

The Problem of Care in a Culture of Convenience

The reality of caring for the very young (or the very old) while trying to maintain a living is what modern social theorists refer to as “the dependency problem.” In pursuit of maximum efficiency and endless affluence, modern industrial economies require that all able-bodied adults work full-time outside the home.

Those who are too young—or too old—to contribute are labeled accordingly as “problems.” Harvard sociologist Theda Skocpol [insists](#) that “participation in the wage-employment system is universally understood as desirable for all adults, men and women, mothers and fathers alike.”

But UCLA social scientist Jody Heymann [identifies](#) the long-term consequence of this approach:

The fact that both men and women labor is not new. What has been altered radically over the past 150 years for both men and women is the location and conditions of work.

Heymann warns of a new “care-giving deficit” that plagues modern societies: “Whether the issue is elder care or child care, the experiences of low-income families are sounding early, grim warnings for the nation as a whole.”

Author and social historian Allan Carlson [holds that](#) “the most socially disruptive effect of the industrial revolution was the way it severed the place where adults work from the place where adults live. Most of our current family questions—from loud disputes over gender roles to child care to low fertility—derive from this great disruption.”

“Every community must resolve the same issue,” writes Carlson

in [The Natural Family Where It Belongs](#).

Who will care for the very young, the very old, the weak and the infirm? How shall the rewards given to productive adults be shared with those who are not or cannot be productive? In the natural human order, these tasks fall on kin networks, where spouses care for each other 'in sickness or in health,' where parents nurture, train, and protect their offspring until they are able to create marriages of their own, where the aged enjoy care, purpose, and respect around the hearth of their grown children, and where kin ensure that no family member falls through the family's safety net.

Many secular thinkers place little value on the family as a fundamental economic partnership for the good of one-another—and by extension, the good of society.

Christian teaching, on the other hand, diverges radically from the materialistic, consumption-driven culture in which we find ourselves. Noticeably absent from Christian teaching and historic practice is any justification for neglecting others who are too young, too old, too weak, too sick, or too unplanned to be productive members of society. Instead, Christian teachings place relationships—care of others—as the priority, not problems to be removed on the pathway to prosperity.

Care is the ultimate act of self-sacrifice. And it is not a responsibility to be delegated; it is through caregiving that we ourselves are changed.

Delegated care—the inevitable “answer” given by social theorists—robs us of the personal transformation that accompanies caregiving, and it diminishes care for the receiver too.

Caregiving is not adventurous. It is not glamorous. It is mind-numbingly mundane, and it is usually unseen. At times it

may well put us into financial hardship.

But caregiving is important. The mind-numbing, ordinary, unseen, everyday sacrifices have an impact far beyond what we see in the present. The simple act of giving your child your full attention is perhaps the greatest gift they can be given. It is the one thing that every parent has and every child needs.

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