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CENTRALIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS:

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEASURES OF MORAL
DEVELOPMENT, HAPPINESS AND TECHNOLOGY DRIVEN, CENTRALIZED
WAYS OF BEING

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE HUMANITIES PROGRAM
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

KIRSTI SVENDSEN

NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

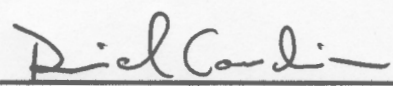
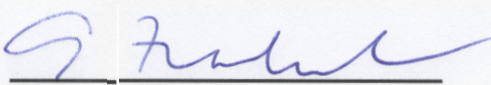
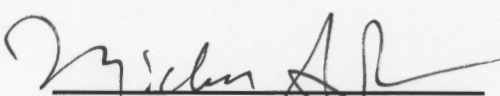
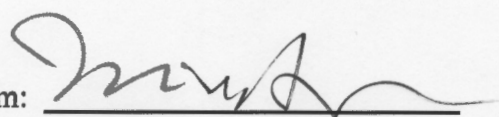
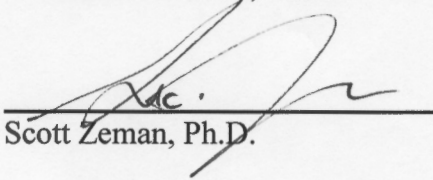
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GRADUATE STUDIES

This dissertation of Kirsti Svendsen entitled *Centralization and its Discontents: Exploring the Relationship between Measures of Moral Development, Happiness and Technology Driven, Centralized Ways of Being*, submitted to the Ph.D. Program in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Salve Regina University has been read and approved by the following individuals:

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Preface

What I am going to talk about within this preface is of course written in hindsight. Growing up in the north of Norway, where my father practiced as a very austere, Lutheran minister, I quickly got the impression that there was something very wrong with me and with the world. I remember always feeling very anxious and often inconsolable. My parents informed me that what is wrong with all human beings and the world is sin. As a child I did not understand what that meant.

As an adult I have come to find better words for what I still believe *is* wrong with all of us. I call this human problem self-centeredness. Self-centeredness seems to be natural for the very young, and no person can be completely free from this natural aspect of human nature. However, I have come to understand that self-centeredness is not our destination, but a natural aspect of our life-long journey *away* from isolating self-centeredness and *toward* all-centeredness, connectedness with others, moral maturity and true happiness.

As a child I thought that moral development was an issue only for “weird”, religious people, like my parents. Much later it has become beautifully clear to me that moral development is a uniquely human challenge, a central aspect of becoming truly human. Moral intelligence, like other kinds of intelligence, is a human ability or capacity to be developed.

From my parents I got the impression that being morally good and happy was based on an *intellectual* experience alone. Coming to know the one and only *correct* interpretation of the Bible seemed to be what they called their faith. The correct interpretation of the Bible was, of course, my father’s interpretation, supported by

Norway's most powerful, conservative theologians (Bergrav and Hallesby). My parents also emphasized the importance of obeying a few, seemingly arbitrary behavioral rules. All such rules started with "do not". Being very afraid of doing something wrong, I often ended up doing very little, except thinking about what not to do.

However, my parents also modeled aspects of the truly virtuous life for their children, by spending most of their time and money helping people all over the world in a variety of ways. My parents' interactions with suffering people all over the world gave me a wonderful impression that the whole world was my family.

Even though I did not agree with my father's interpretation of the Bible, which he insisted was not an interpretation, but the ultimate truth, I still held on to the erroneous belief that another, correct version of the ultimate truth could be found somewhere in print, and that when I found this ultimate theory, it would take care of all my problems and make me whole. I would then find peace. I would be happy. I would be good. I have since come to understand that no human being can know the ultimate truth. I still believe that objective, ultimate truth *exists*, far beyond the human realm, and that part of our moral development depends on a deep respect for such objective truths.

I never dared tell my parents that I did not believe their interpretation of the Bible was the one and only correct interpretation. I felt as if such a confession would destroy them. I continued to go to their church to please them. I did not understand at the time that this kind of behavior was both self-centered and inauthentic.

As soon as I left my childhood home, I spent all my spare time in libraries, desperately seeking the ultimate truth that I so desperately hoped was waiting for me in

some big book. At that time I read a lot without the guidance of teachers, which may have contributed to some of the problems I have had with organizing my thoughts later.

While studying philosophy and religion at libraries and going to nursing school I continued to feel very anxious. At that time I also started to develop behaviors that I discovered helped make me feel less anxious. Without understanding it at the time, I became dependent upon such behaviors or habits and developed addictions to the temporary feelings of relief they provided. For example, just like my father, I became dependent on extreme order around me. On a subconscious or unconscious level I believed that if I could obtain perfect order *around* me, it would somehow help create perfect order, peace and happiness *within* me.

For a long time I also used food, just like other substance abusers use other substances, to help console me. My mother was a phenomenal cook and baker. Her food felt like love. And since gluttony did not seem to be on my parents' list of sins, I became very addicted to the illusion of happiness I found in food.

At one point I decided to try to live a "perfect" life, like nuns do. I gave away all my belongings, except mere necessities. I withdrew from "the world", withdrew from food, other than what was needed for survival. For four years I only spent time in church and studying. At the end of these four years I discovered that, again, I was just being self-centered. I was trying to be "perfect", so that I could feel better. None of my addictive behaviors had given me peace or made me happy.

Through reading different interpretations of the Bible and also studying eastern philosophy and psychology, I eventually came to understand that if I wanted to be happy, I would have to learn to live and grow up within the world, as the world is. I then made a

very conscious decision to start *practicing* what I had slowly come to understand as the virtuous or good life, through my reading and other experiences. Very gradually I walked out of the last prison of self-centeredness I had created for myself and began to interact more and more with others and the world in respectful and honest ways, in spite of all my fears.

Starting my own family provided myriads of important opportunities for me to practice morally good activities. I wanted to help all my children, from their very beginnings, to (eventually) become authentic, morally mature, happy and creative human beings. In order to practice good parenting and be a good model for my children, I realized it would be necessary for me to keep letting go of newly discovered layers of meaningless (self-centered) behaviors that only helped me escape my irrational fears. It was amazing for me to discover that the more I was able to stop focusing on protecting myself, the less anxious I became. I was starting to experience true happiness, or joy, by connecting with others and the world in more and more meaningful ways. While my children were growing up, I was growing up!

Within my new family institution, with lots of chaos around and within me, I was compelled to get involved in an always increasing number of challenging interactions with my children, their friends, their teachers, our neighbors and so on. I also returned to church, because I wanted my children to be exposed to this kind of community, which in the past had been both important and confusing to me. This return to a neighborhood church also provided me with a new opportunity to experience a church community without having to be dishonest or leaving my true (developing) self at the door, as I had done as a child.

Within this process of becoming myself, I also felt the need to go back to school, and look at the world again, now from a brand new, honest or open point of view. After having lived my life “suspended in mid air” (anxiety) for so long, I had finally come to feel ground under my feet. As soon as my children were all in public schools, I started working again as a registered, psychiatric nurse and returned to school to study psychology and then the humanities. I also participated in book clubs, philosophy clubs, and Bible-study groups, and was somewhat successful at dabbling in

I had learned the important lesson that while ideas are important parts of our development as human beings, intellectual theory *alone* does not help us move toward moral maturity and happiness. Only when our ideas, the seeds, are being planted in soil, or implemented and practiced within all aspects of our lives, through genuine, direct interactions with others, 1:1 and in groups or community, can we change and grow.

As a psychiatric nurse, I came to work with alcoholics and other drug addicts in a psychiatric hospital, where substance abusers were helped through medical detoxification and provided with counseling as they were about to enter a long and extremely challenging process of becoming sober, authentic and eventually (truly) happy. The patients’ stories reflected a variety of very serious, moral and other problems within the thinking and other behaviors of the patients, their families, neighborhoods, other institutions and our society in general.

Most of my patients failed, again and again, on their very turbulent paths attempting to move away from old habits of isolating self-centeredness and addiction to illusions of happiness and moving toward a life of honesty and respect for others and themselves, with the hope of again becoming responsible and valued members of their

families and society. However, a few of the patients were victorious and did again become productive, delightful and very happy individuals. The few who did succeed were those who connected with others in honest or genuine ways. This process was often started when they joined a unique, moral community, Alcoholics Anonymous, where they were supported by other members of the group, while they learned how to practice the virtuous way of being, including being honest and respectful in *all* their relationships. Those who became truly sober often expressed the tremendous joy or happiness they experienced as their new way of being in the world transformed them.

I also discovered that some alcoholics, like other human beings, took only one or a few steps toward recovery or moral maturity. They seemed to believe that others and the world were punishing them for their drinking behaviors. And because they wanted to avoid such punishment, like losing their unhappy spouses, homes or jobs or end up in prison, for example, many of them managed to stop drinking. However, they did not surrender their whole selves to the process of becoming truly sober. They did not start to interact with others and the world in open, honest ways or in other ways practice positive, creative aspects of the virtuous or morally good life. They only seemed to change their observable behaviors to avoid punishment from the world around them. Such “dry drunks” (as they are called) continued to be miserable and often very critical of others. They gave up drinking alcohol, but did not give up their other addictive and destructive thoughts, and therefore never became truly sober, mature or happy.

It was easy for me to see the striking similarities between the process substance abusers had to go through to become sober, my own process of growing up, my children’s process of moral development and the process *all* human beings must go

through in order to develop *from* our initially natural self-centeredness (and dependence upon illusions of happiness) and begin to move *toward* moral maturity, and become creative and happy members of society.

My interest in the complex process of moral development, its possible connection with happiness, and how it all may be related to our way of being within the structure of our institutions, eventually brought me to the research and writing of this dissertation.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my wholehearted appreciation for the incredible patience of my three excellent readers, all masters within their different areas of expertise. They have all been supportive as they have helped me see where I have often gone astray and showed me ways to get back on track as I have been struggling through a very long journey toward learning how to actually write a dissertation.

My brilliant mentor and reader, Dr. Michael Budd, so graciously helped me see how I was stuck within certain very problematic patterns of expressing my ideas, for example, using words and sentences that did not help me say what I really intended to say. In addition to helping me see where I was trapped, Dr. Budd also graciously suggested different, excellent ways to write, which made it possible for me to make changes and move forward.

I also want to thank my second reader, Dr. Arthur Frankel, who gave me numerous, honest reactions to both content and writing style, all of which has been important and very helpful in so many ways. Dr. Frankel also reminded me, specifically, of the need to explain more carefully both my own ideas and the ideas of my sources. And along with my other readers he also emphasized the need for empirical evidence to support my many claims throughout the dissertation.

Also, I want to express my gratitude to my third reader, Dr. Daniel Cowdin, who was the last but not the least reader to come “on board” on this incredible journey of mine. In addition to offering multiple, very meaningful comments, Dr. Cowdin also suggested further sources/thinkers for me to use to help me develop the main ideas within

my dissertation as persuasively as possible. His consistent encouragement was immensely helpful.

Abstract

This interdisciplinary, qualitative dissertation offers an exploration into possible intimate relationships between recently expanding, technology driven forms of centralization of our social institutions and a supposed decline in moral development and happiness among Americans today.

According to Jacques Ellul, technology in itself is not the problem. Instead, he believes the tragedy is that the new idea or spirit of “technique”, technical efficiency and economic progress, which may have started with the Industrial revolution, and has become the western world’s new “religion”, the new salvation for humanity. Ellul and other thinkers suggest that the single-minded focus on material progress has made centralization of our institutions necessary. Within increasingly centralized systems human beings are being as means to the new end of efficiency for material progress. According to Ellul and others, our institutions have thereby become increasingly unfit for a certain uniquely human way of being, which facilitates moral development.

The ideas of Aristotle and other theorists are used as lenses through which we can also look at the perennial question of human happiness and its possible relationship with moral development and the way we live within community.

Aspects of life within centralized America today are being contrasted with features of Aristotle’s ideal state. Our highly centralized way of being in America today is also being compared to the less centralized way of being in America 50-60 years ago.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This dissertation offers a re-examination and further exploration of modern and current debates concerning moral development and happiness. A central part of this exploration will be to take a close look at certain intimate, individual, psychological and spiritual aspects of the very complex, life-long, process of human/moral development, and to learn more about the ways this process may be influenced directly and indirectly, by recent institutional changes and social frameworks that have come about as a result of the steadily increase in centralization of America's institutions.

The ideas of *Aristotle*, *Jacques Ellul*, *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*, *Wendell Berry* and many others will be used as lenses for looking at the perennial question of human happiness, its possible relationship with moral development, and how it all relates to one's role within community.

In particular this research project addresses the changes that have been wrought more recently by advancing technology, industrialization and the building of the modern nation state. Developed nations are characterized by an emphasis on facilitating economic development and material progress. The emphasis in America today seems to be on making institutional changes to help perfect the world *around* individuals, by elevating our (material) standard of living, for example, which appears to promise happiness. Older models of society, in addition to being designed to also support material progress, seemed to keep human/moral development more carefully at the center of attention as they all continued to change or recreate their institutions.

The term “centralization” is being used to describe a fairly recent and still ongoing progression within our always changing institutions, a trend or spirit that may be affecting Americans’ *way of being* in the world in significant, negative ways. Obviously, many of our centralized systems, which take care of problems or challenges that cannot be managed locally, are very beneficial. The development of our interstate highway network and the recent creation of the Internet are just two examples of many such great, centralized systems. However, many organizations, which in the past used to be managed fairly well locally, like public education and health care for example, have recently become exceedingly centralized. In the process of centralizing such institutions, myriads of smaller, moral communities have disappeared from American life. While such local, moral communities certainly did not solve all our problems, they may have provided actual and excellent spaces for certain, crucial, direct interactions between individual Americans, which may be necessary for successful moral development and happiness.

The organizing (Catholic) principle of subsidiarity, which will be referred to at times throughout the dissertation, describes very well the importance of a certain structure or spirit within society, which benefits individual development. This principle suggests that all matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralized, competent authority within a society. This principle does not exclude the need for education and supervision, but seems to suggest that all individuals should be allowed and encouraged to practice all aspects of their lives that they can learn to manage. Recent forms of centralization of our institutions seem to have moved many such character-shaping challenges into the hands of centralized government programs; tasks

that, in the past, used to be handled by masses of individual Americans within their local, moral communities.

Half a century ago it was still necessary for most Americans to interact directly with each other and the world in the uniquely human way within their very imperfect but functioning small, moral communities, their families, neighborhoods, local schools and churches. 50-60 years ago there were still very few centralized systems available that could assist with and even take over the creative processes involved in solving the many problems that parents, teachers, neighbors and other small community members were facing. Therefore earlier Americans were compelled to be courageous, reach out and be creative. Even if they did not always succeed, such efforts were often helpful for their communities. More importantly, maybe, such genuine, individual, daily attempts to connect with others in helpful ways seemed to facilitate moral development and happiness in such community members, as we will discuss.

In today's America, many such interactions, which may be important aspects of moral development and happiness, have become absorbed by impersonal systems, like our centralized public education and centralized healthcare, for example. Again, while some forms of centralization are indeed beneficial, some recent, more advanced forms of centralization seem to have removed a multitude of previously natural, important challenges that existed in the past within America's small moral communities. Half a century ago, teachers, doctors, neighbors and parents had to face their many individual, uniquely human challenges within their small communities, all of which may have helped many of them become excellent teachers, doctors, neighbors and parents.

The current analysis will re-examine the idea that the small, imperfect, moral communities of America's not so distant past, may have played an important role in compelling masses of Americans to exercise and develop their individual, uniquely human, creative potential and responsibilities. The word responsibility is also defined as "the opportunity or ability to act independently and make decisions without authorization". As human beings we have a variety of different abilities to respond to circumstances and challenges affecting ourselves and others. Human abilities seem to be similar to seeds, which can only develop through myriads of direct interactions within their soil (community). Seeds cannot develop naturally away from their soil, or if the texture of the soil has been changed so drastically that the soil no longer facilitates the development of seeds.

We will be looking at structural aspects of the centralized family, neighborhoods or small communities and public education in America, and contrast the most recent, centralized way of being in America today to a different kind of being within the less centralized America's not so distant past. Our objective is to see if we may discover more about the very complex relationships between the shape and design of our institutions (which affects our way of being in the world), moral development and happiness among the members of such institutions.

In order to think about how much centralization is "too much", we may liken the originally intended, limited tasks of our central government to the tasks of parents. If the central government, for example, move far beyond their specific, limited roles, including protecting its citizens' right to live their lives in freedom from harm, many would consider such government behaviors harmful or destructive. Likewise, if parents do not

encourage their children to practice what they need to do in order to develop their abilities, and instead try to “help” their children by doing the children’s work for them, such parental behaviors could be devastating for their children’s development.

This study is looking at some ways in which America’s centralized government recently may have come to take over many character-shaping, human activities, which in the past used to belong to individuals within their challenge-filled communities. When many such functions became centralized, it became *unnecessary* for masses of Americans to practice, and thereby develop, many aspects of their uniquely human abilities as parents, teachers, neighbors, and so on. We may also compare the role of our central government to the role of the umpire within a baseball team. If the umpire starts to do the job of the players, rather than acting within the important but limited role of umpires, there will soon be no excellent baseball players or games.

Is it possible that masses of today’s Americans are paying a very high price for all kinds of new, centralized systems, created to facilitate economic development? Our centralized systems certainly provide a multitude of economic and material improvements, while they also seem to promise a substantial increase in free or unstructured time for many. However, as mentioned before, within this exploration we will focus especially on some of the ways the steadily increase in centralization may also have negatively affected moral development and happiness among Americans, who are living within the new structures of their families, public education and other centralized institutions.

As we compare aspects of the way we live within our centralized institutions today to the way Americans lived 50-60 years ago, we will focus on the character-

developing practices that in the past used to be part of everyday life for parents and their children, teachers and other community members, and look at the ways many of these activities have come to be considered unnecessary or unimportant for masses of Americans today. With the help of many centralized systems many natural incentives have disappeared, for individuals to be creative and struggle to find uniquely human and morally good solutions to social and personal or spiritual problems. We want to look at the different kinds of forces and activities that are involved within direct interactions between individuals within small, moral communities and how such often difficult, but meaningful, human connections may affect moral development and happiness among its members

Again, the intention is not to ignore the fact that many centralized programs are indeed helpful for all citizens in many important ways. The purpose of this exploration is to see if America's government, recently, and especially within the past 50-60 years, may have entered areas of involvement that may interfere with full human flourishing. Have the most recent forms of centralization created a culture of (learned) helplessness and dependency (upon the government) among masses of Americans? Is the practice or application of a uniquely human way of being within community *necessary* for all persons, in order for them to eventually develop into morally mature and truly happy human beings?

At different times in history, a variety of reasons have been suggested for perceived declines in both morality and happiness. Recently there has been a tendency among conservative Americans, for example, to argue that the relaxation of laws around sexuality and marriage, which started around the 1960s, is the main reason why there has

been an increase in divorce and break-up of the family, which again has led to the recent decline in both morality and happiness. In his book *My Dear Bishops* (2013), his other books and multiple articles for a number of national periodicals, David Carlin, a professor of philosophy and sociology writes extensively from this point of view.

This dissertation uses the Aristotelian idea that links the social good with everyday habits of good (virtuous) behavior as the basis of moral development and happiness. Building on Aristotle's ideas about the role of communal institutions in moral development, comparisons will be drawn between life within America's institutions today and the way of life within the less centralized institutions in America 50-60 years ago, as examples, to see if we may be able to identify and describe certain institutional features that may or may not facilitate moral flourishing and happiness.

Aristotle's ideas will be buttressed with Jacques Ellul's more recent theory, which addresses proposed connections between centralization ("the technical society") and diminishing opportunities for people to live as truly human, i.e. moral beings, and the important role of our institutions when it comes to encouraging the uniquely human way of being in the world.

Aristotle believed that the desire for happiness is the major motivator for human behavior. There will therefore will also be a separate chapter discussing Aristotle's view of happiness, his amazingly detailed description of it, and the views of many others writers when it comes to definitions of happiness and the role of happiness within the process of moral development. While different kinds of behaviors may lead to different kinds of happiness or levels of good, Aristotle argued that only the highest level of good, virtuous activities, are associated with the highest level of happiness or true happiness.

True happiness, he said, is an activity, an intrinsic part of the virtuous life within community, through which practices human beings become virtuous and truly happy.

In his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle explains how pleasure (happiness is also pleasurable) and pain can help guide individuals toward virtue or excellence: "...the noble and the beneficial seem pleasant to us. Moreover, a love of pleasure has grown up with all of us from infancy. Therefore, this emotion has come to be ingrained in our lives and is difficult to erase. Even in our actions we use, to a greater or smaller extent, pleasure and pain as a criterion."¹ Within this quote we also see that Aristotle is very aware of the importance of a person's early (childhood) experiences.

Aristotle does not believe our emotions alone may guide human beings toward moral maturity as they practice virtuous living. Therefore, Aristotle also talks about the importance of excellent education or instruction and our ability to reason, all of which are necessary aspects of the important process of learning how to interpret our emotions correctly, for example.

Emotions are not good or bad in themselves. Instead they carry messages to persons about their intellectual and all other behaviors. Then it is up to the person to interpret such emotions or messages correctly. Therefore Aristotle says: "Also, we are neither praised nor blamed for our emotions: a man does not receive praise for being frightened or angry, nor blame for being angry pure and simple, but for being angry in a certain way. Yet we are praised or blamed for our virtues and vices."²

¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962), 38.

² Ibid., 40.

Jacques Ellul does not seem to think that human emotions are trustworthy or important. Nevertheless, he argues that centralized living within a society made up of technological (rather than human) systems, narrowly aimed at material growth, make people unhappy. Ellul also argues that the technological society does not want its citizens to discover that they are unhappy, because that could lead to a revolt. Therefore, he says, centralized cities and societies had to find ways to distract their citizens from their feelings of unhappiness.

In his book *The Technological Society* Ellul (1964) describes how technique's new centralized systems initially forced the "consumers" to leave the lives they knew in order to come to the machine, as adequate means of transportation were not yet available.

At first, urban planning was only a clumsy kind of adaptation, which was little concerned, for example, with slums (despite the efforts of the utopian planners of the middle of the century). Somewhat later, as big city life became for the most part intolerable, techniques of amusement were developed. It became indispensable to make urban suffering acceptable by furnishing amusements, a necessity which was to assure the rise, for example, of a monstrous motion-picture industry.³

Ellul descriptions (above) sounds similar to some of Huxley's descriptions of what was going on in his fictional *Brave New World* (1932), where "the office" had to bring about a variety of illusions of happiness so that their inhabitants would not rise in rebellion.

Illusions of happiness can also help distract people from examining important feelings of intellectual or moral dissonance, by introducing entertainment and other pleasures and thereby leave very little time for contemplation, for example.

Moral development will be defined and discussed according to the theories of Aristotle, Jacques Ellul and the more recent research of Lawrence Kohlberg, for example.

³ Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 113.

Erik Erikson's view of moral development will also be visited as he emphasized the importance of the continuous, *lifelong* process of moral development.

The data supporting this investigation suggest that a person's level of moral maturity is based on the development of a natural, not primarily religious, but uniquely human responsibility, or ability, to respond to life's challenges, an ability that must be awakened, nurtured and exercised on a continuous basis within our institutions, within community in order to reach maturity. While certain religious beliefs remain beyond the areas of experiences we can examine, utilizing the scientific method, many aspects of the process of moral development, their possible connections with a certain way of being, and happiness can be examined and re-examined using this method.

The very complex process of moral development and happiness will at times be compared to the better known, also all-inclusive practices involved in a person's *physical* development and feeling of wellness (physical happiness). Both processes are endlessly complex and can be dramatically affected by changes within our institutions, which may interrupt or alter behaviors or interactions that are crucial for the success of such developments. Again, within this dissertation we are looking at how the most recent increase in centralization of America's institutions to facilitate economic development may have caused an unintended decrease in healthy moral development, including the development of creativity, authenticity, empathy and happiness for masses of Americans.

As is the case with physical development, this research suggests that moral maturity is not something one may acquire through a certain fixed set of intellectual, moral exercises alone, or through passively following some particular, prescribed, religious or other behavioral rules, for example. According to Aristotle and many others

it seems that moral maturity can develop only through a certain, continuous way of being, involving *all* aspects of one's intellectual and other behaviors, including attitude or motivations behind one's ideas and actions. The expression "a way of being" is being used simply because it helps incorporate all manners in which human beings exist in the world, as we think about ourselves in the world and the ways we approach other persons and situations, each of which is unique or different from all other persons and circumstances.

It is well known that human development is influenced both by nature, one's given, biological limitations, and by nurture, which is provided through our institutions. Because everybody's way of being starts to get shaped by their early institutions long before individuals can make their own choices, it is important to look at the crucial role of a society's institutions, starting with the family. The family supplies the young with their very first, most potent and powerful, awakening experiences and practices, which become the habits that give the young their initial shape or identity.

Louis Althusser, the French philosopher who sought to counter the popular interpretation of Marxism as an essentially humanistic and individualist philosophy, also spoke about the ways our ideological, social and political institutions like the family, the media, religious and educational systems and the discourse they promote, bombard individuals, especially the young, with ideas that give them their identity. A person's identity, or the person, he says, is her or his response to the ideas he or she is born into. In other words, human beings do not simply choose what they initially come to believe, or bring into being. Althusser says this initiation into life is both necessary and fundamental as we cannot recognize ourselves or act outside some kind of ideology or structure. It can

be argued that the individual exercise of what is called “free will” does not begin until sometime after family, teachers and other community leaders or institutions have already shaped the young in important ways.

This study will also look at the many ways the particular behaviors (intellectual and other) that parents, teachers and other leaders model or demonstrate for the young, may also affect such leaders’ own, continuous, lifelong development as moral beings in very important ways. The structure and condition of our institutions seem to be as important for all *stages* of human or moral development as the condition of the soil is for both acorns and oak trees.

Why may this research be important or useful? While much research has already been done to help us learn more about the many ways we may be facilitating or hindering physical, psychological and spiritual development in human beings, we have still only scratched the surface of what there is to know. Some of the research regarding moral development has been left to the Church, which often begin its “research” with answers rather than questions. The theories of thinkers used within this research make it clear that moral development and happiness are not issues that pertain only to religious persons. Instead, it is understood that morality or the development of certain moral values and principles of behaviors are central issues or challenges belonging to all human beings.

Since all our institutions are continuously changing, according to discoveries of new values, and it is known that implementation of such changes will have (sometimes significant) consequences for all members of society, it seems obvious that leaders and other members of all societies should be very careful as they make such structural changes. This would include ongoing, comprehensive, interdisciplinary research,

including all known aspects of our endlessly complex, psychological, spiritual and moral development, the role of our institutions, and the far from fully understood role of happiness within this all-important process. Such research should always be done in an open and vigorous manner, using the same scientific methods with which we continue to conduct and present research within other areas of investigation.

When inquiring about the ways certain aspects of the increasingly centralized structure of our institutions may play a role within the hypothesized decline in moral development and happiness in America today, this study will obviously not examine *all* aspects of all our institutions. Because the institutions of family and other, small moral communities like neighborhoods and public education, affect all human beings first, and are therefore our most influential institutions when it also comes to moral development, we will limit our discussion to focusing mostly on these mentioned institutions.

Again, only certain aspects of America's centralized family, neighborhoods and public education will be discussed, in an attempt to learn more about possibly crucial features within these institutions, which may have slowly been disappearing during the process of centralization and may be necessary for the far-from-fully understood individual transformation we call human or moral development to take place.

The principle of subsidiarity describes so well a certain basic, institutional design, which seems to be necessary if a society wants to facilitate moral development for all its citizens. This social doctrine proposes that all matters, problems or challenges ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralized, competent authority, including political decisions. As America's institutions have become more and more centralized, it seems as if we are moving in the opposite direction. Progressively, important character-

forming activities or challenges, which in the past used to be taken care of by local schools, individuals teachers, parents and neighbors, for example, are now being handled by higher, centralized authorities and systems.

Granted, some forms of central leadership and supervision are important aspects of any society. However, the problem we are looking at here is not leadership or supervision in itself. Instead we are looking at a possible, new trend within centralized America, where centralized leaders and supervisors, are not leading or supervising, but instead seem to be taking over many vital, character-forming responsibilities or practices that used to belong to local, less centralized, competent authorities. This shift, which may have come about to help increase efficiency, is also taking away multiple opportunities for both local, moral communities and individuals to be creative and flourish within their communities.

Americans' way of being half a century ago will be compared to life in America today, to see if we may identify and discuss what it is about our way of being in America today that may inhibit human flourishing and true happiness.

Even though modern technology has provided us with a phenomenal increase of instantly available information all over the world, for example, we also know that access to valuable information does not by itself lead to wisdom, moral development or happiness. Without plenty of opportunities for people, through their institutions, to be helped to think critically about the ideas that are being presented to them, or having enough local, moral communities wherein which Americans may apply their theories, such ideas may remain like seeds without soil. It will be argued that the small, moral community life in America's past, in spite of colossal social and other problems, still

seemed to provide a structure that helped facilitate the complex process of human flourishing for many.

Before Americans began to hand over to the centralized government many uniquely human challenges, which at earlier times had belonged to individuals within their smaller, moral communities, including family and public education, for example, it had been necessary for most individuals or “lower, capable authorities” to practice their uniquely human (developing) abilities. In addition to possible moral convictions, these Americans were also motivated by the fact that If they did not take care of their problems, no one else would. Young or immature human beings tend to seek out solutions that are easy rather than excellent. This is why our institutions and all our leaders are so important, in that they may (or may not) help the young discover morally good solutions to life’s many challenges, and thereby facilitate excellent moral development.

When talking about the increasingly centralized institutions of family, community and public education, attention will not only be paid to the young, whose foundation for further development is highly affected by their introduction to the new, centralized way of being. As mentioned before, this dissertation will also look at the important ways the same changes in the structure of America’s institutions may also be coercing masses of our institutions’ leaders (parents, teachers, neighbors and other adults) to act more like consumers of endless amounts of material goods that the centralized systems have helped bring about, rather than modeling moral maturity for the young, including being creative and compassionate toward others, for example.

While masses of adult Americans are busy trying to fulfill the demands of the increasingly centralized systems they have helped construct, they may also be missing countless opportunities to interact with others and the world, as leaders, in ways that may affect their *life-long* process of human/moral development in significant ways.

Purpose of this Research

The purpose of this interdisciplinary study is to see what more we may learn about the ways America's centralized institutions may have come to disrupt or hinder the process of healthy human development and may instead (unintentionally) have led masses of Americans astray from a certain way of being, which may be necessary for successful human/moral development and happiness.

With specific questions in mind, it is hoped that this inquiry may help us understand more about the innumerable factors that drive individual moral development. What more may we discover about the many building blocks within persons and their daily activities or habits, first introduced by their institutions, all of which seems to shape all human beings morally? We already know that moral development is not a purely intellectual process. What other aspects of individual development and the institutions within which such transformations happen may also be important and even essential for successful human flourishing? Does full moral development require the involvement of *all* aspects of a person's way of being?

This exploration will attempt to describe the hypothesized, intimate connections between 1) the different ways individuals interact with others and the world, their way of

being, 2) the different degrees or levels of healthy moral development and happiness and 3) the role of our institutions within these interconnected aspects of human development.

It is hoped that the questions that have been raised and discussed within this work may provide a modest contribution to the ongoing conversation or discourse regarding the still far from fully answered questions concerning what it means to be human, and how we should live.

Method

This dissertation is based on qualitative, interdisciplinary method of research. While quantitative research is mostly about specific forms of testing and statistics that give researchers important tools with which they may control and predict certain phenomena, the intention of qualitative, interdisciplinary explorations is to find patterns or themes within theories from different fields of knowledge, to help us better understand the subject or subjects at hand.

Within this exploration the theories of a variety of thinkers from different times in history and from the fields of philosophy, religion, sociology and psychology have been included to help us look again, from several angles and through different lenses, at the complex relationships between known and many still mysterious aspects of being human and the roles of our institutions and our communities when it comes to human development.

Within this research project, we ask what more can be learned about the nature and possible effects of a person's way of being within community. In what ways do the different thinkers included in this study suggest that a person's way of being relate to

human development and happiness? How is happiness defined? And finally, what more can we learn about how the structure of our institutions may affect the salient process of moral development?

Similar and differing views of the selected authors regarding possible connections between a person's way of being, moral development and happiness and how the shape of our institutions may influence the process of moral development, will be discussed, compared and contrasted in an attempt to offer a comprehensive picture of the proposed relationships between America's highly centralized institutions and human development and happiness among Americans today.

Structure of the Dissertation and Sources Included

After the introduction, part one of this exploration will begin with defining and explaining the meaning of certain terms that will be used throughout the dissertation. This chapter (two) will include a description of the main perceived problems that will be discussed.

The French philosopher, theologian, sociologist and Christian anarchist Jacques Ellul (1912 – 1994) lived during the time when the materialistic spirit he believed was guiding what he called “technique” had already become a recognizable power in the modern world. Ellul's powerful analysis of essential aspects of the many-faceted *problem* we are examining will help begin our exploration. The theories of Aristotle and many other, important thinkers and theorists, will soon be added to help address several other, crucial features of this investigation.

Jacques Ellul saw how the western world had come to drastically change and centralize its institutions in order to, above all, facilitate and promote economic or material development. Ellul, who cared very deeply about the individual, uniquely human way of being, became very concerned about this new development. He believed that the centralization of our institutions for the sake of technique or efficiency, was leading masses of people, who were blinded by all kinds of promises related to material progress, into a way of being that was suitable only for machines. Ellul believed it was essential that human beings are allowed and encouraged by their institutions to live as human beings, responding to myriads of moral choices in individual, creative and authentic ways, practices he saw as central to being human.

In his book *The Technological Society* (1964) Ellul produced a very dark, but brilliant analysis of the disastrous consequences he saw emerging from western civilization's choice to make "technique" or "efficiency" the new number one concern, the new sacred, as he called it. He described how the most recent, momentous choice by government leaders, involving enormous institutional/social changes, had come to alter western culture, so that masses of individuals were no longer able to practice what Ellul saw as uniquely human, morally significant lives.

Aristotle has been chosen as the other, major source for this investigation, because he has described so eloquently and detailed, the very complex "anatomy" of healthy human or moral development, which Aristotle also says depends on our institutions' ability to 1: educate the young regarding "the good life" and 2: help them get into the habit of practicing the virtuous way of being. This is Aristotle's path to a virtuous, morally mature or excellent and happy life.

Throughout this dissertation, the possible errors and consequences involved when an immature society chooses to make drastic, institutional changes based on the discovery of a new, seemingly great, but isolated value, like technique, efficiency or material progress, will be discussed by comparing and contrasting the views of thinkers who address different aspects of this multifaceted topic. While the discovery of technique and new possibilities of material progress, which make centralization necessary, have undoubtedly affected all developed countries, we have chosen to limit this study to looking at America and the changes that have come about with the most recent, drastic forms of centralization of our institutions between the 1960s and today.

At one point within this dissertation, the possible negative effects upon moral development and true happiness among centralized Americans will be compared to the well known process leading to development of “the addictive personality” (Craig Nakken). Perceived, negative developments among today’s Americans, which may have resulted from the single-minded choice to change our institutions based on discovery of new, under-examined ideas, promising progress and happiness, will be likened to the development of a certain addictive personality, which happens to immature persons, who choose to use drugs, for example, based on an under-examined promise of happiness. All kinds of addiction start with a desire to be “happy” and require that the potential addicts adopt a precarious, self-centered and isolating way of being in the world.

In another chapter, important aspects of an alternative way of being will be discussed, based on a deep respect also for the many, still mysterious, mostly unknown aspects of reality, which tends to help facilitate healthier moral development and true happiness.

A thoughtful respect for larger, known and unknown aspects of reality, as Jacques Ellul talks about at length, seems to be in opposition to humanity's (also natural) desire for quick fixes or premature answers or closures, all of which seems to help ease our natural anxiety or "existential angst". It seems as if some individuals and groups of individuals are especially willing or eager to settle for new and promising, religious, political and other ideas (including drugs) as ultimate answers, rather than daring to remain open to the bigger questions and the unknown.

Wendell Berry's theory will also be included in this discussion. Berry approaches the problem of single-mindedness from a different angle as he urges his readers and audiences to rediscover and maintain a respectful openness toward the bigger picture of reality, especially in the ways we treat our planet, our soil. Berry talks about the terrible misuse of the earth and misuse of resources, which he has been a witness to, after groups of individuals and whole nations seem to have abandoned both what they know and what they don't know about nature, in order to follow today's newest idea, to simply maximize economic benefits for today. Berry finds it very disturbing that people seem to be willing to simply forsake their previously held respect for, and enjoyment of, the still far from fully known mother nature, and simply embrace a new, under-researched way of farming (factory farming, as he calls it), for example. Such industrial agriculture, he says, is only financially beneficial for the short term (another quick fix), while it destroys the soil for future use and enjoyment.

Not unlike Ellul's disapproval of the idea of centralizing all institutions spreading all over the western world, to facilitate material progress, Berry also observes how Americans' new acceptance and application of their new "Faustian" economics seems to

have turned American society into a financial insane asylum run by the inmates. Berry claims that America's constantly entertained and distracted "consumers" are slowly being turned into very unhappy victims, threatened by a future of very possible disasters.

The crucial roles of our institutions within human/moral development will be re-examined through the eyes of *Ellul*, *Aristotle*, *Wendell Berry* and others. From different angles these authors discuss the important roles of our institutions, where most of our habits are initiated. Their theories help illuminate and illustrate the many connections between our way of being within our increasingly centralized institutions, and how this centralized way of life may or may not help facilitate happiness and the life-fulfilling process of human or moral development.

Due to much disagreement around the very complex phenomenon we call happiness, it seems necessary to devote a separate chapter (with subchapters) to discuss a variety of definitions of happiness and the different views regarding the debatable relationship between happiness and moral development. Aristotle, for example, understood that there are different kinds or levels of happiness, which correspond with certain levels of moral goodness in a person's activities.

According to Aristotle, and other, more recent authors, including most today's psychologists, happiness is the ultimate goal of all human behaviors. Happiness is therefore what motivates people to repeat the behaviors they associate with happiness. However, Aristotle maintained that *true* happiness (or *eudaimonia*) can only be experienced as an integral part of the all-inclusive, virtuous way of being.

It is well known that experiences of lower levels of "happiness" also drive people to repeat the behaviors they associate with such feelings. Repetitions of behaviors soon

turn into habits. Unfortunately, both good and bad behaviors that are repeated over time turn into habits. And it is our habits, good or bad, that change or develop all of us either toward or away from moral maturity and true happiness.

Aristotle knew that many kinds of happiness, or illusions of happiness, may lead people into deviant behaviors, if such persons have been misguided by their experiences within their early institutions. Aristotle uses the “happiness” experienced by a thief as an example of an illusion of happiness, which still tends to lead to repetitions of stealing. The thief feels happy when he gets away with his stolen goods. Therefore, the thief will tend to steal again. Such behaviors soon become a habit, which will affect the thief’s moral development in very negative ways. Aristotle believed that individuals, with the support of their institutions (including excellent education) could learn to tell the difference between true happiness and illusions of happiness.

Jacques Ellul did not believe in the importance of happiness, especially not as a guide to help people figure out the moral goodness or badness of their behaviors. Ellul’s view is in some ways similar to the view of Emanuel Kant. Their views of happiness will be contrasted with the theory of Aristotle, and others, who have described happiness as playing a significant role within human or moral development.

Other, more recent evaluations of happiness and how happiness may be related to moral development will also be visited. Martin E.P. Seligman’s extensive research behind *Authentic Happiness* (2002), for example, will be discussed and compared to Daniel Gilbert’s very different definition and conclusions regarding happiness described in his book *Stumbling on Happiness* (2007).

During the research process, additional problems seemed to become important to include within this already involved examination of the suggested relationships between the way we live, human development and happiness. For example, more Americans have recently come to treat happiness as something that has very little to do with their way of being (thinking and acting) and their moral development. Instead, many Americans seem to think that happiness is something they are entitled to, something that the world owes them. Such “happiness” can be purchased and consumed in the forms of food, drugs and constant entertainment, for example. Several authors, including Charles Barber, will be involved in our discussion regarding the ways our centralized institution of medicine, for instance, may have helped to further complicate today’s Americans’ sense of what happiness is, what it means to be human and how we should live.

Within *part two* of this dissertation, an exploration of *another* (less centralized) *way of being* will be conducted; looking at data showing possible connections between life within small, moral communities, positive human flourishing and happiness.

After having explored the many ways in which the recently increased centralization of America’s institutions may be affecting the proposed decline in human development and happiness among masses of today’s Americans, we will be looking at aspects of another way of being, in centralized America 50-60 years ago by referring to the research of *Robert Coles*. Coles observed and described some extremely challenging, but also possibly character-developing interactions among Americans within their very imperfect, small communities, afflicted by horrible practices of racism in the 1950s and 60s. Robert Coles provides his readers with amazing examples of excellent moral development and happiness even among very young Americans, who lived within such

small and very troubled communities. This was a time when there were very few centralized government systems available to take care of the many serious, social and other problems that these community members had to deal with.

The theories of *Ellul*, *Aristotle*, *Wendell Berry*, and others will also be involved in this aspect of our exploration, having to do with how the size of a community also may help facilitate the kinds of direct interactions between persons, which may be necessary in order for community members to develop toward moral maturity.

There will also be a separate chapter discussing the importance of allowing or embracing a certain amount of anxiety or growing pains as part of normal human development. It seems as if masses of Americans today, with the help of pharmaceutical companies, for example, have helped convince both people in general and psychiatrists, for example that almost all kinds of anxiety or discomfort are symptoms of mental illness, including a certain level of anxiety that may be a natural aspect of most developmental challenges and learning. In America today, it seems as if several medical and other institutions are actively involved in trying to prevent or cure natural and helpful levels of anxiety or frustration, which may be necessary components of healthy human development.

In addition to a steadily increasing variety of medications being available to eliminate anxiety and possibly important feelings of dissonance, for example, America's increasing supply of constant entertainment and many other forms of distractions may also be helping to keep masses of Americans "numb" (Charles Barber). The research of Charles Barber, Neil Postman, Robert Kegan, Gary Zukav, Matthew Fox and others will

help describe the important, positive role of a certain amount of anxiety or discomfort as natural and necessary parts of the process of healthy human development or growing up.

Toward the end of this dissertation there will be an attempt to identify and describe what may have been happening to masses of centralized Americans, by comparing certain aspects of centralized living to similar to the debilitating way of being that leads to the development of *The Addictive Personality* (Craig Nakken). It will be suggested that one of the many possible consequences of the new, centralized way of being, may be that masses of Americans (unwittingly) have come to give up multiple, important, uniquely human practices involved in authentic, respectful, direct interactions between persons and between persons and the larger world, all of which used to be available within the life many Americans seem to have lost or abandoned.

Having handed over uniquely human, character-shaping practices to centralized systems may also have created a sense of helplessness and feelings of dependency upon the central government and the systems that have taken over these practices. Such feelings of dependency may also have caused many weakened or immature Americans to develop feelings of being entitled to receive more and more crippling assistance from the government.

As mentioned above, Craig Nakken's theory and description of the development of dependence and addictions to illusions of happiness will be used as an analogy. In his book *The Addictive Personality* (1988) Nakken illustrates the tragic, destructive development that takes place when immature human beings, who (for a variety of reasons) become increasingly dependent upon and addicted to the "happiness" or relief they feel when they first try certain mind-altering drugs and the behaviors that go along

with such drug use. According to Nakken, people may become dependent upon and addicted to almost anything, including food, sex, money, material things, drugs, perfect lawns, being right, being number one, and so on.

Finally, there will be some suggestions for change for the better within our still change-able institutions, starting with early public education. The suggestions will not include all the details needed in order to implement such changes, but will refer to literature that supports such suggestions, including ideas of authors who have already started discussing and implementing change.

Some Disclaimers

It is not the intention of this writer or any writers used as sources for this exploration, to denounce *all* forms of centralization or technology in general, much of which, obviously, is both natural and necessary and has brought about enormous benefits within many aspects of our lives. With the help of certain centralized systems we have seen immense progress in helping increase the provision of food, medicine, information and education, for example.

Instead, this dissertation will argue that the problems that are being discussed here may have come about due to some unfortunate or possibly *inappropriate* uses of technology, including the *degree* to which our institutions have become centralized. Is it possible that we, with the help of advanced technology, may have come to change the design or structure of our society in ways that have made our institutions unsuitable for some of their most important functions as in facilitating human or moral development and true happiness among masses of Americans?

Data shows that inside the bounds of the (troubled) smaller, moral communities of America's past, starting with the family, masses of Americans still had plenty of natural opportunities for direct interactions between each other and the world, within which interactions they were enabled or compelled to practice the uniquely human activities that seem to be crucial for them in order to develop into morally mature and (truly) happy human beings.

Likewise this research is not seeking to romanticize America's dark and very problematic past. It is well known that fifty years ago America was filled with very serious, moral (and other) problems. With the help of certain new, centralized laws, for example, some of these problems may now have become less severe.

Moreover, this writer does not intend to suggest that it takes the experience of extremely difficult social conditions, like many situations in America in the 1960s, for individuals to be able to develop into morally mature and happy human beings. Rather, the purpose of this research is to explore actual connections between possibly necessary, direct and respectful interactions between individuals and the world, human or moral development and happiness. It also seems true that such uniquely human interactions always include varying degrees of emotional pain, anxiety or discomfort.

Part One

Chapter 2

An Overview of the Suggested Problems That May Have Lead to the Proposed

Decline in Human/Moral Development and Happiness in America Today

“We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.”

--Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Before getting into this exploration of the suggested, important connections between 1: one's way of being, 2: human or moral development, 3: happiness and 4: the role of our institutions within these related and essential aspects of human existence, it may be useful to first clarify what is meant by certain terms used throughout this study.

One's "way of being" refers to all the ways people function as uniquely human beings. Every person's way being affects others and the larger world in multiple, direct and indirect ways. However, within this exploration there will be an emphasis on how our way of being, all our intellectual and other practices, affect the practicing person. Our way of being will include observable behaviors and habits, but is also defined by our thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and all other ways through which we live and unfold.

It may be helpful to compare the all-encompassing relationships between one's way of being, moral development and happiness to the more familiar relationships between the ways we take care of our physical bodies, our physical development and our physical well being (physical happiness). Most people know that physical development, health and well being have little to do with occasional or random attempts to follow certain trends regarding nutrition and/or physical activities. Instead, healthy physical

development and physical well being tend to be the results of continuous practices or habits including nutrition, physical and even intellectual and spiritual activities.

Human development or transformation toward moral maturity is also highly influenced by our behaviors, including intellectual and many other practices, which soon turn into habits. It is our habits that eventually transform or develop human beings for better or for worse. Our first and most consequential habits are introduced to us by our first institutions, starting with the family. Many persons are misguided by their imperfect families and may therefore adopt bad or destructive habits. Such misguided and therefore injured persons may later be helped to discover better or healthier ways of being if they have access to other institutions or compassionate, moral communities. They may be helped to change their behaviors and develop a new way of being and new habits, which can lead them toward healing, moral maturity and happiness.

The term “centralization” (of America’s institutions) is used describe certain important features of the most recent structure of our institutions, created to facilitate material or economic development, which seems to have become a growing preoccupation among Americans. The structures of our institutions in the past, although very imperfect, still seemed to provide plenty of opportunities for Americans to practice a way of being that tended to also facilitate moral development. Is it possible that our highly centralized institutions have come to alter the way masses of Americans live, in ways may truly hinder full moral development for many?

This exploration will look at the possible effects upon the process of human or moral development among Americans after numerous creative, character-building activities, which in the past used to be practiced by individual Americans within small,

moral communities have been moved to, or handed over to, more efficient, centralized systems and/or the central government.

Findings within this research seem to suggest that there may be certain features within the structure of Americas institutions fifty-sixty years ago, for example, which may have been quite facilitating or helpful in promoting healthy moral development and happiness among many Americans within their far from perfect, but high-yielding, smaller, moral communities, which still provided a multitude of opportunities for people to interact with others and the in direct, uniquely human, creative, character-shaping ways.

William J. Bennett, secretary of education in America from 1985 to 1988, and co-director of Empower America (a new, political organization), wrote an article in the Wall Street Journal (April 1993), where he attempted to answer the question: Is our culture declining? In addition to addressing business developments and economic trends, Bennett also provides his readers with a similar kind of data-based analysis of America's cultural issues, from 1960 to the present, describing moral, social and behavioral conditions of America's institutions today.

Bennett states that in spite of many material advances, there has been a drastic increase in violent crime, illegitimate births, divorces and teenage suicide rates, for example. He mentioned that the many government-initiated social programs, while they initially seemed to be helpful, have grown into something that may now even be harmful in some ways.

He talks about a change in *values* in America and quotes Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who said: "The West has been undergoing an erosion and obscuring of high moral and

ethical ideals. The spiritual axis of life has grown dim.” Bennett also quotes John Updike who wrote: “The fact that compared to the inhabitants of Africa and Russia, we (Americans) still live well cannot ease the pain of feeling we no longer live nobly.”

William Bennett does not feel that America is doomed. He talks optimistically of what Americans can do to encourage cultural renewal. Addressing the destructive aspects of our welfare system, he suggests that our central government should take the same Hippocratic Oath as doctors take before starting practicing medicine: “First do no harm”. Bennett also suggests that political leaders may help reshape social attitudes through public discourse. However, he does not think we should focus on what the government can do. Instead, he recommends that we re-focus on our social and civic institutions like families, churches, schools, neighborhoods and civic associations. These institutions used to be responsible for providing the young with love, order, discipline, self-control compassion and so on. Character development is not up to the government. He talks about the importance of education, asserting that we must recover the lost sense of the fundamental purpose of education, “which is to engage in the architecture of souls”.

Due to ever-increasing levels of centralized and materialistic living in America, the institution of the family has also been affected in negative ways. For example, it has recently become very common for children to be raised within large daycare centers, enabling both parents to work outside the home. Our centralized systems may have increased the cost of living. However Americans’ new focus on material progress, while possibly paying less attention to human/moral flourishing, may also have contributed to an assumed and exaggerated need for more parents to work outside the home, in order to be able to pay for new and bigger homes, cars and so on.

The centralized family will be discussed later within this paper, as the new family structure may not only affect the children's development. It will also be important to consider how reduced time spent within this most important moral institution called the family may also affect the life-long human or moral development of the many parents who have considerably less time to practice parenting, for example.

According to Stephanie Coontz, a historian and the author of *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of 1960* (2011), in the 1950s only 19 percent of mothers with small children worked outside the home. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of 2008, more than 60 percent of mothers with children under the age of six worked away from their homes.

The hypothesis of this dissertation is suggesting that our new, centralized, more indirect, impersonal or machine-like way of being in the world may have come to hinder moral development and the kind of happiness that Aristotle, for example, says is an integral part of the practices that are also involved in the salient and consequential process of human development toward moral maturity.

The French philosopher, law professor, sociologist, lay theologian and Christian anarchist *Jacques Ellul* seems to describe more passionately than any other thinker of the twentieth century, the proposed central problems that will be examined within this study. He talked about the devastating consequences he saw for humanity, for our civilization, after the western world came to choose *technique* or efficiency, which is all about facilitating material progress, as the new number one concern for humanity, beginning around the time of the Industrial Revolution.

In his book *The Technical Society* (1964) and throughout his writing, Ellul calls the introduction of technique “the betrayal of the West” and “a technological tyranny over humanity”. He compares the power and spirit of technique to that of a tyrannical, political and/or religious system, which forces masses of individuals to change their way of being, robbing individuals of their natural right, purpose, duty or “reason for being”, to simply live as human beings.

It is interesting to note that Ellul seems to view the western world’s choice to make efficiency the new object for institutional design, as something evil, from which, new path he sees no return. Ellul seems to suggest that the western world knowingly elected to betray humanity by choosing technique and the creation of the centralized systems to (single-mindedly) facilitate economic progress. His point of view may be somewhat fatalistic. He does not seem to consider that the introduction of technique may be yet another of many political, religious or other kinds of *mistakes* that have been made throughout history, for which errors all of humanity, directly and indirectly is responsible. Instead of blaming government leaders, when possibly devastating consequences become perceivable, maybe all of humanity needs to own our errors and together make creative attempts to correct our mistakes, as humankind continue on its long, endlessly complex and mysterious journey.

With his expression “technique” Ellul does not refer specifically to technology or machines, which only plays a minor role within his “technological society”. Instead, he explains that technique is about “the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity.

Its characteristics are new; the technique of the present has no common measure with that of the past.”¹

Ellul explains further that “technique is not an isolated fact in society (as the term technology would lead us to believe), but is related to every factor in the life of modern man; it affects social factors as well as others. Thus technique itself is a sociological phenomenon.”²

It is important to understand that, as Ellul sees it, earlier forms of technology (including technological, social systems) used to be a means or tools that a person could use to create something of value. Technique on the other hand is, or has become the value or sacred end in itself. When technique or efficiency is the goal in itself, human beings are no longer creative participants, but are instead being used as pawn by the technological or centralized systems that are designed to serve the one and only ultimate goal, efficiency.

With the introduction of technique as the new god, the new sacred, Ellul says that humanity has been led into a life designed for machines, which deprives humanity of their chance to practice *being* human. He argues that the most important aspect of being human is to come to know that we are free, that we are responsible (able to respond to life’s many challenges) and that our institutions therefore should first and foremost allow or encourage individuals to remain free to think about their responses as they are always making moral choices, even when they choose not to choose.

¹ Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), xxv.

² Ibid., xxvi.

Ellul felt very strongly about the devastating effects he saw from the changes that came about when technique became humanity's new sacred or god. He compared the structure of the new, technical society's systems to the design of Hitler's concentration camps.

Ellul speaks about the practice of the uniquely human ability to respond as moral beings and be creative as the most salient aspect of being human. Creativity, he says, can only sprout from a place of authenticity, not from commands, laws or creeds from outside the person, whether that comes from the Church or any other institution. Ellul likens human life to the life of an artist, including a whole-hearted participation by the artists within life's often difficult and seemingly contradicting adventures or tasks.

Ellul argues that modernity's focus on technique or efficiency as the new, sacred goal for humanity has come to turn reasonably free individuals into prisoners or slaves. While technical efficiency obviously can allow people more freedom to choose how to spend some of their time, most of which they previously had to spend working (in meaningful ways) in order to survive. Still, within the newly acquired freedom, it seems as if today's Americans, for example, who actually get more time to spend as they may please, tend to fill such free time in arbitrary ways, which they hope will make them happy. Often this freedom seems to lead to a self-centered, passive and often addictive need to purchase and consume more and more of the world around the person. Such a preoccupation with, and dependence upon, the buying of consumer goods does not facilitate the uniquely human, respectful, character-shaping interactions between persons and the world that Ellul saw as the purpose of human life.

Nevertheless, says Ellul, the promise of a new and undisclosed kind of freedom seems to have been enough for masses of human beings to welcome enormous

institutional changes, which have come to completely change their way of being in the world.

In his book *Escape from Freedom* (1941) *Erich Fromm* suggests that humanity is not yet ready to be free and that we therefore keep “freeing” ourselves from one kind of dependence only to become dependent upon something else.

Ellul also states that since technique became the new sacred, “everything in human life that does not lend itself to mathematical treatment must be excluded--because it is not a possible end for technique--and therefore left to the sphere of dreams”³ Ellul’s observation here can certainly be applied to what seems to have happened to some aspects of America’s institution of public education, for example, where more emphasis is being placed on subjects that may help train students to manage a multitude of technical features within our centralized systems. Less emphasis is being placed on the humanities, for example, which include a greater and most precious heritage of knowledge, which may help students consider other, important aspects of being human, many of which tend to help facilitate our uniquely human or moral development. The study of history, philosophy, religion, great literature and art, for example, provide excellent opportunities for students to learn how to think creatively and critically, how to use their ability to reason and discuss important, moral and other questions, all of which may be great catalysts for change and human flourishing.

Indirectly, Ellul seems to suggest that the most important requirement of a good society would be that it first and foremost allows and encourages individuals to live as spiritual i.e. human beings, within moral communities. Upon the discovery and

³ Ibid., 431.

acceptance of technique or technical efficiency as modernity's newest, under-examined, most precious value, Ellul felt that humanity had been seduced to, for example, ignore the old, most important human, moral questions about what is truly good or sacred and how we should live.

A Brief, Historical Background Leading up to the Introduction of Technique

In the same book *The Technological Society*, Ellul states: "The world had to wait for the eighteenth century to see technological progress suddenly explode in every country and in every area of human endeavor."⁴ Ellul suggests that the increasing centralization of institutions for the sake of the new highest value, efficiency, started all over Europe around the time of the Industrial Revolution.

Throughout history individuals and nations have changed their minds regarding what they consider most important or sacred. According to Ellul, as a result of such changes in values, human institutions have been re-created or changed accordingly. Ellul suggested that

1. "In the beginning" humankind regarded *nature* as "the sacred".
2. Then, within the first few centuries AD, the Christian Church was established and became the new sacred.
3. In Catholicism, a new authority was created, the magisterium, which decides what the authentic teaching of the Church is. For the Catholic Church this authority is given to the pope and the bishops who are in communion with him.

⁴ Ibid., 42.

4. Then, around the 16th century, the Reformation made the Bible the new, sacred authority or institution. While the Catholic Church had emphasized indoctrination (and thereby “centralized” all interpretation of the Bible by allowing only the pope to interpret the Scriptures), the Reformation, or the Protestant Church, encouraged all individuals to study the Bible and also think for themselves, thus allowing and encouraging individuals to practice thinking creatively and critically, asking questions as they attempt to understand what makes certain thoughts and actions morally good or not. Thereby, such individuals became able to practice making their own moral choices based on their interpretation and understanding of the Bible, a privilege that had previously belonged only to the pope.

5. Then most recently, from the 18th century on, with the fast advancing technology, Ellul says science and reason became the reigning, sacred institution from which center the newest “religion”, technique, was created.

More About the Essence of the Problem

Ellul continues to illustrate, in different ways, what he saw as the terrible truth about technique, which he says always supposes centralization and always promises leisure and abundance, but does not spell out the devastating cost: “The old dream that has tempted man from the beginning, the medieval legend of the man who sells his soul for an inexhaustible purse, which recurs with an enticing insistence through all the changes of civilization, is perhaps in process of being realized.”⁵ Ellul adds: “Modern

⁵ Ibid., 193.

man never asks himself what he will have to pay for his power. This is the question we ought to be asking.”⁶

The new promise of external or worldly progress or perfection and the kind of “happiness” that come with technical efficiency also seem to provide humanity with an escape or a distraction from the crucial, internal (spiritual) struggle or character-shaping dialogue between different aspects of the person, which is at the center of what it means to be human.

In America, for the past half a century, our fast growing central government has come to make all America’s institutions more and more centralized, adding new, centralized programs and laws, which are taking over important aspects of crucial, creative and character-shaping tasks that used to be available within the small, moral communities of America’s (imperfect) past. With the introduction of many of our impersonal, centralized systems, which can perform more efficiently the many tasks that used to be an important part of life for individual community members, it has become *unnecessary* for very many American parents, teachers and other community members, including children, to practice being human in ways that may be crucial for their human development. It seems to be a natural tendency for all humans, and especially for immature persons, to seek the easiest path to one’s goal, which is happiness, without examining what *kind* of happiness that may be associated with such behaviors or the overall moral goodness of such actions or inactions.

If we compare the uniquely *human* way of being to the machine, we see some important differences. A machine acts blindly and efficiently according to the way it has

⁶ Ibid.

been programmed. Such machines can be extremely labor-saving and productive. Typically, human beings are not programmed only from one such source. While most people receive training or programming before they start a new job, for example, they also constantly get input from all other aspects of who they are, biologically, intellectually, socially, emotionally and spiritually. While being employed, some persons may also be experiencing financial problems or emotional conflicts within their families, which tend to interfere with their efficiency at work, for example. Other persons, like physicians, may come to discover that certain aspects of their work, which they have been trained to do, may not be helpful, but rather harmful for their patients and their lives. Such uniquely human discoveries of moral dilemmas take time to work through, rendering a doctor less “efficient” than a machine. Still, these moral dilemmas or feelings of moral dissonance are very important aspects of being human, equipped with the ability to respond to such inconvenient disturbances. Some such doctors may have to change or lose their jobs. Other doctors may feel they have to become politically active to help make others aware of their discoveries of certain hurtful or immoral practices. All of this may be considered obstacles that should be eliminated if material or financial efficiency is the highest priority within a hospital or an entire society.

This exploration seems to show that along with practicing straight forward intellectual and other activities, there are many other levels of creative and spiritual practices that may be crucial for a full development of our uniquely human abilities to interact and respond to others and the world. Ellul considered these individual practices or responses a basic human right or duty as we are constantly confronted with life’s many challenges and contradictions, whether we recognize or respect them, or not.

As mentioned earlier, Ellul compares the establishment of the increasingly centralized systems to help execute the newest, sacred goal or idea, technique to Hitler's creation of Nazism and the concentration camps. This analogy may seem drastic, but helps describe some important points. During the Nazi years, millions of people cooperated with Hitler, and many walked toward their gruesome destinations without much resistance, mostly because they were misinformed, or not informed at all, about what was going on. Ellul saw only one difference between the Nazi concentration camps and technique's centralized systems: The Nazi concentration camps sought to kill human beings while the centralized systems merely need to destroy the human spirit, the human soul.

Ellul believed that centralization of any kind of institution tends to destroy the freedom that human beings need to have in order to live truly human lives. Such freedom, for Ellul, also included being free to consider the universal, indefinable or mysterious God. As mentioned before, Ellul criticized the Catholic Church for having made the mistake of "centralizing" the Church, turning the Church into an enormous, centralized institution headed by one (infallible) pope. He compared the centralized Catholic Church to the earliest Christian Church, the latter of which he maintains consisted only of small groups or communities of disorganized individuals, each of whom were allowed to, and always encouraged to keep grappling with the many moral challenges that present themselves for all human beings within their/our daily lives. In other words these early Christians simply practiced being human within their small-scale, moral communities.

The Catholic Church represents only one institution. How much more powerful may the consequences be, when technique, or humanity's new "religion", as in America

today, finds it necessary to centralize *all* institutions, affecting or occupying most aspects of most citizens' lives most of the time?

The centralized Church practiced indoctrination as their way of getting people to conform. Ellul reminds us that technique (and its centralized systems) also indoctrinates masses of individuals both directly and indirectly, so that they will conform to the new "religion" or technique, which offers salvation through perfecting the world *around* the individual. Obviously there is no written document or creed, detailing this kind of indoctrination involved in the world of technique. The spirit of centralization seems to complete its mission of getting masses of people to conform by gradually and indirectly changing the centralized persons' way of being. As mentioned earlier, when we behave in certain ways over time, such behaviors become habits. And it is our habits that change or transform us as human beings.

History tells us that other civilizations, cultures or "stairways to heaven" have been constructed before centralization, and collapsed. From the ruins of previous cultures, new civilizations have been built. Even though Ellul is very pessimistic and seems to think there is no way back from the implementation of technique, his writing is still an attempt to make people aware of the major errors he sees inherent within the single-minded focus on efficiency, and the tremendous losses humanity may have to suffer as a result of being led toward the inescapable collapse of yet another civilization.

Chapter 3

About the Role of Respect for the Still Mysterious Aspects of Reality, the “Sacred”

I want to beg you, as much as I can, dear sir, to be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.

-- Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*

These few lines from Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Letters to a Young Poet*¹ may help set the tone for this chapter discussing human beings’ seemingly ever-present, unfortunate tendency or need to think they have found the ultimate answer or solution to endlessly complex, human questions, problems or challenges, when a new and under-examined idea or philosophy presents itself as promising.

Rilke reminds his readers of some of the important problems that may result from ignoring the larger unknown aspects of reality and carelessly assume that we at any time can know the ultimate answers to life’s big questions. He also talks about the great difference between simply knowing something intellectually and knowing how to practice such knowledge or live it. The latter involves a long and complex process of careful, thoughtful or contemplative way of being, within which process persons may never arrive at some perfect answer, but may, very slowly, move *toward* a greater understanding and ability to truly practice what is true or good.

¹ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet* (London: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 1934). 27.

Ideas or fragments of intellectual knowledge are, by themselves, just small parts of larger truths, that can only become meaningful, useful or helpful if allowed the time and process needed to be more fully understood. This is especially important when it comes to human behaviors and moral development. Rilke urges human beings, like Ellul also does in a different way, to live humble, careful lives, always aware of the very limited knowledge we may have at the time of what is true or good, while also being respectfully aware of, and open to, the much larger unknown aspects of reality or truth within and around us.

According to Rilke's words and also the theory of Ellul, it seems foolish for any person, and even more for whole nations, to assume that a new, under-researched idea, like centralization of all nations' institutions, may be a near perfect or ultimate answer to humanity's many problems. While some forms of centralization of a nation's institutions may indeed help facilitate economic or material development, it seems unwise for any society to go ahead and redesign all its human institutions, according to a new blueprint or pattern that is designed to somewhat single-mindedly serve economic or material development. We may compare the effect of such changes to an absurd idea of changing all clothing for human beings into metal "clothing" suited for machines.

Since the only thing we know for sure, as human beings, is that we are going to die, and we do not know how or when that is going to happen, for example, it seems self evident that both anxiety and impatience play important roles within the lives of all human beings, as they go about answering questions or making choices regarding what to think and how to live. Because uncertainty is all we know for certain, it seems understandable that people have always been in a hurry to find ultimate truths or answers

and therefore have tended to settle for very premature closures. Unfortunately such very human frailties seem to have led to many, very consequential mistakes, which have become important parts of our history.

Can Anyone be Blamed?

Although Ellul does not put much emphasis on happiness as a possible motivator for, or consequence of, certain human (intellectual and other) behaviors, he realized that centralized human beings were unhappy. Therefore, Ellul suspected that the creators of the centralized systems also had to invent centralized amusement to distract their unhappy citizens, so that they would not discover that they had been betrayed. It may seem as if Ellul is suggesting there is some kind of conspiracy going on, put in motion by nameless leaders in charge of the implementation of centralization of our institutions. However, Ellul also says that the terrible consequences of having come to believe in efficiency, material or external progress as one's highest value is simply the nature of technique, implying that the most important aspect of technique is evil, a spiritual reality, to which people have become blinded. He thereby seems to put blame on technique as evil in itself.

Rather than suspecting that anyone knowingly chooses evil, it may be better to view all unfortunate individual and societal choices as moral and other mistakes made by immature human beings make as we all naturally start out self-centered and no one ever reaches moral perfection. Therefore, with the exception of very young children, we are all directly and indirectly responsible for the shape and condition of ourselves, our families, communities, nations and the whole world. Mistakes are not evil. Instead, if we examine

our lives, mistakes can be very important learning opportunities, which can also help move us forward toward human or moral maturity.

Ellul believed that both God and humans represent a holy *mystery*, which must be kept sacred, rather than being reduced to pawns or mechanical parts within the new centralized systems, for example, within which systems humankind becomes preoccupied with the very limited and limiting world of technique, productivity and cost-effectiveness. Ellul is not saying that everything in life is a mystery, but urges his readers to *also* respect the many levels of reality within and around us, which are still unknown, and therefore a mystery to us. He warns people against ignoring all that is still unknown to us, and single-mindedly barge ahead, implementing new ideas and drastic changes within their societies, *as if* such new ideas are based on an almost solid understanding of how such changes may affect us all.

Ellul believes that the introduction of technique or technical efficiency as the ultimate solution to all problems in the western world was the beginning of the slow destruction of our entire western civilization, which at earlier times had allowed for much respect or awe toward the unknown or God. He argued that technique represented a tremendous reduction or simplification of human life and life in general. As Rilke suggests in his “Letter to a Young Poet” (above), Ellul also suggests that human beings need to keep practicing a uniquely human, humble way of being, within which careful way of life “Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”²

² Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet* (London: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 1934). 27.

Efficiency, Ellul argued, had become humanity's one and *only* "ethical" concern. Whatever can be done efficiently and fast it is good. The new, centralized systems have no room for human inefficiencies, which may be caused by curiosity about the larger unknown, for example, or a person's conscience, feelings of shame, doubt or duty toward family, friends and the rest of world, when thinking or acting in certain ways, for example.

Again, Ellul saw how centralization's machine-like systems, designed to primarily facilitate material progress, made it very difficult, if not impossible for human beings to simply practice being human. In order for the centralized society to meet its goal, which is efficiency, its systems must treat citizens as pawns that can easily be moved around, rather than allowing them to think and act from their authentic moral selves, which is really the epitome of inefficiency.

Ellul's theory regarding how to live, moral development and happiness seems to be based on his very personal interpretation of Christianity. He talks about the importance for all human beings to be allowed and encouraged to live authentic, creative lives, which includes making important moral choices on a continuous basis. He has described in graphic details the devastating problems he sees within centralization of our institutions and the new devotion to technique. Therefore he has made a very important contribution to this exploration. However, some of his arguments are not in agreement with Aristotle's theory, upon which this dissertation also rests. Aristotle's very different views when it comes to the role of happiness and human or moral development will be discussed at length as we continue with our study.

Other Depictions of the Centralized Way of Being

In his dystopian novel “Brave New World” (1932) *Aldous Huxley* described a culmination of what he saw happening within the western world after the Industrial Revolution and the fixation on what is known, while eliminating everything else and making curiosity illegal.

In Huxley’s centralized, brave, new world there were no natural or biological families. Children were created and born within State “factories”. The children became the property of the State, where they were forcefully and brutally trained, by the use of electric shock, so that the children came to hate and avoid everything that was considered outside their class or placement within the State. The class system was one of many features created by this central government for the sake of achieving and maintaining perfect order, perfect control. Five different classes were needed to make the brave new world function efficiently. Long before birth every individual’s personality, place and function within this society was determined. The individual conviction that each person is in the best class was implanted in the minds of the children through hypnosis (while the children were sleeping). Not parents, but the State made all the decisions regarding how and what each child would learn. Parent/child relationships were considered improper. Feelings were obsolete. Nothing was allowed to disturb the total control of the State’s class system.

Everybody within this State was conditioned to think and act only as a member of their class, not as an individual. The perceived problems with individual parents’ desires for their children were eliminated when the family was eliminated.

The fictional brave, new world trained its citizens to seek carnal pleasures (an important part of their new, perfect world). There was no room for spirituality, which tends to lead to individual, religious or other transcendental understandings of human existence. Because no curiosity was allowed in Huxley's brave new world, there was *no* room for any spirit of inquiry regarding other possible purpose or meaning with life, different world views or ideas concerned with other ways of being and so on. Therefore also there was no rebellion. In Huxley's fictional and absolutely centralized world, all citizens, except the central government, were treated like lifeless, wooden puppets, moved around by the power of strings that only the central government was able to manipulate.

Like Ellul's *The Technological Society*, Huxley's fictional masterpiece offers a warning, not against technology in itself, but against suspected misuse of technology and science. The idea of factory-produced children, the conditioning by the (centralized) State, which replaces families, and the creation of drugs that evoke pleasure or illusions of happiness, are all examples of how technology may be misused to create a world within which human beings do not have a chance to fail or flourish or be human, but can instead be shaped into perfect pegs within a machine like system.

The American novelist, poet, environmental activist, cultural critic, and farmer Wendell Berry, who addresses America in particular, expresses, in a different way, his similar concerns regarding America's move toward centralization. Berry sees centralization of America's institutions as based upon a very backwards and disastrous way of thinking. In his book *What Matters?* (2010), Berry calls America's newest economic philosophy, for example, a "Faustian Economy". He accuses Americans of

having become single-minded and having sold their soul to the devil in order to create a fast and completely unrealistic hope of an ever-expanding economy, while destroying both the American *soil* and the American *soul*.

Although much of Wendell Berry's writing focuses on the ongoing destruction he sees of America's soil, after the introduction of centralized farming or "factory farming", as he called it, Berry also has much to say about the many ways such disrespect for the earth and our larger eco-systems are also affecting important aspects of moral development and happiness among Americans.

Chapter 4

The Crucial Role of Our Institutions Within the Process of Moral Development,

Initiating our Habits, Our Way of Being

This study is supported by much research data indicating that even though human beings are naturally self-centered, with a deep-rooted tendency to be egoistic, we are also naturally capable of change, for better and for worse. Besides general human nature and individual, biological differences, moral development or transformation seems to be highly influenced by the structures of our many, human institutions. Robert Coles, for example, describes some remarkable examples of positive moral developments in people who grew up under very difficult circumstances, during the terrible racial conflicts in America's South in the 1960's. Coles was amazed to find that even young children were able to transcend or move forward and develop toward moral maturity in spite of living within communities afflicted by brutal practices of racial injustice. There seemed to be something unique about the families and other local, moral community structures surrounding the young persons he interviewed, which had greatly helped them move away from isolating self-centeredness and toward openness, inclusivity and altruism as they were compelled to interact with all members within these imperfect communities.

We have already looked at Ellul's description of the devastating problems he saw emerging after the western world came to choose technique as the new ideal, which makes centralization of all institutions necessary and tends to make the small, moral communities, including the family, less important. Ellul's empathy was with the masses who he felt were seduced by the centralized systems into which they were born. Ellul provided his readers with an in-depth analysis of how the focus on technique and

centralization of all institutions have facilitated material or economic growth, while such structural changes, he argues, have betrayed humanity by eventually making all institutions unfit for human existence. With the ever increasing centralization of all institutions, and the central government taking over many practices that used to belong to individual citizens, many human beings were no longer allowed enough opportunities to do what is uniquely human, so that they can live as human beings, including spending time contemplating upon their “reason for being”, as he recommends. One of the important and most uniquely human features, which Ellul, Aristotle and others talk about, is that humans are able to reason and can therefore keep asking themselves whether their thoughts or actions are morally good or bad. Ellul argued that since technique or efficiency became the highest moral good, approved by centralized societies, it became considered a waste of time for people to think about the moral value of their thoughts and practices.

Very recently the writing of a Swedish novelist, poet and playwright, *Stig Dagerman* was discovered. Within his short life he wrote mostly fiction, which has later been compared to the writing of Camus, Faulkner and Kafka. Like Ellul, Dagerman also spoke about the modern world’s grave mistake when choosing to move toward centralization, although Dagerman expressed his concerns in a more personal way. Dagerman suggested that the root of human disaster lies in the *anonymity* of mass-organizations, which obstruct empathy and individual responsibility, qualities without which he believed the human race cannot survive.

Dagerman saw mega-organizations as an enemy of humanity, because such organizations rob individuals of the vital necessity to feel responsible for their neighbors.

Such organizations restrict individuals' possibilities to show solidarity and love and instead turn persons into agents of power that for the moment may be directed against others, but ultimately is directed against themselves.

Dagerman's mostly fictional writing emphasizes the emotional consequences he saw as a result of the increasing centralization of our institutions. When creating his characters from the Swedish Post-WWII generation, Dagerman carefully describes their emotions with great empathy. Instead of blaming or shaming people for their/our numerous mistakes, his writing expressed a remarkable willingness to understand the many, often circumstantial differences between one person and another, between one situation and another. Only when such differences are understood can two persons meet and interact as *human* beings instead of acting as nonhuman, efficient parts or pegs within some centralized system.

Dagerman used to say that human beings have "an insatiable need for consolation", which he felt could not be met within the new, centralized way of being in the world. Dagerman himself was unable to find the kind of consolation he needed. His remarkable literary output came to a tragic end when he committed suicide at the age of thirty-one.

As we continue our discussions about the role and structure of our institutions, it is important to keep in mind that, unlike Jacques Ellul, Aristotle and many others, including this writer, believe that human beings are capable of moral development and that the experience of (different levels of) happiness also plays an important, guiding role within the very complex process of human or moral development within our institutions.

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, the first book ever written on ethics, Aristotle makes it clear that virtues do not simply develop by themselves. Instead, he says they require both education and training or practice, which eventually turn into habits. Such education and practices begin and continue within a person's many institutions, starting with the family. Persons who are introduced to, and keep practicing a virtuous or morally good life, including a virtuous motivation, Aristotle says, will, over time, eventually *become* what they live, think and do. A transformation takes place. This transformation is many-faceted and also includes the crucial, guiding role of happiness, as we shall see.

It may be important to note that the same cause and effect relationships between virtuous persons' (intellectual and other) behaviors and their moral development is also true for people who start out within unhealthy or inferior institutions, and therefore do not get started practicing virtuous (intellectual and other) behaviors or discover the kind of (true) happiness that is part of such a way of being. Instead, such persons will discover lower levels of good, accompanied by lower levels of happiness. And since (all levels of) happiness, also according to Aristotle, is the ultimate motivation for all human behaviors, such misguided persons will therefore keep practicing the morally immature or bad behaviors they have come to associate with happiness. These behaviors soon become the habits, which can eventually destroy both such persons and their lives.

On the other hand, people who happen to start their lives within institutions that expose their young to instructions and practices that help their members *discover* the connections between morally good or virtuous (intellectual and other) behaviors and the highest level of happiness, which is associated with such behaviors, will tend to continue to practice these virtuous behaviors. Right instruction and the experiences of morally

good behaviors and its connection with true happiness will help them develop into mature and truly happy human beings.

In order to help visualize the very complex process of human/moral development, which Aristotle says depends on instruction, practice and the development of habits, involving all aspects of the person on a continuous basis, it may be helpful to again liken this intellectual, psychological and spiritual process to the also multifaceted process of a person's physical development. Becoming a physically mature and healthy person, who enjoys physical well-being (happiness), also involves a certain continuous, complex, healthy way of being. Most people know it is not what they eat, practice or think about between Christmas and New Year, for example, which will transform their bodies. Instead, it is what they habitually consume, how much they dance and what they think about between New Year's Eve and (next) Christmas that tend to make a big difference when it comes to their physical development and well being. In addition to important biological limitations and abnormalities, both physical and moral development are highly influenced by the habits we are encouraged to develop through our institutions.

Thriving moral development or human flourishing seems to depend on the kind of happiness individuals may discover as they are exposed to or participating within a variety of virtuous practices within their institutions. As we have discussed earlier, and according to Aristotle, only virtuous behaviors are associated with true happiness. From this it should follow that a most important goal for our institutions, beginning with family, community and early education, would be to expose all members to virtuous practices, within which experiences the young may discover or experience true happiness that is associated with such behaviors. Then, according to the happiness principle, the

virtuous behaviors will tend to be repeated and become the habits, which lead them toward moral maturity and true happiness. Such developments do not only benefit each person who becomes morally mature, but tend to also improve our institutions and the larger world in very positive ways.

According to Aristotle, both instruction and full *participation* within institutions or community by each individual are crucial for healthy human or moral development (and true happiness). It is interesting to note that both Plato and Socrates suggested that once a person receives instruction and knows (intellectually) what it means to be virtuous, he or she would become virtuous. Aristotle obviously thought differently, stating that in order for persons to become truly virtuous (and truly happy) they must also practice *applying* their theoretical wisdom as they interact with others and the world. The latter he called practical wisdom. When attempting to apply theoretical wisdom, general principles must be reexamined within the context of each situation at hand. Our institutions play an important role also in helping or coaching the young regarding this very important aspect of moral development. Practical wisdom may be beautifully modeled by parents and teachers, who may also discuss actual examples of moral dilemmas within their homes and classrooms.

In addition to emphasizing the crucial role of practicing virtuous behaviors and developing virtuous habits, Aristotle also spoke about the important role of human *reason* within the complex process of moral development, asserting that our ability to reason is the one distinctly human function that separates us from other beings. Therefore he maintained that moral development and happiness must always be grounded in reason.

And reason, like all human functions, is another *ability*, we know, which also must be developed through instruction and practice.

Aristotle often spoke about the golden mean, the desirable middle between two extremes, which is also associated with the use of reason, and how our institutions should help the young to practice moderation and avoid excess or deficiency. Aristotle knew that humans have tendencies toward extremes, both excess and deficiency, and knew it was crucial for a good and happy life that the young were helped to avoid extremes and discover the golden mean. Later we will discuss a recent, very unfortunate development of dependence and addiction that may be related to the highly materialistic and competitive way of being, which is modeled for many within our centralized institutions in America today.

Aristotle also divided the human soul into the rational and the irrational, and said: “Virtue, too, is differentiated in line with this division of the soul. We call some virtues ‘intellectual’ and others ‘moral’: theoretical wisdom, understanding, and practical wisdom are intellectual virtues; generosity and self-control are moral virtues. In speaking of a man’s character, we do not describe him as wise or understanding, but as gentle or self-controlled: but we praise the wise man, too, for his characteristic, and praiseworthy characteristics are what we call virtues.”¹

As mentioned earlier, Aristotle understood that “none of the moral virtues is implanted in us by nature, for nothing which exists by nature can be changed by habit.”² Instead, he said that human beings are enabled by nature to receive (intellectual) virtues,

¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962), 32.

² *Ibid.*, 33.

and then virtuous habits bring such abilities to completion or fulfillment. Here Aristotle seems to talk about the important relationships between nature and nurture. While individuals by nature are given many gifts or abilities, it is through the structures of our institutions that we may (or may not) be helped to develop and use these gifts.

Aristotle continues: “Intellectual virtue or excellence owes its origin and development chiefly to teaching and for that reason requires experience and time. Moral virtue, on the other hand, is formed by habit...”³ Such statements from Aristotle’s theory regarding the complex process of moral development (including happiness), seems to place an enormous responsibility upon all our institutions, where all kinds of teaching (good and bad) and habit-formation start shaping the young long before they can make any choices of their own. Such early habits will later greatly help facilitate or hinder a lifetime of continuous, positive human/moral development.

Other Considerations

It should be mentioned here that today we have an enormous body of evidence from research within the fields of medicine and psychology, which suggests that, even though our institutions are always involved, they are not the only agents involved in human or moral developments. We now know that many negative or deviant human behaviors may be the result of identifiable brain disorders, for example. Some persons are born with abnormal brains. Other people’s brains may become severely damaged from accidents or sports injuries, for example. Such damaged brains may affect the injured persons’ behaviors in devastating ways. Dr. Simon Fleminger, a neuropsychiatrist, is one

³ Ibid.

of many scientists who have done extensive research regarding long-term psychiatric disorders after traumatic brain injury. Dr. Fleminger talks about common, cognitive impairments that can drastically change such injured persons' lives. Even more devastating, it seems, is the personality changes that sometimes seem to result from such injuries, causing some brain damaged persons to become increasingly self-centered and unaware of the needs of others, for example. Some may also become agitated and very aggressive.

On the other hand, another neurosurgeon, James Doty, who also directs Stanford's Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education, has also been involved with some very interesting research, which shows that, while certain brain disorders may change our behaviors, excellent behaviors can also change our brains (neuroplasticity). Doty has helped many individuals change their lives by learning to let go of destructive aggressive behaviors and learn how to be compassionate. He talks about the need for human beings to come to grips with our old, tribal, fight or flight instincts and the impulse toward tribalism (the baggage of evolution) and says that we can learn (through our institutions) to relax the body, for example, so that our minds may calm down. With a calmer mind we may learn to master self-control and so on. With such instruction and practices, individual biology does not have to become our destination. We do not have to continue to be victims of our circumstances, but may begin to live intentional lives and become compassionate toward ourselves and others.

During his research, and with the help of advanced brain scanning, James Doty discovered positive changes within the brains of the persons he worked with to help them change their behaviors. As his clients changed their behaviors and learned to be

compassionate, the part of the brain involved with the fight and flight instincts for example, the amygdala, actually started to shrink. Doty also talks about the way he sees the unchecked “baggage of evolution” still playing a big role in our political arena in America today. He also sees how the same primitive way of acting and reacting with rage within and between different cultures all over the world is still causing incredible suffering for so many.

With the help of modern technology, used appropriately, we are now able to see physical evidence (above) of the validity of some of Aristotle’s amazing theories regarding moral development, based on his studies and observations of people’s way of being in the world more than two thousand years ago.

Needless to say, we are still barely scratching the surfaces of ultimate truths, also regarding the endlessly complex relationships between causes and effects when it comes to human behaviors, happiness and moral development. This is one of the important reasons why continued research, also within this field, may be of tremendous value regarding future development of individual human beings and our troubled world.

Charles Barber, whose theories we will discuss later, talks about a tendency in America today to view a variety of symptoms of emotional discomfort as purely medical problems, which must be corrected with medications or eliminated altogether. Barber argues that many such mood disorders and other disturbances are natural consequences of often destructive or harmful behaviors, which can and should be addressed and may be changed. Such behavioral changes must happen within moral institutions or communities, and may also include psychiatrists and psychologists. Within such communities people who may be experiencing important intellectual or other kinds of dissonance, may be

helped to understand the possible relationship between their behaviors intellectual and other behaviors and their feelings of discomfort, and may also be helped to change their attitude, their thinking and the way they interact with others, for example. Such changes in behaviors often get rid of their symptoms of dis-ease and may facilitate very positive changes as they continue to develop as human beings.

Aristotle emphasizes that virtues or excellent ways of thinking and acting are not automatic or instinctive human behaviors. He says that virtuous behaviors are always voluntary and purposeful, involving education, choices and practice, all of which involves our institutions. As mentioned above, Aristotle also knew that even if human beings are born with the *ability* to respond, they are still not responsible for their first and most important “choices”, which are made for them by members of their first institutions. The crucial beginnings of individual moral development depend heavily upon the teachings and practices within their early moral communities: their families, neighborhoods and formal education.

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle showed that he understood the significance of childhood experiences as we do not start out with a great capacity of self-control, for example:

To obtain the right training for virtue from youth up is difficult, unless one has been brought up under the right laws. To live a life of self-control and tenacity is not pleasant for most people, especially for the young. Therefore, their upbringing and pursuits must be regulated by laws; for once they have become familiar, they will no longer be painful.⁴

Being aware of the need for institutions that help facilitate the life-long challenges involved in human or moral development, Aristotle continues: “But it is perhaps not

⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962), 296.

enough that they receive the right upbringing and attention only in their youth. Since they must carry on these pursuits and cultivate them by habit when they have grown up, we probably need laws for this, too, and for the whole of life in general.”⁵ Again he emphasizes the need for moral communities throughout our entire lives, as doing what is truly good is not the first or only response that comes to the human mind when faced with difficult situations involving moral choices.

Numerous articles in medical journals report findings from the most recent research, showing that children who are raised within morally immature families, for example, where they receive morally inferior instruction (in direct and indirect ways) often start practicing immoral behaviors, which become their habits and tend to lead them down destructive paths. We know that such tragic developments may go on from generation to generation, unless one or more members within their surrounding community or other institutions can help interrupt this tragic progression. As we know, this kind of important information regarding the relationships between early experiences, learned habits and moral development, may also be shared very effectively through the world of fiction.

A recent film, “August: Osage County” (2013), written by Tracy Letts and based on the author’s Pulitzer Prize-winning play of the same name, describes such a devastating, uninterrupted family tragedy. No “enlightened witness”⁶ comes into this isolated family, who could possibly have helped one or more of the family members

⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962), 32.

⁶ Miller, *The Truth Will Set You Free*, (New York: Basic Books, 2001), x.

change their course. Instead all members of the two generations that are described, (parents and adult children) keep descending into deeper and deeper despair.

In another novel *Sophie's Choice* (1979) the American author William Styron, describes the relationships between three individuals in a boarding house in Brooklyn right after WWII, all of whom are wounded by their institutions in different ways. One of them, a young aspiring writer, attempts to be an enlightened witness, but his moral goodness is not enough to help rescue the two “tortured souls” he attempts to save. This novel is able to help readers understand the complexities behind human behaviors. Such vicarious experiences, as readers interact with fictional characters, can also greatly help readers develop their capacity for empathy toward other human beings, whose lives and behaviors may be very different from their own. A novel like *Sophie's Choice* also shows how not only families, but entire nations (at war) may contribute to the destruction of both individuals and nations.

Another great advantage of reading or seeing such (morally significant) novels, films and plays, like the two mentioned above, is that what we learn vicariously, may help us avoid making certain bad mistakes or choices that have the potential to destroy our lives. Such literature can help readers understand more about the complex relationships between individuals and our institutions, and about the importance for all citizens to also help create or recreate our local institutions, our moral communities, which for some will include getting involved with politics.

As stated before, much of the research behind this dissertation seems to suggest that our increasingly centralized institutions have come to take over, or have been entrusted with a multitude of uniquely human responsibilities, direct interactions that

previously used to belong to individuals within small, moral communities, activities or practices, which may be crucial for human flourishing. Half a century ago, America still had a variety of (imperfect) moral communities, within which local institutions it was necessary for most people to participate. Such active, direct individual participation may have helped many Americans reach higher levels of moral maturity at that time.

As an example of some of the suggested negative effects from the recent, drastic centralization of our institutions, we may take a look at certain aspects of the centralized health care system in America today. Within this enormous system, our central government and centralized insurance companies seem to have come to absorb many important moral challenges, which in the past used to belong to individuals within local, moral institutions. It is as if centralization of our health care system, for example, has created a new, increasingly complicated, very indirect way for recipients of such health care to interact with their health care providers. Is it possible that such a large, indirect, impersonal, centralized system may foster a development of unfortunate (immoral) behavioral patterns or practices by both providers and recipients of this kind of care? The insurance companies' success is measured by the amount of money they make. The lack of direct interactions between also seems to increase the temptation for some recipients of centralized care to use the insurance companies in fraudulent ways.

Our health insurance companies seem to be motivated by efficiency, which helps make such companies wealthy, but may not be in the best interest of patients. Often it seems as if our centralized health insurance companies, for the sake of efficiency, become the ones who direct treatment of individual patients, instead of the doctors who interact directly with the patients and provide the treatment. Today's centralized health

insurance companies are also starting to demand that doctors spend only a few minutes with each patient. If they spend more time, the treating physician will not be reimbursed by the patient's insurance company. This kind of system, designed to secure maximum financial gains for centralized health insurance companies does not seem to encourage excellent or morally good practices for anybody involved. Instead it seems to make it very difficult, if not impossible, for doctors, for example, to practice good medicine, which may have devastating consequences both for doctors and patients.

America's earlier (imperfect) ways of caring for the sick, with more direct relationships between providers and recipients of health care within local moral communities, seemed to create a better health care system. Simultaneously this localized system also seemed to provide a true moral community which kept facilitating human flourishing.

It may be important to mention that it is not the intention of this writer to suggest that no forms of centralized supervision are important. Because of our life-long human tendencies toward self-centeredness and other non-virtuous ways of being, both individuals and our institutions will benefit greatly from supervision. The problem that is being discussed here occurs if or when elected supervisors for whatever reason take over the creative, character-developing activities that belong to those who are being supervised, all of which the supervised need to practice if they are to thrive as human beings.

A few of Aristotle's descriptions of the ideal structures or politics within all kinds of institutions were specific to the ancient Greek culture, including the treatment of slaves and women for example, and will not be important to discussed here. However, Aristotle

emphasized that the most important purpose of the city-state, or *polis*, was to ensure that the citizens may reach their developmental or spiritual end. He also accentuated the sovereignty of the *polis*, a political association, over the individual, since it incorporates all other forms of association and always aims at the highest good.

Thus it follows that the end of politics is the good for man. For even if the good is the same for the individual and the state, the good of the state clearly is the greater thing to attain and to safeguard. The attainment of the good for one man alone is, to be sure, a source of satisfaction; yet to secure it for a nation and for states is nobler and more divine.⁷

In the ancient Greece, the goal for the *polis* was different from the main purposes of *the modern state*. The modern state focuses on trade, defense and so on, which seem to be similar to the goals of technique within our centralized society. The ancient polis was aimed at happiness of individuals to help ensure that citizens came to discover the activities associated with the ultimate good. Aristotle firmly believed that the polis was the natural state of man and that no one can strive for his ultimate good outside of the polis, the moral community.

Aristotle's conviction that citizens must be allowed and encouraged to actively participate within all institutions of their lives, including politics (for some), if they are to become virtuous and happy, speaks to important aspects of what is being discussed within this dissertation, where it is being argued that centralization of our institutions may have come to drastically reduce this participatory way of being for masses of Americans. In *Aristotle's Politics* he also addresses, again, the important difference between the kind of happiness that is a vital aspect of this participatory, virtuous life and contrasts true happiness with the kind of "happiness" that is connected with external things.

⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962), 4.

The issues involved with different kinds of happiness represent another, vital part of our investigation, having to do with centralization and human or moral development. Within this exploration it appears that our many efforts to keep increasing the levels of centralization of our institutions may be based on the (illusory) belief that external changes and material things may (by themselves) lead to true happiness. Still, it seems as if it has become necessary to also provide today's centralized Americans with an ever-increasing availability of drugs and entertainment for example, providing masses of Americans with a constant supply of new and seductive illusions of happiness..

In his book *Politics*, Aristotle says:

Further, it is for the sake of the soul that these things are naturally choice-worthy and that all sensible persons should choose them, and not the soul for the sake of them. That the same amount of happiness falls to each person as of virtue and prudence and action in accordance with these, therefore, may stand as agreed by us. We may use god as testimony to this: he is happy and blessed, yet not through any of the external good things but rather through himself and by being of a certain quality in his nature.⁸

In the ancient Greek city-state (which is different from the modern state mentioned earlier) most citizens took part in government, a necessary feature of “the good life”. Aristotle therefore realized that people who lived a virtuous life were also necessarily politically involved. Aristotle saw it as the responsibility of all legislators to facilitate continuous moral upbringing and development of most citizens within the polis.

While discussing the role of our institutions within human or moral development and the difference between the moral community life (similar to Aristotle's polis) and life within our highly centralized society today, it may be worthwhile to talk about the great principle of subsidiarity again. The idea of subsidiarity, which has its origin within the

⁸ Aristotle, *Aristotle's Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 188.

Catholic Church (Pope Pius XI's Pope Pius XI's encyclical *Quadragesimo anno* of 1931), seems to also describe the *ideal* structure of all institutions and nations.

The principle of subsidiarity basically indicates that the "higher" body should not do what the "lower" body is able to do. Thus the central government shouldn't do what can be done equally well, or better, by state or local governments. No centralized government group or system at any level should do what can be done as well or better by local schools, their teachers and students, for example. We may compare the roles of parents within the family to the roles of government within a nation or state. Parents should not do what can be done, sometimes as well or better, by their developing children. It is through practice that their children get the crucial experiences they need in order to become morally mature adults. The goal should be to have "life" or "activity" (and thereby development) within all the parts or layers of a society, not just at the very top.

Although the Catholic Church may not always have applied the principle of subsidiarity, as Ellul also noted, the idea of subsidiarity is still an excellent ground rule, which also supports the ideas within this dissertation. This principle does not suggest that individuals or small communities are completely independent. All parts of the larger whole are based on interdependence. If or when a smaller part fails to flourish, a larger institution may and should step in to help the smaller community get going again, as long as such help is necessary. The goal must always be to respectfully support life and development within all parts.

Chapter 5

Aristotle's Definition of Happiness and the Role of (True) Happiness Within Moral Development

A great variety of experiences may be associated with happiness or pleasure, like food, flowers, drugs, bargains or winning the lottery for example. However, such feelings of happiness are “external” as Aristotle says, or based upon circumstances, objects or events outside the person. Another important aspect of the kinds of happiness that are associated with external things and events is that individuals who seek this kind of happiness become dependent upon something outside themselves in order feel happy, while they themselves may remain passive, inactive and isolated. The above mentioned kinds of happiness are what this study will refer to as lower levels of happiness or illusions of happiness. Such feelings of happiness are not integral aspects of persons’ way of being, or at all relevant within the practices that are central to uniquely human, moral development and true happiness, as Aristotle describes so thoroughly.

Aristotle did not only carefully define happiness. He also described the pivotal role of true happiness within the process of human development. The Greek word “eudaimonia” is translated to mean happiness. More accurately it means “excellence” or “living well”, which suggests that true happiness, also according to Aristotle, is an intrinsic or inextricable feature of an activity or a person’s way of being.

As mentioned earlier, Aristotle states that true happiness (eudaimonia) is our highest good and the deepest motivation for all our behaviors. Aristotle says that eudaimonia is also pleasurable, but he carefully explains that eudaimonia is still very different from the lower levels of happiness or pleasures people may feel when they act

in non-virtuous ways and discover lower levels of good. Again, Aristotle emphasizes that *eudaimonia* is a virtuous activity, a unique experience within the person who acts in virtuous (or morally good) ways. Within such experiences virtuous persons are happy and can make the connection between such true happiness and their virtuous behaviors involving the highest level of good. Truly virtuous activities involve all aspects of the acting person, including thoughts (reason, motivation), how the acts are carried out and so on.

Non-virtuous activities lead people to discoveries of lower levels of good and lower levels of happiness associated with something external, which often include some promise of future happiness. The differences between higher and lower levels of good cannot automatically be understood. As we have discussed earlier, according to Aristotle, in order for the young to gain some understanding of the different levels of good, it requires both education (guidance) and practice. Again, if the experience of happiness is the most powerful motivation for all our behaviors, and our behaviors or practices are what shapes us as human beings, it seems obvious that our human institutions should therefore, first and foremost, be created to help guide all individuals (especially the young) toward morally significant activities or experiences that will help them discover the connections between the highest level of good and the highest level of happiness, true happiness, excellence. With some foundational knowledge of different levels of good, the young at least have a chance to make morally good choices regarding their behaviors, rather than simply “stumbling on” behaviors and different levels happiness they do not understand.

Throughout life individuals will naturally make many moral mistakes. Lower forms of happiness, which are dependent upon changing circumstances, are often instant and easy to obtain. Such “quick fixes” can therefore be very seductive. The structure of our institutions play a very important role within the process of human or moral development in that our institutions may help or hinder people’s exposure to important moral experiences. It seems that a good society should be shaped in ways that help lead the young toward multiple opportunities for them to discover the crucial connections between their behaviors and levels of happiness. Since true happiness, as Aristotle argued, can only be experienced within virtuous activities; and all human beings tend to repeat the behaviors that they associate with any kind of happiness, it would be very beneficial for the young to have reached some understanding of the difference between the behaviors that are associated with true happiness and other behaviors, before they are bombarded by all kinds of experiences, many of which will be associated with behaviors that produce illusions of happiness.

The more opportunities people get to practice uniquely human, morally good or virtuous behaviors the greater the chances are that they may keep behaving in virtuous ways and develop toward moral maturity and true happiness. Such a development does not only serve the virtuous person, but tends to benefit others and indirectly the whole world.

Our exploration seems to suggest that America’s centralized society, based on the most recently discovered lower good, i.e. technique or efficiency, may have come to create institutions that provide today’s Americans with less exposure to the kinds of interactive experiences that are associated with higher levels of good and true happiness,

while there seems to be a drastic increase in exposure to experiences or pursuits associated with lower levels of good and illusions of happiness.

Obviously, and as we have mentioned before, there are exceptions to Aristotle's theory of moral development and happiness, in cases of mental illness and the presence of brain disorders, for example. Nonetheless, according to Aristotle and many others, a successful moral development and true happiness are not limited to chance. Such a life-changing and joyous development can be discovered and understood. Later on we will contrast Aristotle's theory with the theory of Daniel Gilbert, for example, who seems to suggest that most people are not able to predict what will make them happy and are therefore limited to "Stumbling on Happiness".

As an example of the kind of activities that are motivated by a lower level of happiness associated with a lower kind of good, Aristotle uses the example of a thief. The kind of happiness that motivates thieves is not based on any kind of activity that is virtuous or excellent in itself, and therefore it is not part of true happiness, even though such activities may provide many thrills that may be mistaken for true happiness. Aristotle says that the lower level of happiness the thief feels is rooted in a promise of future happiness, when the thief may be able to buy something for his stolen money, which he believes will then make him happy, for example. Again all such illusions of happiness comes from something that may be taken or purchased from somewhere outside the individual rather than being an intrinsic part of the acting person. (The thief may also feel another kind of happiness by simply not being caught.)

Aristotle describes true happiness this way:

Obviously, happiness must be classed as an activity desirable in itself and not for the sake of something else. For happiness lacks nothing and is self-sufficient.

Activities desirable in themselves are those from which we seek to derive nothing beyond the actual exercise of the activity. Actions in conformity with virtue evidently constitute such activities; for to perform noble and good deeds is something desirable for its own sake.¹

Aristotle also states that true happiness is a most important indication that a person is thinking and acting “properly” (virtuously).

As we have mentioned earlier, people who think and act within the highest levels of moral goodness tend to flourish as human beings and be truly happy, much like people who use their ability to reason and choose to eat healthy foods, practice moderation, exercise and so on, tend to develop healthy bodies and experience physical well being (physical happiness).

As an outstanding example of a well known person, who seems to live according to the highest levels of moral goodness, we may look at the internationally recognized Dalai Lama, the spiritual and temporal leader of the Tibetan people, who has worked tirelessly on behalf of human rights and world peace and is a Nobel Prize winner. Among his many books the Dalai Lama also wrote a book called *The Art of Happiness, A Handbook for living* (1998). His co-writer for this book, Howard C. Cutler, MD., is a diplomat of the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology. In spite of suffering the loss of his country, the Dalai Lama asserts and shows in all kinds of ways that he is truly happy. His vision of happiness is in harmony with Aristotle’s views.

The Dalai Lama starts this book by saying “I believe that the very purpose of our life is to seek happiness. That is clear. Whether one believes in religion or not, whether

¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962), 286.

one believes in this religion or that religion, we all are seeking something better in life. So, I think, the very motion of our life is toward happiness.”²

In this book he talks about the difference between the western concept of happiness, which has to do with luck or chance, and his own, eastern philosophy, which, like Aristotle’s theory, looks at happiness as something one can develop by training the mind:

When I say ‘training the mind’, in this context I am not referring to ‘mind’ merely as one’s cognitive ability or intellect. Rather I am using the term in the sense of the Tibetan word *Sem*, which has a much broader meaning, closer to ‘psyche’ or ‘spirit’; it includes intellect and feeling, heart and mind. By bringing about a certain inner discipline, we can undergo a transformation of our attitude, our entire outlook and approach to living.³

Throughout this book, the Dalai Lama and Dr. Cutler discuss important issues involved in the training of the mind, including the importance of deepening our connections with others, the value and benefits of compassion, how to deal with anger and hatred and how to bring about change, and many other subjects involved in living the morally good and happy life.

The co-author, Dr. Cutler, shares conversations he had with the Dalai Lama and conversations the Dalai Lama had with others, including large audiences. The author talks about the way the Dalai Lama is very present with people around him, whether that is one person or a whole crowd, always emphasizing what all human beings have in

² Howard Cutler and Dalai Lama, *The Art of Happiness* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), 13.

³ Ibid., 15.

common and that we are all struggling, saying: “If we can leave the differences aside, I think we can easily communicate, exchange ideas, and share experiences.”⁴

Through having practiced a virtuous or morally good way of thinking and being, the Dalai Lama has been able to undergo a transformation of his attitude, his world view his approach to all persons and to the world and all its problems. He has developed an ability to put others at ease and quickly create a direct connection with fellow human beings, which tends to bring about peace and understanding on many levels. And the Dalai Lama smiles and laughs a lot.

Like Aristotle, the Dalai Lama, and Tibetan Buddhists in general, believe that true happiness is not an easy activity or venture, but that it is possible and a very important aspect of the human experience. This belief is not based on blind faith or religious dogma, but on sound reasoning and direct experience. The Dalai Lama has been able to share his ideas with people from all walks of life, including custodians, top scientists, religious and political leaders.

According to Aristotle also, true happiness is an important part of the uniquely human, virtuous way of being. It may be worth repeating that Aristotle did *not* believe that true happiness is a reward that some people may receive as a reward after they act in virtuous or morally good ways. Instead, as indicated earlier, true happiness is an inseparable component of virtuous activities. Aristotle maintained that virtuous persons do what is truly good because they gradually come to understand it is universally and truly good for everybody at all times, even though the specific behaviors may look different in certain ways within differing times and cultures. Such understanding of what

⁴ Ibid., 2.

is truly good includes the use of reason and involves education and guidance or mentoring and multiple other experiences (within moral communities), all of which represents important aspects of our institutions. Only persons who have a certain amount of such knowledge may be able to make truly good moral choices.

Again, in his book *Nicomachean Ethics* (1962) Aristotle carefully defines happiness and also elucidates the important role of (true) happiness within moral development. In many different ways he restates that happiness is not a predetermined, human characteristic, but a living part of human activities, revealing important information about our behaviors.

Since this dissertation is exploring how the most recent *centralization* of our institutions may be affecting moral development and happiness among today's Americans in negative ways, we obviously cannot use Aristotle, who lived more than two thousand years ago, to describe the specific nature of our latest forms of centralization. Therefore the great French philosopher, Jacques Ellul, who lived from 1912 to 1994, was chosen to help illustrate the serious problems he saw all over the western world after centralization of our institutions became necessary to promote the newest number one concern for humanity: efficiency to single-mindedly facilitate material progress.

Even though Ellul stated that centralized living made people unhappy, and that the central government therefore had to come up with entertainment for the masses, in order to avoid rebellion or revolution, he still did not suggest that centralization had much to do with human or moral development or that happiness played an important role within this process.

Ellul, who was a Christian (anarchist), argued that human beings, created in God's image, simply needed to be allowed or encouraged to spend time contemplating their reason for being, attempting to answer important moral questions and make choices as they struggle to find their way through life's many seemingly contradicting issues and situations. And a lifestyle designed to suit centralization's goal of efficiency, did not allow any room for thoughts about how a (moral) human being should live.

Ellul's mother was a Calvinist. Although Ellul did not remain a Calvinist, his views regarding human or moral development seem to be influenced by Calvinism. Some Calvinists profess that human beings are born and die depraved. In his book *Reason for Being; A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* (1990) Ellul talks about the meaning of the expression "there is nothing new under the sun". He explains that the author of Ecclesiastes was not talking about the world per se, where *material* progress has always been present. Instead the author of Ecclesiastes, like Ellul, talks about human beings and the human condition, where he believes there is no real progress. Ellul explains: "True, history exists. But as it unfolds, humanity by no means moves from an inferior to a truly superior stage."⁵

Ellul viewed centralization as a terrible choice by government leaders, who decided to change all institutions for the sake of economic ends alone and thereby making society unfit for citizens to simply live as they should as *human* beings. For Ellul, living as a human being included, above all, having freedom and opportunities to be authentic and creative, make moral choices regarding their thoughts and actions on a continuous basis. Authenticity was necessary for people to be truly creative.

⁵ Jacques Ellul, *Reason for Being. A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* (Michigan: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990) 65.

In spite of his different views when it comes to human or moral development and happiness, Ellul's powerful description of the serious problems he saw introduced by centralization of the western world, seems to provide the truest illustration of the problems we are exploring, regarding life in centralized America today. Aristotle's universal and timeless theory regarding the hypothesized, important relationships between certain ways of being, moral development and happiness, makes an ideal lens through which we may come to understand more about the suggested negative effects of centralization upon human development and happiness among Americans today. Aristotle's philosophy seems to describe, thoroughly and beautifully, certain basic universal truths, which are relevant for all times and changing cultures.

When Aristotle describes "the good life", the excellent way of being, he does not offer his readers a list of specific, virtuous acts. In other words there is no recipe or rule for virtuous action that fits all or even just two situations. Instead Aristotle talks about a way of being in the world, which includes a most important process of adapting all we may know theoretically as good to every particular person and situation as we interact with others. Our virtuous knowledge, theoretical wisdom, must be carefully adjusted or translated to fit every person we approach, according to each person's nature and circumstances. Aristotle calls the latter practical wisdom. Again, virtuous activities require involvement of all aspects of each virtuous person as he or she interacts with and respectfully considers all aspects of other persons. And, as mentioned before, happiness is an important aspect of such activities; since our level of happiness can guide us or help us assess how we are doing.

More recently, Daniel Goleman, for example, talks about the role of emotions within the process of interpreting our experiences. In his book *Emotional Intelligence* (1996), Goleman argues that our emotions are just as important as IQ as they both help guide us in our interactions with others.

As mentioned before, Aristotle points out that true happiness must always involve reason, which is another, uniquely human ability (to be developed). Happiness, he says, consists in the excellent use of reason as we attempt to live the virtuous life.

When describing the role of informal education regarding moral development and the role of happiness within this complex process, Aristotle refers to Plato, who said “men must be brought up from childhood on to feel pleasure and pain at the proper things; for this is correct education.”⁶ This statement seems very important as we think about both formal and informal education today, within the institutions of parenting and early education. Often today’s busy parents are inconsistent in their ways of encouraging and discouraging their children’s behaviors. Their reactions may depend on their moods rather than what they may consider good or bad behaviors. It may also be important to remember that the centralized way of being has already affected several generations of Americans. Many American parents may not have received any kind of education regarding the important differences between lower and higher goods and the corresponding differences between lower and higher levels of happiness. Such parents cannot teach their children what they do not know or practice. Hence, their children may not receive “correct education” or learning “from childhood on to feel pleasure and pain

⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962), 37.

at proper things”, and may be left to stumble upon any kind of behavior that makes them feel any kind of happiness, which therefore will encourage them to repeat such behaviors.

Many, more recent writers, when they discuss happiness, seem to leave the word undefined, which makes it very difficult for readers to know what such authors are really saying. Often true happiness seems to be treated by writers as if it were indistinguishable from a variety of illusions of happiness, or similar to likes and dislikes.

Again, according to Aristotle, true happiness is an activity, the practice of the virtuous way of being. Another way of attempting to explain some of the differences between the virtuous way of being (associated with true happiness) and other ways of being may be to look at the way virtuous acts tend to be altruistic or all-centered, for example. As was mentioned when we talked about the Dalai Lama, the altruistic attitude tends to connect or reconnect the virtuous person with the rest of humanity. Altruistic or virtuous persons tend to focus on what they have in common with others rather than what separates us. Being connected tends to bring about both a larger sense of meaning and a sense of belonging, all of which are well known aspects of true happiness. Non-virtuous self-centeredness on the other hand tends to keep the self-centered persons isolated and unhappy, even though they may manage to fill their lives with material goods, entertainment and other distractions from the world around them, which may give them short-lived feelings of bliss (or illusions of happiness).

We know that today’s centralized systems offer ways in which many Americans may think they are happy, when they really are isolated as they passively receive or consume what they think they want, without any participation within any kind of meaningful community or interactions with others and the world.

In his book *The Art of Loving* (1956) the great psychoanalyst and social philosopher Erich Fromm gives an explanation of the scene from the Bible in the Garden of Eden. He suggests that the reason Adam and Eve were ashamed and tried to cover their bodies after they had sinned was not because they had discovered they were naked (the Victorian explanation). Instead, Fromm suggests that their sin had made them realize they were separate. Before they sinned they had been one with God and each other. Fromm says: “The awareness of human separation, without reunion by love is the source of shame. It is at the same time the source of guilt and anxiety.”⁷ According to Fromm, an important aspect of our uniquely human nature is that on some level we know that we are all members of the whole human family with very similar, human needs. Fromm uses the word love to describe the attitude with which human beings must approach each other in order for each lover to develop toward moral maturity.

In the Bible, within Jesus’ *Sermon on the Mount*, some examples are given between a certain virtuous way of being and happiness (being blessed): “God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy,” and “God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God.”⁸

Non-virtuous behaviors, which therefore are not associated with happiness, are also very carefully described within this well known sermon, along with their natural consequences:

You have heard that our ancestors were told ‘You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.’ But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in

⁷ Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1961), 9.

⁸ Matthew. 5:7, 5:9 (New Living Translation).

danger of the fires of hell. So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.⁹

In the same Gospel, Matthew reports how Jesus described the hypocritical behaviors of the teachers of religious law at that time, and how their inauthentic way of being is associated with moral development or happiness:

The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees are the official interpreters of the law of Moses. So practice and obey whatever they tell you, but don't follow their example. For they don't practice what they teach. They crush people with unbearable religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden. Everything they do is for show. On their arms they wear extra wide prayer boxes with Scripture verses inside, and they wear robes with extra long tassels. And they love to sit at the head table at banquets and in the seats of honor in the synagogues. They love to receive respectful greetings as they walk in the marketplace and to be called 'Rabbi.'¹⁰

Jesus spoke about the importance of being aware of what all human beings have in common: "Don't let anyone call you 'Rabbi', for you have only one teacher, and all of you are equal as brothers and sisters."¹¹ Jesus also spoke directly to the religious leaders and described the natural consequences they would reap for their hypocritical behaviors (which are not associated with happiness): "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and self-indulgence!"¹²

Lower levels of happiness seem to be in a class of their own. Such illusions of happiness may be called gratification or relief, which is the feeling people get when their

⁹ Matthew. 5:21-24.

¹⁰ Ibid., 23:2-7.

¹¹ Ibid., 23:8.

¹² Ibid., 23:25.

circumstances change in ways that may make their lives less challenging, as in winning the lottery, for example. Receiving lower levels of happiness may not involve anything immoral. However, such events do not include the kinds of virtuous activities, which are necessary for moral development and true happiness. Therefore, after a period of luck ends, the “lucky” persons, who may have abandoned other, important, life challenges, may feel very empty, as if they have lost months or years of their lives.

Unlike individuals who come to discover true happiness, the kind of happiness that is associated with the character-shaping virtuous way of being, people who settle for lower levels of happiness or illusions of happiness resulting from unethical or inauthentic activities, tend to remain unchanged or stuck within a lower level of moral development. Unfortunately, for many, such negative or meaningless behaviors may affect their human development in devastating ways.

Later on, as we discuss what may have happened recently regarding human or moral development and happiness among centralized Americans, we will look at Craig Nakken’s description of the process of developing “The Addictive Personality”. As Nakken suggests, if people are allowed or even encouraged by their institutions to find “happiness” by manipulating others and the world, rather than connecting and interacting with others and the world in honest, respectful ways, they tend not to mature as human beings. Instead, while they may get stronger financially, they will tend to stop developing as persons become weak and increasingly dependent upon (and addicted to) their exterior sources of happiness. According to Nakken, such illusions of happiness, disconnected from a virtuous life within community with others, tend to eventually become the only,

most important aim for such increasingly isolated, compulsive shoppers, hoarders, liars, perfectionists, violent persons, persons who are addicted to praise or to drugs and so on.

When Aristotle states that virtuous activities fulfill our proper functions as human beings, and that happiness, which is also pleasurable, is an inherent part of such activities, he carefully adds that pleasure is still not the ultimate end for human beings. Aristotle knew that many kinds of pleasures, especially physical pleasures, may lead to excesses, all of which leads us away from the virtuous life and true happiness. Aristotle therefore also spoke about the importance of developing our ability to use reason, which also helps us understand the value of learning self-control and the (reasonable) practice of moderation.

It is important to note that although Aristotle believes that happiness is the ultimate goal of all human behaviors, he is not suggesting that a conscious *pursuit* of happiness will bring about true happiness. The latter is not an activity that is an end in itself. Pursuit of happiness is motivated by a self-centered hope of some future, exterior reward. According to Aristotle, true happiness is simply an intrinsic and inextricable part of the good life, the virtuous life. It cannot be experienced outside the virtuous way of being in the world.

People who are pursuing the kind of happiness that is associated with external or extrinsic goods are limited to a narrow or closed pursuit of preconceived, subjective version of happiness, through manipulating others and the world. Virtuous activities on the other hand, keep challenging the virtuous persons as they struggle to keep choosing the higher good, rather than giving in to natural human tendencies to do what initially seems easy (the quick fix). Virtuous persons, who exercise their ability to choose, and

continuously practice their (developing) abilities to use reason, to be courageous, honest or authentic as they interact with others and the world, will therefore also tend to develop and flourish as human beings.

When Aristotle asserts that true happiness is a person's highest good and that happiness is the ultimate goal of all human behaviors, he also talks at length about the many traps the young may fall into before they have gained enough experiences of true happiness so that the virtuous way of being has become more like a habit. Therefore he emphasizes the important role of our institutions, starting with the family, who can help instruct and guide the young as they begin their most important and challenging part of their journey toward becoming morally mature human beings. One may wonder what Aristotle would have thought about our centralized institutions in America today.

Aristotle understood that it takes the "proper" or morally good experiences for the young to come to discover true happiness. Such proper encounters can only be experienced when human beings are "living well" (*eudaimonia*) as they interact with others and the world within community. Therefore, discoveries of true happiness cannot happen unless the young are given plenty of opportunities within their early institutions to practice virtuous behaviors, involving all aspects of who they are.

Lawrence Kohlberg did extensive research with children regarding moral development. His work was based upon the theory of Jean Piaget and the American philosopher John Dewey, both of whom believed that human beings develop philosophically and psychologically in a *progressive* fashion.

Kohlberg's theory describes three levels of moral development (including two stages within each such level). Within the first (pre-conventional) level of moral thinking,

which is common for elementary school children, Kohlberg found that children seem to do their moral reasoning based on a naturally self-centered fear of punishment by teachers or parents, if the children did not obey.

Kohlberg's next level of moral development, the conventional level, is characterized by reasoning and behaviors that are aimed at approval of others or obedience due to a sense of duty. According to Kohlberg, most people do not develop morally beyond this second, also self-centered, conventional level of moral thinking.

Kohlberg still described a post-conventional stage of moral development, which may be developed in children (and adults) if they are challenged and encouraged to look beyond their initial and conventional, self-centered way of reasoning. Such challenges can help force the young to rethink (repent) the contradictions that are inherent to their self-centered way of thinking, and help open their minds toward a way of reasoning based on universal principles, leading them toward more altruistic ways of thinking and acting.

As Aristotle had understood two thousand years ago, Kohlberg also came to realize, based on his extensive research, that moral development can be greatly facilitated through education, if teachers, for example, present their students with stories involving moral dilemmas, followed by lively discussions. Kohlberg became an advocate for such moral education, believing that it could certainly help facilitate moral development in students, beyond the conventional level and help such individuals enter the post-conventional level of moral reasoning. Like the virtuous person's way of reasoning, the post conventional level of moral reasoning is based on universal principles or a perceived

common good, rather than self-interest alone. And such a way of being seems to be what brings people toward true, moral maturity and happiness.

While Kohlberg's research focused on moral development according to age, Robert Coles' research, which we will also discuss, shows that even grammar school children, when encouraged by family members and neighbors, for example, to act in virtuous ways when faced with challenging situations within their communities, were able to enter the post-conventional level of moral reasoning at a very young age.

If people are helped or encouraged by their institutions to become aware of it, every day is full of opportunities for individuals to exercise their ability to make morally good choices, so intimately related to their development and happiness. Aristotle calls the virtuous way of being "the good life" and keeps emphasizing that it is not enough for a person to *know* what is good in order to become morally mature. True moral development involves both knowledge and the ongoing *practice* of the virtuous way of being.

In book seven of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle also offers more explanations regarding the many important nuances involved in true moral excellence. For example, he says it is not possible for the same person to have practical wisdom (knowing and practicing the virtuous life) and be a morally weak individual at the same time. On the other hand he says it is possible for morally weak persons to *pretend* that their actions are based on morally good choices.

However, there is no reason why a clever man could not be morally weak. That is why occasionally people are regarded as possessing practical wisdom, but as being morally weak at the same time; it is because cleverness differs from practical wisdom...They are closely related in that both follow the guidance of reason, but they differ in that (practical wisdom alone) involves moral choice.¹³

¹³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962), 201.

For so many reasons, some of which we have discussed here, what could be a more important task for any nation's institutions, than to help provide the young with plenty of opportunities to participate in virtuous practices, which includes true happiness and will therefore lead the young to repeat such behaviors, which seem to lead to excellent human or moral development?

Without a variety of such opportunities within moral communities, many individuals seem to unwittingly drift into morally inferior behaviors, which will be repeated based on illusions, or lower levels of, happiness that are associated with such behaviors. As we will discuss later, after morally bad habits have been established, it is then much more difficult for such morally immature and unhappy persons to find their way out of the morally inferior habits they have come to know, and into a new way of being they don't know, because they have not practiced or experienced it.

Comparing Aristotle's View of Happiness with Other Views

Aristotle understood that true happiness or eudaimonia or "living well" is a powerful motivator for repeating good or virtuous behaviors. He was also aware of the fact that lower levels of happiness or illusions of happiness, associated with bad or immoral behaviors, also motivate people to repeat such unfortunate behaviors.

The famous French philosopher and Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) wrote a paper called *Reflections on Happiness* (1943), where he talked about levels of happiness, all of which is in consonance with Aristotle's theory of happiness. Chardin talks about three different kinds of happiness: the happiness of tranquility, the happiness of pleasure and the happiness of growth. He argues that nothing brings about

true happiness unless it involves moral growth, an ascent or transcendence. Thus, truly happy persons are not people who are simply seeking happiness, but persons who discover happiness or joy within the act or activity of *becoming* themselves. This is the kind of true happiness that both Aristotle and Chardin say exists only within the practices that lead to transcendence or moral maturity.

Like Aristotle, and unlike Ellul, Chardin believes in human or moral progress or development. Chardin argues that both scientifically and objectively, true happiness is the happiness of growth and movement along the right path. The right path helps lead human beings away from the isolating self-centeredness with which we are born, and toward an increasing awareness of the powerful reality that we are all parts of the larger humanity with which we must unite. It is within this union, or awareness of being responsible parts of the larger whole of humanity and the world that we become truly human; we *become* who we are.

Chardin emphasizes that a full development of our selves does not only involve embracing all others, but also includes a respectful or worshipping surrender to a power greater than ourselves, including the endless amount of still unknown aspects of reality. Chardin calls the highest level of happiness joy. He says that happiness is something we discover as we align ourselves with others and the surrounding universe, as the universe continues its progress. Allowing or celebrating this ongoing process, he says, brings about peace, which brings about happiness.

As mentioned earlier, Ellul's view of happiness is very different from that of Aristotle and Chardin. Jacques Ellul did not seem to think that happiness was of much importance. However, when Ellul talked about happiness he seemed to refer only to the

many, superficial *illusions* of happiness that were provided by managers of centralized societies, who knew that people who had been seduced by the spirit of technique and the centralized systems were unhappy. Ellul realized that the spirit of technique, which made centralization of our institutions necessary, had abandoned the idea of spiritual or intellectual happiness, in order to focus on material happiness.

According to Ellul, happiness had in the past appeared as a vague and distant hope for humanity. In the nineteenth century, however, things changed. Ellul thought that the new faith in technique or efficiency had come to link happiness to something concrete, which can be obtained by mechanical means, from outside the person. He saw how such new illusions of happiness, which can be bought and consumed, had now become essential for modern individuals.

As mentioned above, in spite of not believing that happiness was important, Ellul observed that masses of centralized people became unhappy after they had been coerced to leave their small, moral communities and move into the big cities, when centralization “forced the consumer of the system to come to the machine.”¹⁴ And he also thought the centralized systems had come to include a variety of ways to take care of this new unhappiness with drugs, entertainment and other distractions. “As big city life became for the most part intolerable, techniques of amusement were developed.”¹⁵

Ellul’s apparent distrust concerning happiness is also similar to the views of the German philosopher *Immanuel Kant* (1724-1804), who, like Ellul, did not see happiness as a reliable source for helping individuals figure out what is morally good or bad. Kant

¹⁴ Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 113.

¹⁵ Ibid.

thought it was better to rely on reason alone as one's guide. Kant saw all happiness as primarily hedonistic and purely subjective, consisting of a self-centered pursuit of the greatest amounts of pleasure throughout one's life. Kant argued that moral actions must be based on reason and a sense of *duty* and respect for universal moral laws, which he believed all human beings know a priori.

Kant also proposed a very clever way for individuals to test whether their actions are morally good or bad, a model he thought was more reasonable than using the experience of happiness as the test or measure. He suggested that when people are about to choose a certain way of acting or thinking, they should ask themselves if they would think that the same action or idea they deem as good or proper for themselves, would still be good and proper if *everyone* acted or thought in the same manner. Very accurately, Kant had observed that when people act selfishly or in morally incorrect ways, they keep making themselves the exceptions.

Although Aristotle believed that happiness is what motivates all our (intellectual and other) behaviors, he also professed that it takes much training, guidance and *experiences* for each person to develop the knowledge of what is *truly* good, especially the experiences of practicing the virtuous way of being, which is true happiness. Again, it is the happiness driven process of human or moral development, including formal and informal guidance by our (changing) institutions that this study is all about.

Aristotle's theory, which says that moral maturity and true happiness originate in natural, human abilities, which must be developed through the practice of a virtuous or morally excellent way of being, contradicts only the happiness aspect of Ellul's beliefs. Both Aristotle and Ellul believe it is crucial that all individuals are allowed and

encouraged by their institutions to always practice the uniquely human way of being, including being authentic (thinking for themselves) as they try to figure out how to best *apply* what they know theoretically is morally good, for each person or situation they encounter.

From the field of psychology, B.F. Skinner and many other, more recent psychologists have made it common knowledge that once a child makes the connection between a certain behavior and happiness (within the brain's reward center), such a behavior is most likely to be repeated and become a habit. And our habits are what transform us for the better and for worse.

In a fairly recent book *Authentic Happiness* (2002), Martin Seligman defines true happiness in a similar way as Aristotle and refers to Aristotle on many occasions within the text. Seligman uses different words to describe true happiness, like gratification, for example. Pleasure is the word Seligman uses to describe illusions of happiness. Seligman compares his word gratification to Aristotle's eudaimonia and says "it is akin to grace in dancing. Grace is not an entity that accompanies the dance or that comes at the end of the dance; it is part and parcel of a dance well done."¹⁶

Martin Seligman also defines true happiness this way, also in agreement with Aristotle: "Eudaimonia, what I call gratification, is part and parcel of right action. It cannot be derived from bodily pleasure, nor is it a state that can be chemically induced or attained by any shortcuts. It can only be had by activity consonant with noble purpose."¹⁷

¹⁶ Martin Seligman. *Authentic Happiness. Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment* (New York: Free Press, 2002), 112.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Seligman believes that true happiness is intimately connected with a person's entire way of being. This author is also aware of how the nature of true happiness and its unique relationship to a certain virtuous way of being may now be scientifically investigated. Although there are certain limitations related to genes, Seligman also believes happiness can be taught, discovered and developed through a certain (virtuous) way of being.

In his book *Stumbling on Happiness* (2006), Daniel Gilbert seems to have a different definition of happiness. He talks about the fact that human beings are not good at predicting their "emotional futures". They cannot know what will make them happy, and therefore it seems that happiness is something that one may have to "stumble upon".

Gilbert's theory is obviously true when it comes to very young children, who cannot understand, yet, the possible connections between their way of being and what kind of happiness they are experiencing. That is why the young, at the tender beginnings of their lives, need much guidance from parents, teachers and so on. Gilbert does not spend much time defining happiness. The many examples Gilbert gives to demonstrate people's inability to predict what will make them happy seem to be associated with changes in their circumstances and the very different ways people react to and feel about such changes.

Gilbert's ideas do not seem to support the theory of Aristotle or the views of Seligman and many other, recent authors, who all indicate that human beings can indeed learn to predict what kinds of thoughts and behaviors that are associated with true happiness and tend to transform them in positive ways, as opposed to behaviors that are

associated with short-lived illusions of happiness, often followed by feelings of emptiness.

Chapter 6

Are Americans Less Morally Mature and Happy Today Than They Were Half a Century Ago? The Rise of Pharmaceuticals and Mass Media

Many factors need to be considered when attempting to assess a possible change in moral development and happiness among masses of Americans after the most recent increase in centralization of all our institutions within the last 50-60 years. Far from all factors involved in human or moral development and happiness will be considered within this assessment. Only certain features of our institutions, identified as essential for human flourishing and happiness are being explored to help us conduct such an evaluation.

Since the word happiness seems to be defined in a variety of ways among Americans today, and considering that America recently has also invented a multitude of medications and other treatments for unhappiness, it has become extraordinarily difficult to estimate whether Americans are more or less morally mature and happy today than they were half a century ago. Therefore, it may be important to spend some time attempting to clarify some of the many possible dependent and independent variables that may influence this kind of an assessment.

Less and less attention seems to be paid to the proposed, crucial connections between behaviors (intellectual and other) and the corresponding variations in moral development and happiness among today's centralized Americans. Those in favor of our newest centralized institutions and systems, including our healthcare system, for example, seem to be very busy finding biological (predestined) or other explanations for individual and societal problems associated with problematic behaviors and unhappiness, all of which will be discussed.

In particular it appears as if natural and temporary occurrences of “growing pains”, including frustration, anxiety, temporary feelings of sadness, all of which may be important aspects of normal human development, tend to be diagnosed right away as psychiatric illnesses, unrelated to human behaviors, and in need of medical treatment.

Granted, there is a new awareness today of the many ways biological changes may indeed affect our behaviors and moods. And sometimes such biological disorders can and should be treated with appropriate medications. However, it is equally true and important to remember that our behaviors also change our biology, our brains, which again affect future behaviors and so on. With the recent tendency to focus on biological changes as causes rather than components of psychiatric illness, many new psychiatric illnesses have been added to our DSM4, based on findings within recent blood tests alone. And numerous, new medications have been invented to take care of such new problems or symptoms, which may not have biological roots.

