



Communications On Caring And The Restoration Of Social Order

Edward J O'Boyle

To cite this article: Edward J O'Boyle (1978) Communications On Caring And The Restoration Of Social Order , Review of Social Economy, 36:2, 197-208, DOI: [10.1080/00346767800000028](https://doi.org/10.1080/00346767800000028)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00346767800000028>



Published online: 28 Jul 2006.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 4



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 3 View citing articles [↗](#)

Communications

ON CARING AND THE RESTORATION OF SOCIAL ORDER*

By EDWARD J. O'BOYLE
Louisiana Tech University

There is, in fact, only one place where fear and doom are truly appropriate and that is when we confront man's oldest habit and most terrible institution—the organized, systematic killing of his own kind.

[Barbara Ward and René Dubos, p. 212]

In an article which won the Helen Potter Award in 1975, J. Ron Stanfield [1975, pp. 153-165] urges "a reformulation of the meaning of humanity and human progress" which recognizes the individual as a person who knows and does much as opposed to one who has much. His suggested paradigms for such an individual are the artist and the scientist. At the very end of his most recent article in the *Review* [Stanfield, 1976, pp. 201-215] he asserts that "[t]he problems of our age stem from the 'degradation of the labor process' and the deterioration of human life this involves" and affirms his confidence in the ability of the "scientific-intellectual elite" to point the way to restoration of social order. These papers reflect a popular and rather convincing socio-economic position espoused by Marxists and other social commentators.

Our purpose in this communication is to show that there is a serious and dangerous error of omission in these works. Specifically, Stanfield neglects the *caring* aspect of human nature and its critical role in human survival. Surely, the social order requires the artist and the scientist but there is little hope of determining sound socio-economic theory and policy without taking into account man in his capacities as parent, healer, and steward.

Let us begin with the hypothesis that the problems of our age stem from such a widespread and substantial devaluation of human life itself that human beings are viewed less and less as persons and more and more as objects. This objectification of the human individual is reflected in countless acts of violence across the world and is traceable to the great and growing influence of utilitarianism.

* 0034-6764/78/1001-197/\$1.50/0

Evidence as to the extent of violence in the modern world is so overwhelming that elaborate documentation is not required. Examples of brutal, overt violence come to mind all too quickly: the exterminators of Dachau, the hired killers of Tel Aviv's Lod Airport, the enforcers of the CIA, the oppressors of the Gulag Archipelago, the terrorists of the Munich Olympics, the paramilitary gunmen of Belfast, the tank crews of Budapest. As the Nuremberg Trials demonstrated, all that is needed for violence to begin is the toleration of the taking of one innocent human life.

Violence is rationalized on grounds that human life is of relative value depending on the extent to which the individual embodies some value or serves some higher purpose. The killing and mutilating are done to purify the race, liberate the homeland, rid the world of dictators, preserve the revolution, free political prisoners, redress economic injustice, defend territorial imperatives.

If violence were limited to headline-making cases, we might dismiss it on grounds that the overwhelming majority of human beings are not violent and simply urge the media to soften its coverage. But the brutalization is more common and subtle than that. It involves literally millions of victims at the beginning of life, at the end of life, and at every point between. This covert brutality is an everyday occurrence in hospitals, prisons, homes, laboratories, mental health facilities, and clinics. It is partially hidden from view behind such terminology as psychopharmacology, genetic engineering, backup to contraceptive failure, euthanasia, psychosurgery. It is no less violent because potassium chloride injections, hypertonic saline, and vacuum aspiration machines are used in place of napalm, machine guns, pistols, and gelignite. This kind of violence is done to alter consciousness, clean up the gene pool, prevent child abuse, reduce the burden of taxes, and ironically, to moderate the violent tendencies of convicted felons.

The extent of this kind of violence is not self-evident. At times it may be described as innocently as the following experimental study:

To investigate . . . the basic physiology of glucose metabolism in fetuses at different stages of gestation, with the object of determining the sequential development of cell mechanisms in handling glucose and other substances used as fuel. [National Foundation, p. 53]

During this experiment the investigators actually severed the heads of 12 living fetuses which were obtained by abdominal hysterotomy at 12 to 20 weeks gestation. [Medical World News, p. 21] This particular

experiment was supported not by some satanic cult or deranged despot but by the March of Dimes. The higher purpose being served in this case was the hope of obtaining information that would help prevent brain damage in newborn babies by improving physician control over the clinical state of the mother.

A forensic pathologist who carefully examined the circumstances surrounding the killing of children reported the following findings:

Three children, all less than one year of age, died of starvation resulting from home situations where vicious and thoughtless neglect or downright stupidity or both were the dominant factors. . . . Homicidal adult starvation is practically nonexistent. Other than the calculated mass murders carried out by this method in concentration camps, it is seen so infrequently as to be a medicolegal curiosity. However, death by this means is not uncommon when the victim is a child. . . . Practically all of the assaults resulting in these obscure homicides occurred in the home, where there were no environmental disturbances to indicate that fatal violence had been operative. Investigation of the home uncovered no overturned lamps, no upset furniture and no outcries that had alarmed the neighbors or given hint of trouble. There were no witnesses to many such deaths. It is relatively simple to destroy the life of a child in almost absolute secrecy without the necessity of taking any elaborate precautions to ensure that secrecy. [Adelson, pp. 1346-48]

These findings are only suggestive of the current toll since they were published years before the vast increases in reported abuse among children.

These two examples of generally covert violence involving innocent and defenseless victims are not isolated cases. The extent of violence in the modern age is fully detailed elsewhere¹ and we see no need to further document it here.

The connection between violence and utilitarianism requires some elaboration. The person familiar with the literature relating human capital theory to the problem of allocating health and welfare services has seen the routine use and justification of cost-benefit analysis in calculating the economic worth of human life² and the employment of cost-benefit ratios as the principal criterion for allocating life-saving

¹ See Fredric Werthman. *A Sign for Cain: An Exploration of Human Violence*, New York, 1966.

² See, for instance, E. J. Mishan. "Evaluation of Life and Limb: A Theoretical Approach," *Journal of Political Economy*, July-August 1971, pp. 687-705.

resources.³ We might take the view that all of this is mere academic exercise were it not that some academics are deadly serious. At a conference which was called for the purpose of addressing the issue of when to treat (or not treat) acutely sick newborn infants and which involved a large number of prominent clinical-science specialists from several prestigious U.S. medical schools, an economist made the following comments. Notice in particular his failure to differentiate persons from objects.

From the economist's point of view, we would add up the benefits which would accrue from keeping the child alive for some given period of time or from sustaining a severely handicapped individual throughout his lifetime and calculate the costs involved in doing so. We would then compare the two. If the benefits exceeded the costs, we would recommend the use of resources to keep the child alive. If costs exceeded benefits, we would recommend that those resources be allocated to some other program where benefits exceeded costs. [Hatwick, p. 43]

Writing in a journal expressly intended for practicing physicians, a professor of philosophy deliberately transforms persons into objects in order to justify killing them.

The fundamental error our senses and emotions cause is to demand that we treat everyone who looks and used to act like a human being as though he continued to be human to the last. Thus, human-looking shapes are treated as though they were human, in spite of the fact that they lack the least vestige of human behavior, intellection or feeling. When we act in this way, we overlook the fact that the only way to treat such beings humanly is not to treat them as humans. This is but a relatively neutral way of saying what sounds abhorrent to the ear and what I myself shudder to put on paper: they must be mercifully put to death.

