

Delegating Love

Hannah Malcolm

Hannah Malcolm is an Anglican ordinand and is writing a PhD on theology, climate and ecological grief. In 2020 she edited the book “Words for a Dying World: Stories of Grief and Courage from the Global Church”.

Pretty much everybody says they want to live in a caring society, at least in the abstract. Participating in one is another matter. Ireland spends just 0.2 percent of its GDP on childcare each year, investing the smallest percentage of its GDP in early years of any developed country, and with the greatest reliance on private services. The average spend across Europe is four times as high.¹ When it comes to old age spending, Ireland also sits at the bottom of the league table at 3.4 percent.² Households where more than one adult is in full-time paid work have gone from being necessary for some, to normative for everyone. Irish childcare costs are some of the highest in the world, while many of those who work in childcare barely earn the living wage, with paid maternity leave and pensions a rarity.³ The results of this model for vulnerable people speak for themselves.

In 2019, RTÉ's investigations into the Dublin-based Hyde and Seek crèche chain revealed fire safety risks, ill-treatment of children, and breaches of appropriate ratios of carers. In the 5 years leading up to the investigation, the chain had drawn down €1.25m in state subsidies and €2.75m in profits after salaries.⁴

Last year, the organisation EPIC (Empowering People in Care) reported first-hand experiences of relational failure in privately-run care homes. Many such homes rely on agency workers who cannot be regularly present with the young people they care for. The consistency required to build trusting relationships is impossible; there is no assurance of any long-term commitment. The same is true on a macro-scale. If a private-care provider withdraws, those in its care are uprooted again.⁵ Last year, Tusla's

chief executive expressed concern about the growth of private care provision and a desire to reduce the state's dependency on it.⁶ Thus far, no child care budget increases have followed this desire.⁷

In February it was announced that Orpea – one of Europe's largest nursing home providers and the biggest operator in Ireland – was going to be investigated for allegations of malpractice, including restricting food, adult nappies, and other basic care in a home outside Paris where residents paid fees of €6500 a month.⁸ Ireland is not immune to these issues with fears of widespread abuse in nursing homes over the pandemic.⁹

Of course, Ireland is not alone in being host to those profiteering off the vulnerable. The owners of private children's homes in the UK make around £250 million in profit a year, with outcomes for children in care recently reviewed as 'unacceptably poor', in part due to replacing 'organic bonds and relationships with professionals and services'.¹⁰ We live in an era of hyper-delegation where common good-services are habitually outsourced for profit", the neoliberal ideals of self-reliance, self-interest, and free choice driving us to constantly shift responsibility for others away from ourselves, either out of necessity or lifestyle preference. The care which families, communities, or the State might take on is increasingly parcelled out to corporations. This changes us.

In *Care and Capitalism*, Kathleen Lynch examines the dynamics of care and violence which shape our communities, and subsequently describes the self as 'co-created... for better or worse' through relationships, these affective relations providing our ordinary meaning

1. "Early Childhood Ireland's 2022 Barometer," Early Childhood Education, last modified January 2022, <https://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/about/advocacy/childcare-barometer/childcare-barometer-2022/>

2. Whelan, J., "How Ireland's spending on welfare compares to the rest of Europe", RTE, August 21, 2019, <https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2019/0415/1042763-how-irelands-spending-on-welfare-compares-to-the-rest-of-europe/>

3. "Regulation and Funding Issues Facing Workers in the Early Years Sector: Discussion," at the Joint Committee on Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth debate, *Houses of Oireachtas*, Tuesday, 5 Oct 2021 https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_children_equality_disability_integration_and_youth/2021-10-05/3/

4. O'Regan, E., "RTÉ Investigates crèche Hyde and Seek clears €2.75m in profits as it gets €1.25m from the State," *Independent.ie*, 25 July 2015, <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/news/rte-investigates-creche-hyde-and-seek-clears-275m-in-profits-as-it-gets-125m-from-the-state-38344940.html>

5. Baker, N., "For-profit companies playing bigger role in residential care for vulnerable children" *Irish Examiner*, 27 September 2021, <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/spotlight/arid-40706681.html>

6. *ibid*

7. "Foster Care Issues and the Loss of Positive Care Services: Engagement with Tusla," at Joint Committee On Children, Equality, Disability, Integration And Youth, *Kildare Street*, 10 May 2022, <https://www.kildarestreet.com/committees/?id=2022-05-10a141&s=bernard+gloster+private#g144>

8. Mulligan, J., "Biggest care home group in Ireland faces official investigation in France," *Independent.ie*, 02 February 2022, <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/biggest-care-home-group-in-ireland-faces-official-investigation-in-france-41303253.html>

9. Michael, N., "Social workers concerned about 'abuse and neglect' in private nursing homes," *Irish Examiner*, 23 March 2021, <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-40249271.html>

