



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

Jennifer Roback Morse

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In too many families, the parents' hand has given way to the Invisible Hand in the raising of children. In a new book from Spence Publishing, a distinguished economist warns that by misapplying libertarian economic and political principles to the family, we undermine the only institution that produces the honest, self-governing citizens upon which a free society depends.

Dr. Morse recalls an important fact that most political thinkers overlook: we come into the world not as rational adults but as babies. And babies are self-centered and impulsive-cute, but not noble, savages. The family's job is to care for these helpless creatures while teaching them trust and self-control. She then shows why neither private day-care, government, nor a single parent can do this job as well as a committed mother and father. She concludes by explaining why basing family life on the political and economic philosophy of individual autonomy rather than the personal philosophy of love is a prescription for individual unhappiness and social chaos.

Most Americans, whatever their politics, share the libertarian view of personal liberty as the right to do as one pleases. We are thus a ready audience for advocates of the "laissez-faire family," each member of which pursues his own self-interest rather than the good of the others. Dr. Morse, whose own libertarian views were shaken by the experience of motherhood, exposes the sham of "guilt-free" parenting, showing that a free society can be sustained only by families grounded in self-giving love.

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