

Love & Economics: Why the Laissez-Faire Family Doesn't Work

Jennifer Roback Morse. Dallas: Spence Publishing Company, 2001. ISBN 1-890626-29-5. \$27.95.

Reviewed by William F. Campbell, Louisiana State University.

Jennifer Morse has written a book on the limitations of economics that stems from her own personal experiences. Her attraction to economics and laissez-faire in her early career derived partially from the charm of its logic, consistency, and simplicity. But more important, libertarianism was consistent with her desire to assert that, "it was my life and that no one could tell me what to do."

This is not an uncommon experience and many never recover from it. Some, like myself, discover sin. Others, like Jennifer Morse, change their minds and souls after honest reflection on their experiences with raising children in a family.

She shares with Augustine the observation that babies are not born as noble savages. Perhaps they are cute savages, but savages they are and need to be nurtured and educated into self-restraint and civility. She notes that Rousseau fathered five children and put all five of them in a foundling hospital. Morse speculates in a footnote: "One wonders how the intellectual history of the West would have unfolded if Rousseau had actually raised even a single one of those children himself."

How, then, can one civilize the savages? There is no institution that can do this better for human kind than the family. She has no illusions that all parents are perfect and all families are ideal, but other beings equal, the normal family of husband, wife, and children is better than other alternatives.

The author's structure for the book is to begin with the personal reflections that generated her concerns with the limitations of economics. She then proceeds to analyze the contractual mentality, the family and the alleged substitutes for the family. She continues with an extended and fascinating section on love and liberty. The conclusion has the fascinating title, "A Civilization of Love."

Morse is familiar with and cites in her footnotes the substantial amount of social science empirical literature connected with issues of the family. She also recognizes that much of this literature is concerned with advocacy of feminism and non-family day-care facilities. The text proper is not weighed down with these findings.

Most of the time she hits a middle ground between the empirical facts and theological formulations. You shouldn't fault a writer for not writing the book that you think needs to be written, but it would have been nice to see her develop the trinity of persons in a theological direction. She asserts that the trinity of father, mother, baby is the foundation of

the whole social order.

One would have liked to see her develop the theological implications of such an observation along the lines that G.K. Chesterton suggested in *Everlasting Man*. He translated the Athanasian Creed's defense of the co-eternity of the Divine son into the idea that God is love. According to Chesterton,

The barren dogma is only the logical way of stating the beautiful sentiment He was fighting for that very balance of beautiful interdependence and intimacy, in the very Trinity of the Divine Nature, that draws our hearts to the Trinity of the Holy Family. His dogma, if the phrase be not misunderstood, turns even God into a Holy Family (p. 227).

At the heart of the family and its education process is the ability to trust, extend time horizons, delay gratification, and correct for our "defective telescopic faculties." She also understands that the family cannot be best understood as a contract-based institution. But she does not go in the direction of "covenant" which might again take her in a theological direction. Nor does she develop the concept of "oaths" which has been so well developed by Chesterton in his understanding of the changes wrought by Christianity during the Middle Ages.

Although she does not quote Edmund Burke (1955) on the matter of contract, I think that she would find his understanding of society quite congenial:

Society is indeed a contract . . . but the state ought not to be considered as nothing better than a partnership agreement in a trade of pepper and coffee, calico or tobacco, or some other such low concern It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born (p. 139).

A narrow contractual mentality leads to minimal compliance rather than maximal cooperation between persons. She points out the similar problems with "job descriptions" in large bureaucratic organizations, including churches. This is consistent with most people's experience—that if you find a minister or priest who is preoccupied with job descriptions, then you have a big problem on your hands. The author is careful not to throw out the baby of the market with the bath water of the rhetoric in which it is usually defended. Free market economics is very good with ordinary commodities and the everyday business of life. She does not allow her understanding of the limitations of economics to go too far in the opposite direction. She understands the dangers caused by appealing to the impulse to cooperate generously. The horrors of the totalitarian experiments of the 20th century have benefited greatly from the rhetoric of anti-laissez faire and the appeal to warm,

fuzzy social entities.

One of the more interesting parts of the book is her Hayekian understanding of the use of information in the economy and the family. The importance of tacit knowledge and the inability of parents to articulate all the details of how they act in raising a child is comparable to Hayek's defense of the market. Paradoxically this leads her into skepticism about market solutions to day-care.

Market failure does not lead, however, to government solutions, but instead strengthens her support of the normal family. If she needed support for her distrust of statist solutions to raising children, she would need only to look at the revealing picture of the "Collectivization of Breasts in a Moscow Nursery" in Renee Fülöp-Miller's book *Leaders, Dreamers, and Rebels* (1935, facing p. 372).

The strength of her book is that she never reduces issues to an either/or. She credits Michael Novak later in the book with a three-sphere approach to society which requires different substantive understandings for each sphere. No one method or approach is sufficient to understand the complexity of the human person and his needs. She points out that there are "gains from loving," but emphasizes that you are not dealing with a stable utility function; the experience of loving and being loved expands our world and changes what we consider a cost and what we would consider a benefit.

Therefore, in no way has she betrayed her trust in human liberty and a free society. Strong families and the formation of character are necessary for the free and responsible society that is her ideal. The spirit of this book is captured in the appeal of John Archibald Campbell, former Supreme Court Justice and articulator of the substantive due process doctrine of economic freedom in the *Slaughterhouse* cases. When he was addressing the Alabama State Bar Association in 1884, he exhorted them

to stand fast in the liberty wherewith you became free, and which the Constitution has been the witness. Be constant and firm to insist that the State [Alabama] shall be maintained in the fullness of the powers reserved by the Constitution which was made by the people of the States. The State is the repository where the family is formed, and with this, the source of domestic peace, where religion, morality, reverence, honor, human affections are implanted and instruction most purely imbibed. It is the State that more surely defends life, liberty, property, family obligations and rights; it is the State that teaches primary duties of manhood and which shields and protects womanhood in her purity and holiness (Connor, 1920, pp. 275-276).

References

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Ethics and Uncertainty: The Economics of John M. Keynes and Frank H. Knight

William B. Greer. Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2001. ISBN: 1-84064-45-1. \$75.00.

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All the great economists, from well before Adam Smith down to the present, have understood that economic life is uncertain. But uncertainty poses a great problem for those who wish to say something specific about how economies perform. Thus, in working out their theoretical descriptions of economic processes, most economists have assumed that economic agents know more than we really do: not only about the future, but about current technical possibilities and consumer preferences. Formal theories have tended to ignore uncertainty altogether. However, when turning to a discussion of the world around us, all good economists—even the little-read but much-vilified classical economists—understood that "there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip." Policy discussions nearly always have taken some account of what theory ignored.

Two major twentieth-century economists went beyond the conventional treatment of uncertainty to incorporate it into their theoretical systems. The attention given by Frank H. Knight and John Maynard Keynes to the problems created by uncertainty brings the two together in this book.

On the face of it, Knight and Keynes form an unlikely pair. Knight was a Midwestern farm boy, raised in a devout evangelical household, educated at two evangelical colleges and the University of Tennessee, when southern evangelicalism pervaded even secular campuses. But Knight had rejected the faith of his parents even before he moved to Cornell University, a much more modernist, secularized institution, to pursue his graduate studies. Thus, in Knight we have an example of someone who understood well, but rejected, the mindset of evangelical Christianity. Keynes was raised in an entirely different milieu: son of a Cambridge don who had already exchanged the viewpoint of Anglican evangelicalism for the optimistic humanism of the Cambridge moral philosophy of the late nineteenth century. Educated at Cambridge (primarily with like-minded individuals), Keynes was raised in the new secular religion promoted by the Cambridge elite, among whom he was to become a leader.

In this book, William Greer—who teaches at Milligan