



Love and Economics

It Takes a Family to Raise A Village

written by:
**Jennifer
 Roback
 Morse, Ph.D.**

*The following has been adapted from a talk Dr. Morse gave about her book, *It Takes a Family to Raise a Village* (formerly entitled, *Love and Economics*) at the John Locke Foundation in Raleigh, NC on October 28, 2010.*

HOW DID AN ECONOMICS PROFESSOR END UP WRITING BOOKS ABOUT THE FAMILY AND MARRIAGE AND HUMAN SEXUALITY? IT'S SORT OF MIRACULOUS IN A WAY—THE FAMILY HAPPENED TO US. I WAS A HARD-CHARGING CAREER WOMAN WHEN I STARTED OFF MY EDUCATION YEARS, AND MY PLAN FOR MYSELF WAS THAT I WOULD GET MY DOCTORATE, I WOULD GET TENURE AT MASON, THEN I WOULD HAVE A BABY DURING THE SUMMER, AND I WOULD PUT THE BABY IN DAY CARE IN SEPTEMBER, AND I WOULD GO RIGHT BACK TO WORK. SO IMAGINE MY SURPRISE WHEN THE BABY DIDN'T ARRIVE DURING THE MONTHS I HAD SET ASIDE FOR IT. AFTER FOUR AND HALF YEARS OF STRUGGLE, MY HUSBAND AND I COMPLETELY GAVE UP ON EVER

HAVING ANY CHILDREN, AND IN THE FALL OF 1990 WE FILED PAPERWORK TO ADOPT FROM ROMANIA AND PROMPTLY FORGOT ABOUT IT. SO WE WENT OFF ON A TRIP, AND WE CAME BACK IN JANUARY, AND WE GOT A CALL FROM A SOCIAL WORKER SAYING, "WE HAVE A LITTLE BOY FOR YOU. HE WILL BE TWO AND A HALF YEARS OLD WHEN YOU GET HIM. WHAT DO YOU SAY?" AND WE SAID, "SURE WHY NOT?" THEN 10 DAYS LATER, I WENT TO THE DOCTOR WITH A HEAD COLD AND FOUND OUT I WAS PREGNANT! SO WE HAD TWO CHILDREN IN SIX MONTHS TIME, WHICH IS A RECORD, EVEN FOR A CATHOLIC.

My background in economics did not prepare me for what I had to deal with; my husband is an engineer, if anything, even less prepared. So, here we are, a pair of nerds, and so what do we see? Well, naturally, we see a controlled experiment. The controlled experiment is: what difference does it make whether you have a mom or a dad in your life? Of course, the difference it makes is enormous because the things that our daughter was doing automatically we had to explicitly teach our son how to do. When

he came to us at the age of two and one-half, he could not utter a single sound in any language. He did not know his own name. He did not respond to the sound of a human voice. Those of you who have children know how deeply delayed that is, and it's more complex than a delay. We had to get a lot of people helping us—to tell us what to do.

Assuming Adults

One of the things we discovered has to do with the attachment between the mother and the baby, and this is what *Love and Economics* is really all about. In economics, we assume adults—everyone comes into the market somehow ready to make contracts, ready to defend their property rights, ready to respect other's property rights. Well, it is not automatic that a person starts from infancy and becomes a functioning adult. It is not a forgone conclusion that anyone is going to make that trip, but because of these two particular children that came into our lives, we had to start taking that seriously. And so that led me to a whole course of study of human development and child development just in trying to help our son. So, I want to tell you a few things about that, which are very germane to the free society.

So here's the thing that you have to understand—we parents, and especially economists, take for granted that when a person is born they are always helpless. This is the key fact about the human condition—that every human being is born helpless and in need of care from other people. And who is the most natural and obvious person to provide that care? The mother, from whose body this child sprang. And so, when a baby is born, their brain is not fully developed before birth. There are thousands of things that mothers and fathers do that they can not articulate, but that have profound consequences, and so even an average, good enough parent is doing enormous social service just by rocking their baby and taking care of their baby, She's rocking that baby, and she's stimulating his vestibular nervous system that actually prepares a child for language. Did you know that when you throw your baby up in the air, when you spin them around, you are stimulating that vestibular nervous system to prepare them for language skills? Mom's rocking, dad's throwing—all of that movement of the body is preparing children for language development. There's a whole Hayekian nature to this. If we start taking this apart and deconstructing it, we're doing so at our own peril because we don't know what we're taking apart.

