

Making Parents Responsible

There is a lot of talk about the government needing to help single parents or to take care of children. In some cases, charity is absolutely necessary. But is it possible that we overemphasize the need of government, particularly the federal government, to help? In so doing, do we forget the natural and just duties of parents?

Consider this point made by John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty* (1859):

“Hardly anyone, indeed, will deny that it is one of the most sacred duties of the parents (or, as law and usage now stand, the father), after summoning a human being into the world, to give to that being an education fitting him to perform his part well in life toward others and toward himself. But while this is unanimously declared to be the father’s duty, scarcely anybody, in this country, will bear to hear of obliging him to perform it. Instead of his being required to make any exertion or sacrifice for securing education to his child, it is left to his choice to accept it or not when it is provided gratis! **It still remains unrecognized that to bring a child into existence without a fair prospect of being able, not only to provide food for its body, but instruction and training for its mind is a moral crime, both against the unfortunate offspring and against society;** and that if the parent does not fulfill this obligation, the State ought to see it fulfilled at the charge, as far as possible, of the parent.” (Emphasis added.)

That is probably one of the greatest dividers in politics. One side believes that the other is callous because they aren’t rushing to set up government programs for children and families. The other side, though, believes that there is a natural duty of parents, *both parents*, to provide for their

children first and that government programs can often undermine that natural duty.

When considering how to help children and parents, we might benefit from such a perspective. Rather than rushing to the federal government to fix every problem, real or imagined, when possible why not put more responsibilities back on parents?

Remember, laws can do both.