10. MacAlister, J., "The independent review of children's social care – Final Report", *The independent review of children's social care*, (2022) <https://childrensocialcareindependent-review.uk/final-report/>



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making.¹¹ Lynch identifies two kinds of caring relation which shape our sense of self: the ‘love labour’ of primary nurturing work in families/ households, and ‘secondary caring relations’ of communities who care for each other, from the intimate level of friendship all the way to political solidarity with the stranger. And she finds that these caring relations are transformative:

Because knowing how to love, care and show solidarity, and having the resources to act on this knowing, *does not happen by accident*, creating an affectively egalitarian society means creating social systems and institutions where people are resourced and enabled to receive as much love, care and solidarity as is humanly possible.¹²

Lynch sees what the neoliberal imagination has failed to grasp. The choices we make to care for or to harm each other are not the product of free, rational calculation, but the product of loving or unloving habit. These habits are more or less easily formed depending on the patterns of life made available to us. In her list of who is to blame for the collapse of these caring possibilities, Lynch offers brief and sweeping

¹¹ Lynch, K., *Care and Capitalism*, (Oxford, United Kingdom, Polity Press, 2022), pp.3-4.

¹² Lynch, *Care and Capitalism* p.22.

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criticism of Christianity. But she finds herself sharing significant conceptual ground with the Christian understanding of virtue as habit. Thomas Aquinas describes the virtue of love – *caritas* – not as a feeling, idea, or statement of intent, but as a habit which is made of doing acts of love over and over again.¹³ To be *caring* – to know how best to *love each other* – requires us to practise doing it. Over time, the result of this practice is that we’ll see our relationships differently. Over time, and through the grace of God, loving each other will come more easily to us. And in the end, Aquinas suggests, we might even start to enjoy it.¹⁴

We cannot simply outsource our caring relationships; the cultivation of virtue cannot be done on our behalf. This is true at a local and national level, whether we are describing the capacity for families and communities to

¹³ ST I-II.50.1

¹⁴ “From all of which it can be seen that we need the habit of virtues . . . in order that perfect activity might be pleasantly accomplished. This results from habit which, since it acts in the manner of a kind of nature, makes the activity proper to it, as it were, natural and, consequently, delightful.” *Disputed questions on virtue, article 1.responsio*



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look after each other or the capacity of the State to meet its responsibility towards its vulnerable citizens. Privatising caring labour destroys the relationships which teach us our responsibility to each other. The difference in the relational possibilities for the State and for a corporation is obvious: the former (at least in theory) has a primary responsibility to its citizens, and its citizens are responsible for voting on who can best carry out this responsibility-taking. The latter has primary responsibility to its shareholders, not to those receiving its care. There is no first-order relationship between the carer and the cared-for. We cannot learn what loving care looks like if we have abandoned these basic opportunities to make ourselves responsible for each other.

This transformation of our habits will require a letting go. We must give up ways of seeing ourselves and ways of living which get in the way of loving each other. We cannot be absolutely free to choose *and also* free to love. Here, I'm making a bold assumption that human limitation is both a necessity and a good. It teaches us to make commitments, and so teaches us how to live fully and well. The theologian, William Cavanaugh, puts it this way:

We need others to tell us what we can give to the world, which is a quite different question from what will give us pleasure. We need families to make demands upon us, to limit the places that we will consider living. We need to prepare one another for suffering, for running up against limitations, for caring for a special-needs child decade after decade. We need to make commitments to one another that are not reversible.¹⁵

Of course, it is very easy to theorise that this might be good for us and much more difficult to do it. The intimacy of caring labour is difficult, exhausting, and frequently disgusting. This reality can be easily disguised by the language of loving care. Describing the unpaid love labour of women as awe-inspiring or miraculous regularly lets men off the hook for taking responsibility for the vulnerable members of their family. Disability

activists point out that 'care' rhetoric can quickly become a paternalistic justification for institutionalisation or stripping away their capacity to make decisions.¹⁶ Romanticising caring labour as 'heroic' and a 'calling' can be an easy way to suppress the pay and working conditions of care workers. But these dangers are most apparent when we isolate participation in caring relationships to a few people in the name of efficiency. Effective care for each other is inevitably 'inefficient' when measured by the time, money, or numbers of people involved.

Moving away from a model of delegating love requires social conditions where the possibility and responsibility of caring for each other is shared out amongst us. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis warns us that "the gap between concern for one's personal well-being and the prosperity of the larger human family seems to be stretching to the point of complete division between individuals and human community".¹⁷ This division cannot simply be strategised away. As Francis points out, the creation of a genuinely common life needs to be "*sought out and cultivated.*" If we want to be a caring society, we need to get in the habit.

¹⁵ Cavanaugh, W., *Field Hospital*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016) p.93

¹⁶ Lynch, *Care and Capitalism* p.58

¹⁷ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (Assisi: Vatican, 2020), §31