What's the most natural thing that parents do with their new baby? She's rocking her new baby all the time and looking at the baby. As I mentioned, children are not born with a fully developed brain. There's a part of the brain called the limbic brain that allows you to have emotional responses to other people, and also your ability be empathetic

“**This is the key fact about the human condition—that every human being is born helpless and in need of care from other people.**”

with another person—your ability to have proper emotional responses. Well, that part of the brain develops when you're looking at the baby in the first 18 months. The baby is looking around for someone, not looking for an object, but looking for someone to look back, and when you look back, the baby's brain is developing.

Teaching Right and Wrong

The most frightening thing [that can happen] if you're a parent is a condition called attachment disorder. Now, attachment disorder means that the child doesn't care about anybody else; the child doesn't care what anybody thinks of them; the only thing, literally, that they respond to is cost and benefits. So that works maybe okay when the child is four, and when they get into trouble you can pick them up and get them out of trouble, but when they're 14, you really can't do that. So, when you're working with a kid like this, they recommend that you do line of sight supervision: you've got to keep an eye on them all the time. If you think about what that's actually like, it is exhausting because kids can get away from you really fast, and if they have a mind to get in trouble, they can do it really fast, and so the child who never got attached doesn't care what mom thinks when mom's out of the room.

Parents want to create an adult who will want to do the right thing, even when no one is watching, and economists need people who keep their promises, even when they could get away with not keeping their promises. That is what we're all counting on for the free market to work. We're counting on people participating in the market in some kind of goodwill with some kind of notion that you don't exploit every possible opportunity for trying to get away with things. So when you're working with your child as an infant in the beginning, you're doing costs and benefits. You act like a little economist, but you want [them] to be able to internalize the thing, so you don't have to go swat them or you don't have to take their toy away or whatever; you just have to stand over there and watch, and they know. If they don't care what momma thinks, she

can raise her eyebrow all day long, and it's not going to work.

Rational Economics. In fact, those kids, when they've got attachment disorder really badly, you can talk to them 'til you're blue in the face about reciprocity, and you'll never get anywhere. You can say to them, "Now don't do that to him because you wouldn't want him to do that to you." They can't even form that in their mind; that's way too complex for them. So all of this stuff that we have in economics—reciprocal altruism, being rational—forget about it. What you really need is to be attached to your mother, because that's how you get an internalized sense of right and wrong that is going to keep you behaving even when nobody is watching, and that's what we need for the free market.

When I started to figure this out, I realized in economics we've overlooked an enormous number of things—that whole area of human life. Economists just assume that people show up dressed and ready to play in the free market, and in fact there's a whole lot of work that goes on to make that possible, and that's what I got interested in, and that's why I wrote *Love and Economics*. It was a message to the economists.

Mothers. My other audience was to talk to mothers. I really wanted mothers to understand the significance of what they're doing—to not be taken for granted, to not take themselves for granted—because remember, in the years I grew up and came to age, women were being told "You're an idiot if you're staying home with your child." That is a profoundly anti-social thought—to make women ashamed of taking care of their own babies—because the origin of the whole social system is right there—mommy and baby.

Married Parents. Also, part of my motivation was the social science literature around child development and around the outcomes for children. I stumbled over this whole body of work that has to do with marriage and the issues around marriage,

and it's very clear that not only do kids do well with their own mom, but kids do better in a married couple household with their mom and dad married to each other in a low conflict marriage throughout their whole childhood. There is no serious doubt about that, and there are many serious studies that point to the facts—a whole variety of social outcomes, all the different configurations of families have been studied, and the married couple family in low conflict marriage is still the gold standard for good outcomes for children.

Social Cooperation of the Family

Here is the way it is helpful to think about it, especially for those of you who are orientated towards economics, and that is, think of marriage—the mother and father collaborating with each other—as the most basic unit of social cooperation. The market allows people who don't know each other to collaborate with each other to get things done; it is a low cost means for facilitating a lot of human effort and a lot of collaboration and cooperation, and it covers a huge part of human life.

Social Benefits. If you think about marriage—the cooperation between mother and father—as the most basic unit of social cooperation, when that cooperation works well, it is socially beneficial. It is socially beneficial for them, their child, and for the people around them. The most basic thing a marriage does is to prevent attachment disorder. By the way, if you get a kid with attachment disorder, it is very expensive to take care of a child like that, so it often comes to the point where the family can't do it themselves. And who steps in? Well, the criminal justice system often steps in.