. . . Admittedly, there is a problem in determining which among the human forms has a continuing potentiality to regain the human essence. This is a hard task, and, when in doubt, we should always err on the side of humanity. But there are some cases, such as that of the [hydran]cephalic child, in which there is and there can be no doubt. With its head full of water, there is no reasonable basis for the hope

³ See, for example, John S. Spratt, Jr. "The Relation of 'Human Capital' Preservation to Health Costs," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, July 1975, pp. 295-307.

of human life. Pigeons have more personality—the indigo bunting more intellect—than this unfortunate mooncalf in our midst.

Our society takes on the burden of its sustained support as though it had no cost. The pain of the parents, the social cost in terms of goods and services, the opportunity of what else the services it uses could procure are all disregarded as insignificant. Our fundamental aim appears to be to keep this creature breathing and growing to no end. [Lachs, pp. 839-40]

Late last year the U.S. Congress was embroiled in a heated and widely-reported debate regarding government funding of abortions for welfare recipients. The advocates of government-financed abortion base their case to a considerable extent on a comparison of the cost of an abortion and the cost of supporting the child on welfare. This controversy, along with the recently reported Aiken, South Carolina sterilization incidents and the Tuskegee, Alabama syphilis experiments, demonstrate the influential role of utilitarianism in making health and welfare policy in the U.S. and in administering health and welfare programs. Michael LaChat's extensively documented study [pp. 14-37] of the use of cost-benefit analysis in German National Socialism to select undesirable Aryans for extermination alerts us to the dangers that attend the single-minded use of this analytical device.

In the space remaining we explore the antithesis of killing, exploiting, using, that is *caring*, and discuss this quality of human nature as it relates to birth and the period immediately afterward, to death and the needs of the dying, and to the resources of our planet. The discussion is based mainly on the work of Willard Gaylin, Richard Lamerton, and Barbara Ward.

In *Caring* psychoanalyst Willard Gaylin illuminates the linkage between the caring nature of human beings and survival of the human race.

Man cares because it is his nature to care. Man survives because he cares and is cared for. We may hypothesize that it is of our nature to destroy our own kind, but this will always remain purely a hypothesis. . . . But the goodness inherent in man is no theory. It cannot be a *product* of culture because no species constructed as peculiarly as man could have survived to a point of culture without possessing at its core a supremely loving nature. . . . We must see our culture and institutions themselves as being derived from the

caring aspect of our species' nature. Civilization is, at least in part, a form of crystallized love. [Gaylin, p. 13]

Caring is deeply rooted in man's biological past. It pre-dates science, art, and religion. Indeed there is strong evidence from more than 50,000 years ago that Neanderthal man practiced caring in order to insure group survival. It is one of the absolute values that differentiate human beings from animals. [Dubos, pp. 45-46]

Caring focuses specifically on the protective, parental, tender aspects of loving between mother and child during the period immediately following birth. The social economist who is concerned about man's social nature as well as his individual nature may profit from a better understanding of the mother-child relationship because it is ". . . the essential paradigm whose presence is necessary for the diffusion of this human quality into other aspects and relationships of life." [Gaylin, p. 63]

In enumerating the qualities that separate human beings from all other creatures, Gaylin shows that the most unique one is the total helplessness of the human infant.

This prolonged early helplessness demands much from the parent and imposes a new set of rules in the relationship of the individual to his developing society. No other animal exists for so long a time in so helpless a state. And no helpless animal in its infancy is endowed with so much awareness; as the human child develops, he soon becomes cognizant of his utter helplessness—as well as his dependence on those around him, and their goodwill, for his survival. If gestation is considered to extend through the year beyond birth, it is a peculiar kind of gestation, for it is the gestation of an *aware* fetus who, while helpless to act, is not helpless to perceive, and with that perception is learning lessons he will never forget. Among those lessons, the most crucial one is the link between helplessness, care, and survival. [Gaylin, p. 27]

Gaylin emphasizes that it is the *amount* of contact—feeding, holding, stroking, playing, talking, tickling, squeezing—more than the *kind* which is significant in normal development. [p. 61] This observation may have profound implications for working parents who rationalize their time away from home on grounds that it is the quality not the quantity of time spent with their children that really matters. In this regard Gaylin doesn't pull any punches: early deprivation is one of the strongest factors in the development of the psychopath.

[p. 61] He is unable, however, to specify how loving contacts early in life can be guaranteed in a society where work has become a moral imperative.

In *Caring* four stages in the development of the baby immediately after birth are examined in detail. The first, attachment, refers to the bond between mother and child. The second, separation, is the emergence from the symbolic union with mother and the development of self-reliance. The third, identification, is the process "... whereby through an incorporation of another human being and his values, we are influenced in our behavior by that person and act as though we were directed by that other person with his entire sense of experience." [Gaylin, p. 95] The fourth, conscience, is the internalizing of a model of goodness. All four stages are critical to the development of an adult who is loving and caring.

Conscience and guilt, Gaylin asserts, are directly connected to group survival. [p. 137] However, there is another way of guaranteeing group survival which produces joy and pleasure: giving that is based on identification and empathy with the small and helpless instead of the strong and capable.

The paradoxical lesson of identification is that we achieve our unique selves via our fusion with others. Whatever individualism means, it is something we can only gain through early attachments to, later identifications with, and, finally loving of other people. To find ourselves we must embrace others. [Gaylin, p. 113]

Thus, caring on the part of parents for their children is no mere sentimental platitude. Neither is it masochistic self-sacrifice. Rather, it is an obligation in contributive justice which not only helps ensure human survival but also indirectly and unintentionally brings about the personal fulfillment that parents frequently seek in vain by more direct and intentional means.

In *Care of the Dying* physician Richard Lamerton describes the needs of the dying and in great detail shows how those needs are to be met. His book is a practical guide to help those who are faced with the responsibility of caring for the person who is about to die. Lamerton teaches through the presentation of numerous case histories drawn from his experience as Medical Director of St. Joseph's Hospice in England, a specialized health-services institution for the dying.

A hospice is more than brick and mortar: it is a concept of care

for the dying which originated in Ireland in the nineteenth century and has spread around the world, reaching the U.S. several years ago. It reduces the arguments of the euthanasia lobby to irrelevancies.

To fail to provide for the needs of the dying is to fail in a basic duty. The self-evident requirements of a dying man are to have his symptoms relieved, and to be allowed to die with dignity and peace of mind. If we evade all the difficult problems he presents, and just kill him, we have failed. Whether such euthanasia were voluntary or not is irrelevant: it is our duty so to care for these patients that they never ask for euthanasia. A patient who is longing to die is not being treated properly. If we are not treating him properly, the solution is to improve our treatment, not to kill him. [Lamerton, p. 95] . . . Proper care is the alternative to [euthanasia], and will be universally available as soon as there is adequate instruction of medical students in our teaching hospitals. [Lamerton, p. 100]

In *Care of the Dying* Lamerton documents through clinical trials that even constant pain can be controlled and that when narcotics are properly titrated against the patient's pain, addiction does not develop. [pp. 15 and 46-47] Additionally, he shows how to relieve headaches, nausea, anxiety, loss of appetite, breathlessness, diarrhea, constipation, coughs, and cramps. [Lamerton, pp. 49-50] Most fundamentally the person who is dying needs someone to hold his hand. This need is convincingly shown in the following first-person account of a nurse who is dying.

. . . We may ask for why's and wherefores, but we don't really expect answers. Don't run away . . . wait . . . all I want to know is that there will be someone to hold my hand when I need it. I am afraid. Death may get to be a routine to you, but it is new to me. You may not see me as unique, but I've never died before, to me, once is pretty unique! [Lamerton, p. 52]

For this reason hospices have a rule that no one is to die alone. [Lamerton, p. 54]

From Lamerton's perspective, the hospice concept of care puts the principle of contributive justice into practice.

. . . As I am a parent, it is my duty to feed my children. As I am a doctor, my duty is to restore my patients to health. Parliament has the duty to govern and defend the realm, the Trade Unions to defend the rights of their members. Always

it is something owed to the weaker by the stronger. In the natural order of things the men to whom we owe the most, the ones who receive most, are therefore the weakest, the poorest and the humblest. Is this not what civilization is all about? Nature requires of us that we provide our best care, our greatest concern, our strongest protection, for the infant and for the senile and dying, because they cannot help themselves. [Lamerton, p. 95]

Efforts to transform physicians who care for the dying into executioners through the legalization of mercy-killing are likely to have terrible consequences. What patient who is in great pain and knows that he is terminally ill but has not put his affairs in order would trust the physician who prescribes a drug when the same physician uses the same basic method to take the life of another patient *in extremis*? Further, if the essential trust between doctors and dying patients is broken will it not tend to collapse between doctors and the families of those who are dying, that is, the living? And if this trust is lost throughout the health-care system, does it not follow that an important part of the total community is destroyed and that, in turn, human survival is further jeopardized? Assuming that our argument is substantially correct, health-service providers who care are critical to survival or, put differently, caring on the part of persons in the healing professions is a moral obligation.

In *The Home of Man* economist Barbara Ward undertakes a most ambitious study of the places “. . . where all the world's peoples, save for dwindling groups of nomads, are born, live out their lives, and go to their death.” [p. 1] The issue of the human habitat is examined in terms of three priorities: settlement by design, settlement for people, and the conserving and enhancing settlement. [Ward, p. 10]

Ward discourses at length about managing the water, mineral, and energy resources of planet Earth with greater care. She is a severe critic of nuclear energy and a strong advocate of solar energy, especially in small-scale applications. In addressing the issue of the determinants of an environmentally stable society, she points out that at the community level the most important element is the quality of the citizen's care. [Ward, p. 256]

In addition to calling for conservation of our planet's resources and protection of Earth's environment, Ward espouses the cause of the poor people of the world. In this regard two facts are emphasized.

carelessly depleted, and she has a clear vision of how they are to be employed. The term that captures the human qualities which Ward seeks to encourage is "stewardship" and given her final remarks in *The Home of Man*—"We must love each other or we must die." [p. 294]—it is evident that she sees stewardship of our planetary resources as an obligation in contributive justice for all human beings.

In conclusion, we do not mean to imply that the restoration of social order can be accomplished without the artist and the scientist. Rather, our meaning is that without the parent, the healer, and the steward, Stanfield's twin paradigms are insufficient to that challenging and noble task.

REFERENCES

- Adelson, Lester. "Slaughter of the Innocents." *New England Journal of Medicine*, June 29, 1961.
- Dubos, René. *Beast or Angel?* New York, 1974.
- Gaylin, Willard. *Caring*, New York, 1976.
- Hatwick, Richard E. "Economics and the Impact on Society," *Ethical Dilemmas in Current Obstetric and Newborn Care*, Report of the Sixty-Fifth Ross Conference on Pediatric Research, Ross Laboratories, Columbus, Ohio, 1973.
- LaChat, Michael. "Utilitarian Reasoning in Nazi Medical Policy: Some Preliminary Investigations." *Linacre Quarterly*, February 1975.
- Lachs, John. "Humane Treatment and the Treatment of Humans," *New England Journal of Medicine*, April 8, 1976.
- Lamerton, Richard. *Care of the Dying*, London, 1973.
- Medical World News*, "Post-Abortion Fetal Study Stirs Storm," June 8, 1973.
- National Foundation—March of Dimes, *Facts '74*.
- Stanfield, J. Ron. "On the Crisis of Liberalism," *Review of Social Economy*, October 1975.
- . "Capitalist Evolution and Social Evolution," *Review of Social Economy*, October 1976.
- Ward, Barbara. *The Home of Man*, New York, 1976.
- Ward, Barbara and Dubos, René. *Only One Earth: The Care and Maintenance of a Small Planet*, New York, 1972.