

Susan S. Phillips and Patricia Benner, eds., *The Crisis of Care: Affirming and Restoring Caring Practices in the Helping Professions* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1994), 190 pp.

Although published nearly two decades ago, this collection is perhaps even more relevant today in our culture of increasingly impersonalized care in the name of efficiency. The editors clearly posit their assumption that caring practices need to be recalibrated to spiritual, moral, and ethical values: “The premise is that we must first understand the best of our caring practices by attending to the notions of the good life and skilled ethical comportment embedded in them” (p. vii). The inspiration for the book emerged at New College Berkeley, a graduate school for the laity affiliated with the Graduate Theological Union. Theological reflection permeates throughout the chapters, inviting us to explore our own understanding of care and its deep roots in our own narratives and life experience.

By examining core principles of compassion, care, community, and what it means to ‘help’ in our society, the authors call us to re-connect with our own humanity. The editors present a historical and philosophical context within which this examination is grounded. The book investigates not only the intra- and interpersonal dimensions of caring, but also the systemic and institutional dynamics of ‘helping’ inherent in our schools, health care facilities, social service agencies, and religious communities. The diversity of authors and perspectives is a strength of this book.

Narratives from caring professionals representing various backgrounds and settings weave well with the more philosophical chapters that cause the reader to pause and reflect on the inherent value and nature of the daily caring practices in which we find ourselves engaged. The book is comprised of ten chapters with notable contributors such as Robert N. Bellah and Eugene H. Peterson. Each chapter includes a heart-warming and compelling narrative. I felt my heart open as the narratives surfaced my own stories of vulnerability, care, and accompaniment with suffering.

This book is not a ‘tool-kit’ for caring professionals. While the skills inherent in caring relationships are noted, the authors engage us in a reflective process and challenge us to examine the very nature of our caring practices. Reading this book, I became engaged in a thoughtful process of intentional discernment, somewhat like experiences I have had in spiritual direction. As a result, I was led to a deeper exploration of the moral, ethical, and spiritual grounding in which my caring practices are rooted.

I highly recommend this book as a resource for caregiver professionals in a variety of disciplines: nursing, medicine, chaplaincy, social work, and education. The writers inspire, challenge, and can thus renew a vision of hope within us that is especially relevant today.

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