

UNITED WISDOM

Interdependence: needing one another while preserving choice

Relationships and Intimacy

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

R16 · EN

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

Interdependence: needing one another while preserving choice

Epigraph

> *“all must turn out for one another”*

Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, Chapter I; a fragment of the image of a shared road. It is a moral image of cooperation, not a promise that participants occupy identical positions.

What this article is about

An adult can need another person. This simple statement becomes difficult when independence means doing without help and closeness means entitlement to unlimited participation. Most ordinary life remains between those extremes: we divide tasks, use other people's knowledge, support one another and make decisions whose consequences cannot be entirely separated from those around us.

This article explores interdependence that preserves choice. We distinguish need, agreement and subordination; consider unequal contributions, temporary asymmetry, refusal and changes to shared arrangements. Historical texts help pose questions rather than provide a universal formula for families or friendship. The scenes are fictional, reflections on everyday life are editorial, and religious teachings retain their own settings. The aim is not to prescribe everyone's correct degree of independence. It is to see whether cooperation makes options more accessible and whether its terms can be discussed without questioning the human worth of whoever currently needs more support.

I. Need describes a situation, not a whole character

A need for help tells us that an action requires a resource. It does not explain an entire personality, abilities elsewhere or attitude towards life. People may manage their work and ask for help with travel, make complex decisions and lack money for a sudden expense, support others and need company on a difficult evening. These combinations do not require a separate justification.

Consider a fictional couple. Oleg is comfortable with paperwork; Lena organizes repairs and speaks with tradespeople more readily. They habitually divide tasks. Oleg believes that an independent person should handle every issue alone and begins to feel ashamed when asking

Lena to call. She sees the request as ordinary cooperation. Until they clarify their words, the same action signifies weakness to one person and trust to the other. The conflict involves not only allocation but also what that allocation is taken to say about them.

Need gives neither an entitlement to any other person's resource nor an obligation to stop needing. Someone can acknowledge a need and receive a limited answer. This uncomfortable combination is more precise than a promise that adulthood automatically solves shortages of time, money and information. One person's refusal does not prove the need imaginary. An acknowledged need does not prove this particular helper must meet it.

Independence can then be discussed through participation in a decision rather than solitary completion of every step. Who chooses the goal? Are the terms understood? Can one obtain an explanation, correct a mistake and propose another route? A person remains a participant even when someone else performs the action. If they must silently accept any method, the help itself may narrow the space for deciding.

This distinction does not turn every dependency into healthy cooperation. Some limits severely restrict choice; some relationships use need as pressure. First describe the particular resource on which the action depends and how it is accessed. The general word dependent too quickly joins practical necessity, emotional experience and an assessment of personality. A precise description makes a concrete route easier to see, or allows an honest recognition that few routes are presently available.

The number of available connections matters too. When one person is the sole source of money, information and company, their refusal changes several areas at once. This arrangement can be described without accusing the helper: circumstances, rather than intentional capture, may have produced it. Expanding available resources nevertheless deserves its own task. An acquaintance may supply information, another person time, an institution an available service. Having somewhere else to turn does not devalue existing closeness. It avoids directing every need at one person and turning every disagreement into a threat to daily life as a whole.

II. Cooperation includes a voice in its design

Cooperation exists not only where tasks are completed but where participants can discuss how they are completed. Someone can be extremely useful while leaving another person only the role of receiving finished decisions. The system appears to work: bills are paid, shopping done, meetings arranged. Its results do not yet show that both people participated in choosing the terms.

In Democracy and Social Ethics, chapter V, Jane Addams criticizes philanthropic improvements made without workers' participation. This is the social ethics of industrial

society, not a study of families. The limited comparison concerns method: a good aim does not replace consultation with those affected. Its application to a household couple is our editorial reflection, not Addams's claim about contemporary marriage.

Lena can organize the entire repair while Oleg still needs to know its timing, price and which rooms will be unavailable. Participation does not require mastering all her skills. He can agree to a budget limit, identify an inconvenient day and choose between options. If his objection is invariably treated as obstructing competence, the division of labour acquires an additional rule: only the person who performs a task better can discuss its terms.

That rule traps both people. The less experienced participant cannot influence conditions because they lack skill; the more experienced remains solely responsible because nobody else intervenes. To change this arrangement, technical and shared decisions can be distinguished. Suitable materials involve knowledge; expenditure and the inconvenient period one accepts involve agreement. Where the levels overlap, the expert explains consequences and participants reconsider the available options.