Disrupting Relationships. The first thing the mother and father do is to prevent really bad outcomes, but the larger thing they do is to help a young person develop into a functioning adult who can contribute and collaborate with other people in a normal and social way. There are a lot of cockamamie theories about the family. The most cockamamie theory about the family is that the family simply delivers resources from big people to little people. This is what the welfare state believes is the family's job—deliver calories to babies, deliver housing to babies, take them to the doctor. If parents are simply a mechanism for delivering services to little people, [then] it doesn't matter who delivers those services or how. However, the more profound and deep truth about the reality of the family is that the family is creating relationships and the ability to be in relationships. Delivering those services and goods is a part of how that's happening. When the state gets involved, we have disrupted the relationships—a profound anti-social act. If you look at many of our social programs, they have the actual desire to disrupt the relationships.



Identifying the Culprit

The last point I want to make is to talk a little about who is doing this sort of thing and why they're doing it because I think it is the sort of thing that has been off the radar screen for many libertarians and conservatives, and I think it is time to get it on the radar screen. There is a group of people—the cultural Marxists, the Frankfurt school, the “lifestyle left”— who have been running around the United States for a long time, but have never been able to create socialism in America. Americans don't like that stuff. In economics, Marxism is basically kaput—it is not compatible with the American character. But this whole area of disrupting the family to disrupt social order is a completely empty field for them [to enter].

Disconnecting sex, marriage, and children. [The ideas of] identity politics [and] radical feminism are working toward a disruption of the link between human sexual identity, marriage, and child bearing. They're big on disrupting marriage as the focal point for both social activity and child bearing.

Why does the lifestyle left put so much effort into this? Well, there are a number of reasons. First, they can succeed in this area and they never could succeed in economics. Number two, if you can disrupt the family, you can replace the family with the state, and that's what they have been systematically doing.

Single-parent homes. The welfare state is primarily populated with unmarried mothers and their children. If you look at the outcomes for children from a single parent household, with girls you're looking at a higher probability of teen pregnancy and a likelihood of dependence on welfare for themselves, higher probability of all the hazards associated with teen pregnancy. If [her] father is not in the household, the probability of a girl being sexualized at an early age goes up very high; if [their] father is not in the household, boys are at high risk for violence, criminal activity, juvenile delinquency, and gang activity. It is true not every child of a single parent has all those outcomes, but it remains true that the huge fraction of welfare rolls are made up of single mothers, and a huge fraction of the prison population is made up of fatherless boys, and all of those things expand the state. The Institute for American Values asked the question, “What is the taxpayer cost of out-of-wedlock childbearing and disruptive households? What is the taxpayer cost of disrupting the family?” They came up with a number of \$112 billion per year in state, federal, and local taxes—that is the GDP of New Zealand that we're spending on family disruption. Now that's the fiscal side of it, so anyone who is a fiscal conservative must take the fiscal side of it seriously as an issue. You're just not going to shrink the welfare state, or the prison population, unless you fix the family.

Family Law. The feminists are deliberately blurring the boundaries between the public and the private. [Family law] has been completely colonized by

“If you can disrupt the family, you can replace the family with the state, and that's what they have been systematically doing.”

people who have these radical views that marriage is a problem that has to be gotten rid of somehow, that all differences between men and woman are a problem that has to be some way gotten rid of. That means the role of the state micromanaging families is ever expanding, and people are accepting it because they can't figure out their problems and they've got this problem—the family is broken down, marriage is broken down— and they can't figure out what to do. The only thing society is offering them really is the family court. They jump right to the conclusion that in times of trouble, there is no option besides to get a divorce. In former times people said, “You have to stay married for the sake of the kids.” That meant you had to figure out what you were going to do; you had to figure out how to come up with ways of supporting one another that aren't destructive. You don't want to take destructive private activity as an excuse for expanding the whole scope of the state, and this is exactly what has happened.

False Freedom. So what kind of freedom is being offered with no-fault divorce and sex as much as you want without live babies arriving? All those kinds of things seem like freedom. The right to act on impulse, the right to indulge on impulse is the meaning of freedom being given—the right to be unconnected to other people. A lot of women's freedoms means not being dependent on a man and not connected to a baby. That's what feminism has meant to a lot of people, and that is a very stripped down notion of freedom. That's not human. It is not socially sustainable, and it is inhuman because we want these relationships—they matter to us.

So I believe that it is very necessary if we are going to create a minimum government movement with staying power, that we address the problems of the family, and that we see that the family is the most basic unit of social cooperation, and we cannot afford to let that unit of social cooperation be destroyed by the active intervention of the state. The state has actively attacked the family. It's not that people have given up on the family. Rather, the family is being taken away from them. ❖

Jennifer Roback Morse, Ph.D., is the founder and President of the Ruth Institute, a project of the National Organization for Marriage and the Senior Research Fellow in Economics at the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty.