sister's Keeper

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The situation

My Sister's Keeper is a novel/movie about a couple whose lives are centered around their daughter, Kate. From a young age, Kate has a diagnosis of Leukemia and doctors gave her little time to live. Her parents undertake a decision to duplicate Kate's chromosomes by a genetically engineered baby sister, Anna, to use her organ to save Kate's life. Kate at 16 years old developed renal failure due to leukemia. Anna's parents expect her to donate her kidneys to save Kate's life. Instead of donating her kidney, Anna files a lawsuit against her parents for the rights of her own body so that she could not be forced to have surgery against her will.

The Fitzgerald Family

Sara – the mother who is a lawyer but elected to quit to take care of her sick daughter

Brian – The father who is just in the background

Jesse – the ten-year-old brother, who felt neglected

Anna – the engineered child; filed a lawsuit for “emancipation.”

Kate – sick with a rare form of cancer: Acute Promyelocytic Leukemia.

The characters of the story have to comply with the laws and standard set forth by the writer of the novel, Picoult. Each character displays different levels of virtue. The movie implants the Fitzgerald family into a society where questions medically engineered baby and medical emancipation become an ethical question. The moral code that this family lives by is unique. There are many ethical questions to delve into; the reflection of this paper will focus on Sara Fitzgerald and Anna Fitzgerald. Several ethical questions arise:

- “Is it ethically and morally right to engineer a child to become a donor for another sick child.?”
- “What happens when children are not loved or treated the same?”
- “Is it morally and ethically acceptable to force your daughter to donate her organ against her will?”

Sara Fitzgerald

Sara is a corporate lawyer but decided to quit her job to care for her daughter, Kate who is sick with a rare form of cancer, Acute Promyelocytic Leukemia. Kate has received multiple treatments for her disease, but she has no more options left. Her doctor recommended stem cell transplantation. The final decision was to create a genetically engineered child who will be a match for Kate’s needs. Anna became the donor for Kate (from birth – umbilical cord, stem cell twice and now as a kidney donor).

Anna’s perception of her relationship with her mother is not a positive one. Anna feels that her mother, Sara doesn’t care about her as a person; as she is a means to an end. Anna believes that Sara only sees her in association with her sister’s treatment. Anna believed early in life that her purpose was to save her sister’s life and this interferes the bonding between Sara and Anna. “ Does Sara’s treatment to Anna make her an agent living outside the virtues established in the story? This is a challenging question to answer and merits deeper investigation.

On multiple occasion, Sara sees Anna be of any importance beyond being a donor to her sister. When Sara was asked to explain what she hopes to tell her new baby when she grows up, Sara callously replies: “With any luck, I’ll be able to tell her to stop bugging her sister.” Anna

was not in her plans. Sara, in the world of ethics, showed to be unethical toward her attitude toward having another child. She cares more for one child than another. Where is the moral order of loving each child equally? Sara denies her son a promise she made to take him to get new soccer cleats after Kate had another relapse. Her son Jesse was only ten years old at the time of this outburst, and the damages of her actions would be long lasting to Jesse. “Your sister is very sick; “I am sorry if that interferes with your dentist appointment or your plans to go buy a pair of cleats. I’d think that since you are ten, you might be able to grow up enough, to realize that the whole world doesn’t revolve around you.” Through a deeper understanding of virtue ethics, Sara goes against the grain of ethical behavior because she ignores the established order with her actions. Sara’s actions are not pure unethical because she loves one of her children; she is by no means a monstrous character.

Sara commits a crime; she fights to keep Kate alive against Kate’s will. At the court, Anna confessed that she had been convinced by Kate to file a lawsuit for medical emancipation. Kate couldn’t tell her mother that she was ready to die. Kate asked Anna’s assistance in perpetuating her end because Sara wouldn’t listen to Kate’s attempt at telling her she was ready to give up. Anna revealed that Kate’s attempt to tell her mother that she is ready to die, she was informed that she is in renal failure and that Anna must donate her kidney to her (Anna is the only perfect DNA match for Kate). “I’m not doing it again; I’m sick of it. The hospitals, the chemo, and the radiation and the whole freaking thing.” Kate tells her parents. Sara responds by saying, “Fine Kate, Go ahead and commit suicide!” Sara treats her daughter’s plea with a sarcastic attitude, which shows she is not listening to Kate.

Anna Fitzgerald

Anna is a thirteen year old smart, funny, observant and protagonist. She is kind and loving and intelligent. While the rest of the family has often been left to sit idly by in Kate's fight against cancer, Anna because her genes match Kate's, has been an active participant. Anna's role in Kate's survival has been a blessing and a curse for her, as it has made her Kate's savior but has also made Anna unable to be a person.

Anna, being self-serving because she has filed for medical emancipation from her parents during a time of crisis in Kate's disease and she is refusing to donate her kidney to her sick sister. The movie painted the reader's belief that Anna is immoral because of this action. Anna was in the state of indecision about the choice she made. Does that character make her lack virtue? No, because the reason Anna is unsure about her actions is that they are not their own. Anna was acting on a directive given to her by Kate to file the petition, and Anna was questioning Kate's decision to go through with this drastic measure, not her own decision.

Sara believed that Anna was selfish, but Anna suffers because of her decision to act virtuously and keep Kate's secret. The true affirmation of Anna's virtue is her willingness to help Kate and be treated. Her mother yelled; "For God's sake Anna, What have you done to deserve this?" Sara tries to make Anna feel guilty by putting pressure on her.

Anna was acting with sense because she had been asked to do something that she knew was going to be tough. She did not resign in her judgment to go through with the lawsuit; she only probed if her sister was going to regret making her choice to end her life. Anna does not want to lose her sister, but she also does not want Kate to suffer any longer. The guilt and

sadness Anna feels at the idea of losing Kate was very difficult, and pursuing a lawsuit that will put an end to her sister's life demonstrate deeply-seated virtue.

Finally, Anna's virtuous character sacrifices herself for her sister. Anna offered herself to her family. By choosing to take on Kate's request, Anna is a saint thinking that Anna is acting out of selfishness, indirect self-sacrifice. On her way to the court, Anna was in an accident and died. Her attorney holds a power of attorney for all Anna's medical decision to donate her organs. Anna's kidneys put Kate into a prolong remission, which is exactly what Anna have wished. Anna would have willingly given her kidneys to Kate had Kate not ask her to file the lawsuit, and with her death, she did just that.

Conclusion

Virtue ethics have merit to a reader on a personal level that other criticisms do not. The theory makes it possible for readers to determine if virtue is applicable and if virtue applies to everyone's life. Sara has a deep and abiding love for all her family, though she does not always know how to show that love

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Each of us will have different views and answers to these questions.

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