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The caregiver and client dilemma: seeing the other in the relationship in order to be completely human

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Abstract

This paper is the culmination of 20 years of working with individuals who at some point in their lives have been in need of personal assistance to complete their daily functions.

The first case study will be a young man in his 20s who was born with cerebral palsy, affecting his speech and muscle movement. A broken heart over the loss of what could have been is a constant struggle for this individual.

He must establish with the caregiver that he is human and has human needs. Conversely the caregiver must be open to understanding that this is a person who is forced to surrender his ability to manage his most basic of needs

The second composite case is a college-educated individual who has Parkinson's. After a successful career as a college professor, he is now dependent on a caregiver, currently his wife, and someday, a professional caregiver. This transition from independence to dependence provides many opportunities for expanding the concept of what it means to be human. The ability to let go of the past and venture into a new self is difficult and often overwhelming for those who attempt the journey.

The individuals involved in these caretaker relationships can expand both their world views and overall empathy. As in Levinas, this is the work that is required of love.