Having a voice does not mean obtaining one's preference on every point. Cooperation includes disagreement, concessions and limits on what can happen simultaneously. What matters is being able to give a reason and receive an intelligible response. If an option is rejected, one can know why and what remains. Even an inconvenient compromise differs from subordination when terms are visible and open to discussion. Visibility guarantees no fairness, but supplies material for assessing it: who bears the cost, who benefits and what can still change.

III. Equal dignity does not require identical contributions

People can have equal dignity while contributing different amounts. Income, time, skill, health and workload are not distributed equally even during a calm period. Demanding an immediate balance of every contribution can make cooperation an inaccessible examination. The opposite extreme refuses to notice allocation because close people supposedly do not count. Between them lies room to acknowledge differences without ranking human worth.

In the fictional couple, Lena is occupied by an important work project for several weeks. Oleg takes on more household tasks. They can understand this as a temporary agreement rather than proof that one loves more. The task will later change. If Lena has promised a contribution and does not fulfil it, that too can be discussed. Unequal input does not cancel commitments; it requires knowing which were accepted and what is now possible.

The Analects, book VI, chapter XXVIII in James Legge's displayed translation, connects moral development with helping others develop. Its Confucian setting includes roles and hierarchy,

unlike an agreement between equal contemporary partners. The comparison concerns moving beyond a purely individual task, not adopting the entire social model.

Fairness is not always identical hours. A free evening hour and an hour after a demanding shift can cost participants differently. This is no reason to invent a formula valuing every effort. We can ask what the current allocation makes impossible: sleep, work, a meeting or a personal activity. Then consequences replace competition in exhaustion. People describe their own expenditure; a timetable does not give an observer complete access to their experience.

Temporary asymmetry should not become a permanent explanation of personality. Receiving more now does not make someone an eternal debtor. Doing more does not grant unlimited authority. A significant contribution can be acknowledged while its limits are discussed. One can thank someone and propose a new arrangement. Cooperation stays alive when changing need need not bring shame and changing capacity need not be accused of diminished love. A more precise measure remains available: the task, participants, resources, cost and date of the next discussion.

IV. Reciprocity need not be repaid in the same currency

Reciprocity extends beyond an immediate exchange of identical favours. One person repairs things, another finds information, another remains present where no ready solution exists. If recognition is possible only through exact repayment, those with fewer resources remain permanently below. If reciprocity has no discernible shape, however, a helper may fail to notice that participation has become endless availability.

It helps to distinguish a gesture, a contract and an expectation. A gift may require no return. An exchange of services may have precise terms. Closeness may include a hope for support later, but that hope is not necessarily a promise. Calling everything reciprocity obscures the origin of subsequent claims. Someone may have wanted attention and received money, or supplied money expecting obedience. First distinguish the forms, then consider whether the arrangement is fair.

Galatians 6:2–5 places shared support beside personal accountability. This is Christian instruction, not a repayment formula. The comparison does not establish each participant's contemporary household contribution.

Suppose Oleg cooks dinner while Lena listens attentively to his account of a meeting. These actions cannot objectively be declared equivalent for every couple. We can ask whether the evening suits these two. Perhaps it does. Perhaps Oleg also wanted to share cleaning while Lena believed conversation sufficient. The problem then concerns mismatched expectations rather than an incorrect currency of care. Making those expectations visible guarantees no agreement but clarifies the disagreement's subject.

Immediate repayment particularly poorly describes long relationships. A person supports in one period and receives more in another; sometimes familiar exchanges change for a long time. This does not erase dignity. Nor must everyone accept any amount because assistance was once received. Acknowledging the past and defining the future are different actions. Someone can say that support mattered and honestly describe present capacity. Reciprocity becomes more responsible when neither what was received nor the cost of continuing must be hidden, and gratitude does not turn into an indefinite promise.

V. Refusing one action need not destroy the connection

Cooperation needs room for limited refusal. If every no means the relationship's end, an offer of help becomes hard to distinguish from a demand to preserve closeness at any cost. Refusal may concern time, an amount, a method, a meeting or the scope of information. Its subject should be heard before conclusions about feelings are drawn.

Lena refuses to call the tradesperson today but can examine the estimate tomorrow. Oleg hears that he must now do everything alone. This is a possible interpretation rather than the refusal's exact content. Clarification requires separating two actions and two times. What emerges may be a different limit rather than vanished support. Lena may also be mistaken if her new offer fails to address urgency. Discussion can reveal both parts without accusations of inadequate love.

A limited refusal can, of course, have serious consequences. If someone relied on an agreed lift, a last-minute cancellation changes their options. Revising participation does not remove the need to consider expectations already created. We can notify them as early as possible, describe the change and discuss an alternative if available. This does not require finding any solution at any cost. It means responsibility for the part of the situation we helped create.

Refusing a method while retaining a shared aim especially matters. One can help with an expense without surrendering account access, support a job search without writing in someone else's name, or share a household task without accepting insults in its discussion. Such distinctions reduce the false choice between complete agreement and coldness. A limit on participation can preserve a connection by showing which form remains possible.

This article nevertheless promises no acceptance of a precise refusal. Some relationships respond to disagreement with pressure or threats. Ordinary discussion of fair allocation may then be insufficient. A particular step's usefulness depends on the real ability to take it. Other resources and a safe way to obtain support may be needed first. We infer no diagnosis from one unpleasant response and prescribe no immediate separation. Nor do we ask someone to endure danger to prove reciprocity. Choice must consider observable consequences.

VI. Shared life and privacy can coexist

Living together does not make all information, contacts and decisions common property. People can budget jointly for some expenses and retain small personal purchases, plan a holiday together and choose their reading separately, share an experience without handing over correspondence. The distinction is usefully established by agreement rather than a slogan that close people should hide nothing.

Oleg tells Lena about a difficult conversation with a friend and asks her not to retell its details. She wants an acquaintance's advice because she feels responsible for helping. Her intention is not consent to share the information. She can separately ask whether an anonymous question may be discussed. She can also say that without additional knowledge she cannot advise. Care remains while access to another person's story is limited. Support that requires no disclosure remains possible.

A counterexample matters: decisions declared entirely personal can change shared conditions. Spending funds allocated to rent affects the other person. Privacy does not cancel an agreement here. The action and shared resource can be discussed without requiring control over every purchase and contact. The useful question concerns what belongs to an accepted shared commitment. It is more precise than demanding transparency about everything.

The division of areas need not remain identical forever. Participants may welcome greater togetherness during one period and later need a different scope. A new decision should be discussed before one person quietly changes the arrangement for both. An earlier agreement should not become a trap without an exit either. Terms can be revised while acknowledging transition costs and completing what has already begun. Privacy and connection take shape through actions, not a ready-made picture of an ideal couple.

This offers another understanding of trust. It need not mean access to every fact. We can trust someone to keep a particular promise while recognizing that the rest of their life does not require constant observation. If a promise is broken, discuss that breach and the information needed to assess it. One mistake should not automatically authorize indefinite surveillance. A reasonable check on shared work differs from taking over private space through its subject, duration and ability to restore ordinary arrangements after resolving the particular problem.

VII. A workable arrangement allows roles to change

Interdependence changes with circumstances. Yesterday's organizer may need accompaniment today; someone who received help may become more available. When roles are fixed identities, such a transition looks like a breach of the natural order. An allocation that was once convenient does not have to describe everyone's abilities forever.

Lena has long handled tradespeople. Her work schedule changes and Oleg needs to take over some contacts. He lacks details; she becomes irritated at explaining. Two routes are possible. She can declare him incapable and continue doing everything with growing fatigue. Or one task can be identified, information passed on and his decision scope agreed. The second route still takes time and allows mistakes. It promises no easy transition; it makes a handover possible to see.

In chapter I of Addams's book, moral assessment concerns the method as well as the goal. This is a social ethical position. Our example raises the question of how the handover happens, beyond whether the repair finishes. A household outcome does not prove her wider social argument.

Role changes can produce feelings that need not be denied for an arrangement to be correct. Asking may feel unfamiliar, trusting difficult, lost influence painful. These are possible experiences, not mandatory explanations. If someone recognizes them, they can discuss them separately from task completion. A helper's vulnerability gives no right to keep someone dependent; a recipient's vulnerability does not require the helper always to remain unchanged. Both may need time.

Revision can be tied to an observable condition: a changed schedule, completed project, new expense or method that no longer works. Discussion then has a subject. Some allocation can remain while another part changes, with another conversation after a few ordinary episodes. A permanent reporting system is unnecessary. Notice what became easier, what was inconvenient and which information was missing. Cooperation is assessed through room for clarification rather than freedom from all mistakes or identical pace.

A handover also needs access to previous work. If contacts, deadlines and explanations remain only in the habitual organizer's head, a call for initiative cannot transfer the task. A short task-specific note can say what is done, what is expected and which conditions change. It is an ordinary tool rather than an ability assessment. Only necessary information is passed on, respecting privacy promised to third parties. A shared task does not make all someone else's correspondence shared. The handover can end with a check of understanding: the participant describes the next step and remaining unknowns in their own words.

VIII. Choice can remain within a relationship

Choice does not vanish whenever a decision depends on someone else. It may concern how to ask, what to accept, which terms to propose, what to decline and where else to turn. Actual resources still determine the available options. Calling someone entirely free because they can formally say no is insufficient. The price of that no must be visible.

Oleg and Lena can stop proving who is more independent and consider one task: receiving a delivery this week. He is available Wednesday; she has the tradesperson's number and payment details. They combine resources and clarify what happens if the delivery is late. Neither does everything alone. Both know the terms, can correct the decision and need not treat participation as proof of personal inadequacy. Mutual need becomes a description of the arrangement rather than a verdict.

An uncomfortable possibility remains: clarification reveals that cooperation is currently unworkable. Resources are insufficient, terms unacceptable or promises repeatedly diverge from actions. Reality cannot be forced to fit the attractive word reciprocity. The task can be reconsidered, other help sought, shared work reduced or disagreement acknowledged. The article does not choose for anyone. Its distinctions clarify what needs deciding.

Closeness need not become bookkeeping. Precision is most useful where cost, uncertainty or conflict appears; many actions can remain spontaneous. The ability to ask and clarify should nevertheless survive the claim that real love already knows everything. Sometimes a clear small agreement makes more room for warmth because people no longer have to guess what hidden duty accompanied dinner, a transfer of money or travel assistance.

Interdependence with choice is not a perfect balance achieved once. It is the possibility of remaining a participant through different needs and resource levels. Need receives a name, an offer a boundary, a shared action an agreement and its outcome room for review. Nobody must cease needing to retain dignity. Nobody must become an endless resource to establish care. Between these rights, concrete forms of cooperation can be built: honest enough for the next step and flexible enough for a new situation.

What this means in practice

If you wish, choose a small shared task that can be discussed calmly. Name its desired result and each person's resources: time, information, skill, money or access. Do not assess whole people. Someone with less of one resource may supply another, or may simply need support; this does not yet establish unfairness.

Clarify who acts, who decides and which terms require joint discussion. Identify one limited refusal that does not cancel the whole connection: another date, a smaller amount or a different method. If no option exists yet, do not invent one to obtain the correct picture. The limitation can be recorded and an available alternative sought later.

After an episode, examine the result: completion, a higher cost than expected, missing information, difficulty reporting a change. These observations prove no diagnosis and establish no character. They supply grounds for changing an agreement. The practice is voluntary and can be stopped. It guarantees no balance and replaces no assistance needed

when safety is threatened. Its modest purpose is to make cooperation visible and consider whether both people's replies still have room within it.

Key quotation

> *“instead of consulting them”*

Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, Chapter V; a fragment of criticism of a benefactor acting for others without discussion. The historical industrial context retains its differences from everyday mutual assistance.

Connections between traditions

Comparison	Shared question and boundary
Addams ↔ editorial cooperation	Participation in the design of assistance. Social democracy is not a household agreement.
Analects ↔ reciprocity	Development relates to others. Confucian hierarchy is not transferred to contemporary partners.
Galatians 6 ↔ participants' responsibility	Support coexists with personal accountability. Religious instruction supplies no exchange formula.
Addams ↔ Analects	Moving beyond an exclusively solitary perspective. Democratic and role-based ideals differ substantially.
Addams ↔ editorial role changes	Method matters alongside the outcome. The analogy is not a family study.

These are limited comparisons through three works; no common doctrine or experimental confirmation is claimed.

Sources

• Jane Addams, Democracy and Social Ethics. MacMillan, 1902; selected passages in chapters I and V on method, participation and paternalism. Social ethics, not an empirical couple model.

• Analects, book VI, chapter XXVIII in this version. James Legge translation; Gutenberg 3330, precise printed year underlying this electronic version not established. Selected passage read, not the entire corpus.

• Galatians 6:1–5. Updated World English Bible, eBible.org. Christian setting of support and personal accountability, not a household obligation calculation.

Tags

interdependence, reciprocity, cooperation, independence, choice, relationships, support, need, resources, agreement, responsibility, dignity, equality, contribution, time, money, skills, roles, refusal, privacy, shared decisions, trust, changing terms, Addams, Confucianism, Christianity, Galatians, shared life, practice, United Wisdom

About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, the unity of traditions, intercultural dialogue and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh

Maria Evilkut is a co-author of United Wisdom. Alongside her research, she seeks to test these ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki