

BOOK REVIEWS



Arthur Kleinman, *The Soul of Care: The Moral Education of a Husband and a Doctor* (New York: Viking Press, 2019), 262 pp.

As the subtitle suggests, *The Soul of Care* is a story of Arthur Kleinman's transformation as a husband while caring for his wife Joan during her battle with early-onset Alzheimer's. The book begins, however, with parallel stories. We read first about Kleinman's early medical training and his drive to establish himself in a new field of medical anthropology and ethnography. In stark contrast, the second narrative is about his wife Joan's willing accommodation to her husband's self-preoccupation and her faithful attention to his and the family's well-being. Kleinman concludes the first half of the book with this blunt admission and posthumous praise: "Joan was the proverbial glue that made it stick together, while I was unwittingly doing so much to shake it all apart by charging off in my own direction. . . . Then Joan got sick and our little world was turned upside down" (129).

The second half of the book is the story of Joan's tragic decline, Arthur's 'moral education' as a husband, and the "incomprehensible jumble" of decisions, medical opinions, and emotional needs that defined their life for a decade with this cruel disease. As Kleinman notes, "One of the truisms about illness and caregiving is that the only constant is change" (145). The second half of the book is Kleinman's brutally honest account of his slow transformation as a caregiver as he learns humility. Kleinman's mother told him that Joan's disease had "made him human".

This is a book for any caregiver of a loved one with a chronic and debilitating illness. Kleinman kept his wife Joan home for too long because handing her over to the care of others seemed too much like defeat. Moreover, be-

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cause Joan had cared unselfishly for Arthur and the family while he chased his career, he could not bear the guilt of not caring for her. "Caregiving," he writes, "for me at its deepest, was redemptive. It redeemed me" (196). This is an all-too-common pattern; caregivers in the world are not always caregivers in the home. I would also be one of those who was a more attentive listener outside the family.

Kleinman's critical self-reflection as a physician is coupled with critique of caregiving in medical practice today. He does this with four paradoxes. (1) Although it has been maintained that caregiving is central to the tradition of medical practice, "[I]t has become increasingly peripheral to what physicians actually do." (2) Moreover, the medical profession has not regarded those who do care (nurses et al.) as equal partners. 3) To this day, "[C]aregiving is not a central part of medical education." 4) The increased use of medical technology for diagnosis or treatment has become a blessing and a curse for physicians and patients: "Fixation on computer screens takes up more of the physician's time than listening and speaking to patients" (219–21). In my limited experience with my own primary care physician, this is a timely and needed challenge to recover caregiving as a core professional goal in medical practice. Kleinman's criticism of the health care system is summarized with these words: "The failure of pastoral wisdom and emotional imagination among medical professionals is a kind of moral blindness" (209).

What, then, is the soul of care? For Kleinman, care still depends on presence, listening, enduring, and "cherishing people and memories". In addition, however, Kleinman reminds us that care is attentive to the context because illness is always shaped by its environment. Unpredictability and change are the constant in both illness and caregiving. And reciprocity is unavoidable. "Can you tolerate the pain of another," Kleinman asks at the end, "as it enters you and finds your own pain?" (249). In giving care, we recognize that we too need care. We are all precarious creatures who belong to a human community of the suffering ones. The awareness of that innermost need we all share is what transforms the soul of care into the care of the soul.

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