In recent years, many Americans, who have learned to become dependent upon their centralized systems, have also come to view happiness as their right; something that is simply owed to all individuals by their parents, their state or central government. Happiness seems to have become more like a commodity for many Americans today; something extrinsic, unrelated to their way of being, what they think and how they interact with others and the world.

As we already have discussed, Aristotle said that true happiness is a virtuous activity of the soul. It is an intrinsic phenomenon, intimately connected to one’s way of thinking and acting as we relate to others and the world within our communities or institutions. According to Aristotle, true happiness has nothing to do with things one may

purchase or what a person may passively receive from others or from some central government system. Circumstances can certainly make our lives more burdensome, but such challenges may not affect our development and experience of true happiness in negative ways at all.

Our research seems to suggest that human i.e. moral development and true happiness are an important function of, or a main purpose for our human institutions. It therefore seems to follow that our institutions should be structured in ways that will allow and encourage a certain way of life that can help all members of these institutions to practice the uniquely human, character-forming way of being within community. This would include activities that may be challenging, while engaging the whole person as he or she interacts with others in authentic, creative, fully human ways. It is being proposed that America's most recent centralization of its institutions (designed to facilitate material or economic development) may have made the important activities that are necessary for successful human development both unnecessary and irrelevant. A multitude of character-building interactions between individual Americans seem to have been absorbed by impersonal, machinelike systems and thereby providing less opportunities for many parents to practice excellent parenting and for teachers to be involved with all practices that make them excellent and happy teachers, for example.

As our centralized systems seem to promise to perfect the world *around* the individual, such materialistic "promises" may encourage many Americans to believe that true happiness can be purchased and that successful human development is independent of the their uniquely human, challenging, all-encompassing participation within

community. Such insinuations may be as recklessly misleading as it would be to suggest that people do not need to eat or move in order to develop and be healthy physically.

We have discussed earlier what a serious mistake it seems to be for parents to think they are helping their children when they remove important, developing challenges from their children's lives. When parents do homework or other, often difficult tasks *for* their children, for example, they are depriving their children of important opportunities to learn what they need to learn in order to become excellent students and/or morally mature human beings.

It is well known that our centralized welfare programs, for example, can be overused and abused in ways that are similar to bad parenting. Welfare programs, which should be available only to help people get "back on track", who may be unable to take care of themselves, temporarily, for example, may encourage persons to help them *avoid* challenges that could possibly have helped them thrive as citizens and human beings. Such programs are also financially rewarding for people who provide these services, which may therefore tempt providers to recommend government assistance where it is not needed.

Soon after Franklin D. Roosevelt became America's president in 1933, Congress passed the first federal public assistance law (the Federal Emergency Relief Act). A short time afterwards Roosevelt said: "The quicker they are taken off the dole the better it is for them for the rest of their lives." He also added that work "is the saving barrier between

them and moral disintegration”.¹ Most of Roosevelt’s New Deal programs were aimed at putting people back to work.

In spite of good intentions and many attempts to reform America’s welfare systems, so that such programs would help people heal and get on with the most important aspects of their evolving lives, there are still many Americans who seem to choose or be mislead to use such programs fraudulently, and thereby greatly reduce their chances to flourish as human beings.

About Medical Interventions

As mentioned before, the hopefully temporary seduction of the human spirit, that is being proposed within this dissertation as related to recent institutional changes will not be viewed as a result of any intended evil. Instead it will be regarded as a possibly devastating consequence of several philosophical, psychological and political mistakes.

As just one example of such mistakes, we mentioned earlier the way most of today’s psychologists and psychiatrists have come to view many important, healthy, human experiences of moral conflicts or challenges as illnesses that must be medicated or eliminated. We owe much to *Sigmund Freud* for helping us discover the important role of subconscious and unconscious aspects of our minds. However, Freud may also have helped lead many mental health professionals to think of important, uniquely human aspects of being a person, including what we call our conscience, as sources of psychiatric disorders.

¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Speech to C.W.A. Conference in Washington" (November 15, 1933). Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed February 12, 2016, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=14555>.

This unfortunate way of thinking seems to have led many of America's psychologists and psychiatrists into a habit of diagnosing as symptoms of mental illness, a variety of healthy emotions that are both natural and crucial as people deal with numerous moral challenges or choices involved in our daily lives as developing human beings.

In his book *Comfortably Numb; How Psychiatry Is Medicating a Nation* (2008), Charles Barber raises the question whether Americans are more unhappy or mentally ill than they used to be; or if the recent, drastic increase in the use of prescribed antidepressants and other drugs in America, may just have become another opportunity for the centralized institutions of medicine and pharmacology to create more and more financial gains for themselves. Enormous amounts of advertisement regarding new drugs that promise to help people "feel good" tend to lead many Americans to believe that happiness may indeed be purchased, also in the form of a steadily increasing variety of medicines.

We have talked about ways centralization of America's institutions may have removed an abundance of opportunities for meaningful, character-shaping interactions from masses of Americans; direct and often challenging interactions that used to be readily available within the (imperfect) small communities of the past. As we shall see, there also seems to be another new idea or invention that may be getting in the way of direct, formative interactions between individuals and their world, via the creation of countless new pharmaceuticals.

Charles Barber, who has worked directly with homeless and mentally ill persons for a long time, discovered that mental illness was not always caused by chemical

imbalances. He realized that it was often the other way around. While some mental illnesses may be caused by a person's given, abnormal biology, which then may lead to abnormal and unfortunate behavioral, there are just as many unfortunate, learned behavioral patterns that cause chemical imbalances, resulting in depressed mood, anxiety and so on. While the former cases may need chemicals or medicine to help correct the problem, Barber says that the latter examples can and should be corrected by helping people change their unhealthy behaviors. Often it is unclear what comes first. And often there is a combination of biological and behavioral reasons for changes in mental health. One would think that it is best to try behavioral changes first. However, in America it seems that pharmaceuticals are almost always tried first. Such medical treatments may only mask the real underlying problem.

In his work with patients or clients, Barber practiced Carlo DiClemente's "Stages of Change" model to help address "the human factor". Barber saw that many of his clients had never been exposed to any aspect of the virtuous way of being by their families, other moral communities or health care professionals. As stated earlier, our research seems to indicate that exposure to healthy challenges within normal interactions between individuals and the world is not only ideal, but necessary for all persons, in order for them to find a way out of isolative self-centeredness and learn to interact and connect with others in ways that tend to cause healing and healthy developments for all involved, including the (moral) communities.

Barber argues that our medical institutions, including the drug companies, have caused a blurring of the distinctions between mental illness and everyday problems or challenges. Our centralized institutions of medicine seem to dismiss the essential process

of human or moral development through our activities, (intellectual and all other) which also is associated with happiness (as Aristotle so carefully described).

Charles Barber talks about the way drug companies first manage to create a need for different drugs through advertisement, and then reward psychiatrists, for example, for prescribing these medications to their patients. He had noticed that the more the drug industry was pushing the instant pharmaceutical cure for all emotional challenges, the less interest there was among psychiatrists, psychologists and counselors to practice effective cognitive behavioral approaches, for example, which have the potential to help millions of people.

Barber accuses the pharmaceutical institutions of seducing Americans into believing they need drugs to handle the normal sorrows of life, which are absolutely necessary experiences within healthy human development. His research adds important points to the discussion of human i.e. moral development and happiness in America today, suggesting that the drastic increase in use of psychotropic medications may help delay or even arrest the naturally difficult, but most important process of human or moral development.

A disclaimer: It should be mentioned that, even though it is being argued here that there is much inappropriate use, or misuse, of prescribed drugs in America today; there are also undoubtedly *some* appropriate and helpful uses of psychotropic medications. As stated above, some psychiatric disorders seem to be caused by a biological problem, which then may cause changes in a person's thoughts and actions. Other psychiatric disorders seem to be the result of unhealthy behaviors, which then, eventually cause biological changes and so on. In all cases psychotropic medications can be very helpful

for persons who may be in some kind of emotional or behavioral crisis. However, once stabilized with medication, it seems crucial that doctors and counselors try to help their clients figure out how their thoughts and behaviors may contribute to the psychological, psychiatric or social problems they experience. Based on a better understanding of possible connections between thoughts, behaviors and experiences of anxiety or depression, for example, such clients or persons may then be helped to make behavioral changes (intellectual and other) that may help lead to a much healthier and happier life.

Constant Entertainment

A similar issue, which also seems to further complicate our assessment regarding moral development and happiness among Americans today, is America's recent creation and availability of constant entertainment. A certain amount of entertainment is certainly fine and it may even provide some degree of meaningful information. However, a steady supply of entertainment may also serve as constant source of distractions, which tend to increase distances between individual human beings, which are already difficult to overcome. When persons do not communicate directly and attentively with others and the world, they miss myriads of intellectual, social, emotional and spiritual challenges that exist within such direct interactions, and can help create connections between them. Today, more and more Americans are already connected or hooked up to their individual iPhones, TV and so on, as they passively "socialize" with others, while they all remain isolated in many ways.

In his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985), Neil Postman helps explain how America's ever-expanding institutions of entertainment have provided masses of

Americans with new illusions of happiness, which also keep distracting people or keep them away from available opportunities to practice morally significant, character-shaping interactions and feel connected in meaningful ways with others and the world.

Such entertainment can provide completely meaningless distractions from what is going on in people's lives and what may be happening in the world. With an enormous variety of entertainment to choose from, at all times, Americans are supplied with endless possibilities to escape from themselves and others and reality in general twenty four hours a day, every day. Always distracted, many Americans spend very little time pondering upon what it means to be a human being or what they should do with their very limited time on earth, for example. The less we come to understand ourselves, others and the world, the poorer our interactions with others will be, all of which tends not to facilitate human development or the kind of happiness associated with meaningful relationships or connections with others within moral (or human) communities.

Postman argues that television, for example, is not able to facilitate deep, rational thinking, because it very often requires minimal engagement by its viewers. There are much greater opportunities for intellectual and other kinds of engagement and growth when people get involved with reading great literature, for example. Opportunities for serious readers to grow as human beings are heightened if they also participate in book clubs, for example, where they may discuss with other club members, important ideas presented in the books they are all reading.

Our research seems to suggest that higher levels of interaction between individuals and the world, including attempts to implement or practice intellectual experiences through writing or political involvement, for example, tend to lead to greater

levels of individual transformation and happiness. Postman argues that television's increasing focus on entertainment and selling products via advertisement, has had a very negative effect on the ways television *could* be used for education, for example. It is as if content has been sacrificed for the entertainment value and business. Television today does not satisfy the conditions for honest, intellectual interactions or rational discussion. This is what happens, he says, when everything that is shown on TV, including politics, journalism, education and even religion become subject to the demands of entertainment.

Also, it takes time, contemplation and practice for a person to develop or change. People may collect enormous amounts of isolated pieces of information. Simply gathering such fragments of information may be compared to filling up one's kitchen cupboards with containers of different ingredients that when prepared will make edible food. People may still starve to death if they do not take time to prepare and eat the food, so that it may be digested and absorbed and thereby help feed the developing body and produce feelings of well being.

Masses of Americans today have come to view their lives and the world as a series of disconnected, random and entertaining events to be enjoyed. Even when people are presented with tragic events on TV news, for example, such tragedies tend to be rated according to their entertainment value. Important issues underlying such events are often missed or ignored. Therefore watching the news on American TV today may not help viewers get a deeper understanding of the world within which they live and interact in ways that are also intimately related to their own process of moral development. Important moral information available within television news reports from all over the world tends to be blotted out by all the emphasis on entertainment or show business.

Unlike the suggestion by George Orwell in his novel “1984” (1949), Postman is not proposing that America’s central government has an aggressive plan for power in the ways they use TV. Instead, Postman seems to indicate that the entertainment addiction in America today is similar to what was happening in Huxley’s *Brave New World*. Within Huxley’s fictional world, almost all citizens were so thoroughly pacified by the availability of entertainment and other pleasures that they simply (passively) complied with their central government program like robots.

More recently, after Postman’s time of observations, the Internet has become a very important source of information all over the world. The Internet has produced tremendous opportunities for important interactions between masses of Americans and the whole world. However, the Internet is also being widely used as a source for all kinds of entertainment by many entertainment addicted Americans. And, of course the Internet has also become a very important and distracting source of constant advertisement for America’s many businesses.

In his book *Leisure, The Basis of Culture* (1948) Josef Pieper describes the significant difference between idleness, which is a state of being disconnected from ourselves, others and the world, even when “busy”--and leisure.

Pieper explains: “Idleness in the old sense, then, has so little in common with leisure, that it is the very inner disposition to non-leisure, that it is really “lack of leisure”. There can only be leisure when man is at one with himself, when he is in accord with his own being.”²

² Josef Pieper, *Leisure, The Basis of Culture* (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 1998), 30.

On the other hand, Pieper also says:

Leisure is a form of stillness that is the necessary preparation for accepting reality; only the person who is still can hear, and whoever is not still, cannot hear. Such stillness as this is not mere soundlessness or a dead muteness; it means rather that the soul's power, as real, of responding to the real – a *co*-response, eternally established in nature – has not yet descended into words.³

As stated earlier, the research behind this dissertation does not support the idea that there is any kind of evil conspiracy leading to the many, recent changes among modern Americans. Instead of suggesting that some centralized government has come up with an evil plan to gain control, for example, our findings seem to suggest that the acceptance of the idea of technique and efficiency, as our new, most important value, which also made centralization of our institutions necessary, is a result of many, serious philosophical, psychological, religious and political mistakes for which we are all more or less responsible.

And unlike Ellul, who also felt there is no way back after having chosen technique as our new “religion”, the overall findings of this research, seem to suggest that even the most serious mistakes human beings have made, can be corrected, if discovered, and if some persons are still open to the discovery of new ideas, or the rediscovery of old ideas, which may be implemented and lead to important changes for the better.

³ Ibid.

Chapter 7

Looking at the Centralized Way of Being in America Today: Revisiting Three Institutions; the Family, Public Education and the Neighborhood

An ever increasing number of activities, hypothesized to be important, character-shaping practices that were still available for masses of both young and older Americans fifty years ago are now being carried out by government created, centralized systems. As Ellul argued, this take-over has been happening because the western world, starting around the time of the Industrial Revolution, came to choose technique or efficiency and material/economic development as its new, number one concern. As Ellul contended, technique requires centralization of all institutions for the sake of efficiency and material progress. Centralization of our institutions is definitely more efficient, in the short run, when it comes to time and money, than allowing individuals and small communities the extra time it may take for them to live and work while also considering individual, uniquely human (moral and other) choices. Allowing people to practice the uniquely human (moral) way of being will include extra time to think about possible consequences of what they are doing and how they therefore may proceed. Unlike machines, individuals also make mistakes, which may take time to correct. However, such mistakes may also provide important learning opportunities for both individuals and beyond. Centralized, amoral, mechanical systems can bypass many such “inefficient” uses of time.

Granted, centralization of certain aspects of American life has been both necessary and very beneficial in many ways, taking care of multiple tasks that individuals and/or small communities cannot do on their own. The problem that is being discussed

here has to do with the degree to which the idea of centralization has been applied.

Within this dissertation it is being suggested that our most recent, inappropriate applications of technique or centralization may have turned a good idea (within appropriately limits) into a possibly very destructive one. Again, the great principle of subsidiarity, which has been mentioned before, speaks of a possibly ideal way of organizing any society, suggesting that all matters should be handled by the smallest, competent authority, all the way down to the individual, rather than by some higher, central authority.

Keeping the theories of Ellul and Aristotle in mind, it seems as if America's present, government-created systems may be affecting masses of Americans in ways that are similar to the way "bad parents" affect their children, when they spoil their children by doing the children's homework (for example) *for* them and thereby enable or rather disable their children.

Our welfare system, for example, which provides help for many, also seems to encourage many Americans to give up their responsibilities or (undeveloped) abilities when faced with difficult, but possibly natural and important challenges they must face in order to develop or reach their potential. Such individuals may thereby forego crucial opportunities to grow and flourish as human beings through increased interactions with others and the world in ways that will help them develop into morally mature and happy citizens, who may also become important assets to their communities and society.

As mentioned earlier, America's centralized systems of our society have also come to take over and more aspects of public education, which in the past belonged to local schools and local teachers. The important, creative, character-developing work

involved in local, public schools when the local schools were allowed create their own curriculum and their ways of assessing their students, for example, did not only help teachers become excellent educators, but also gave rise to new, local ideas, which then could be shared with other schools and so on.

Parents, who fulfill their important role as parents, do not only help their children grow toward moral maturity. Through their excellent way of parenting they also help themselves thrive within their *continuous* development as human beings. Good parents model and expose their children to the many aspects of the good life, the virtuous life, and thereby encourage their children to practice the morally good way of being. They will not, for example, start doing the character-shaping practices *for* their children, which would be equal to stealing the most valuable part of their children's rightful inheritance.

Both governments and parents may facilitate the development of interdependent, morally mature, creative and happy human beings or they may enable the tragic development of dependent, immature, unhappy moral midgets. It all depends on the kinds of experiences (intellectual and all other) to which they help expose their citizens or children.

Our brief visit within three of America's institutions (as they are today) will of course not constitute a full analysis of these institutions, but is an attempt to offer a few examples of how our most recent forms of centralization may be affecting these institutions in negative ways. As we will see, the suggested, negative effects from recent institutional changes tend to show up both within the initial process of human or moral development in the young as well as within the continuous process of development of America's adult generations.

About America's Centralized Family

Unlike the way things were in America half a century ago, when most mothers stayed home with their children, it is no longer viewed as necessary, efficient or affordable for masses of American parents to actually parent their children. Our enormous centralized systems, which have been created to promote efficiency and economic development in America, have also drastically raised the cost of living. Although parents may choose to work away from the home for reasons other than the rising cost of living, many American parents feel they can no longer afford the choice to have one parent stay home with their small children. It appears that more and more parents feel forced to leave their young children within (also very expensive) private or centralized daycare centers, for example, so that both parents can work, away from their families, in order to be able to afford their often extravagant homes within their “bedroom communities”. American parents today, who feel they can afford enough time to actually parent their children, seem to have become the exception rather than the norm.

The research of Stephanie Coontz, a historian at The Evergreen State College in Washington and the author of *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and the American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* (2011), shows that in the 1950s, only 19% of mothers with small children worked outside the home. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of 2008, more than 60% of mothers with young children were in the work force. Of course the recent increase in divorce rates and women having children while remaining single also complicate interpretations of these statistics.

Recently, the number of families who use other persons to care for their children has gone down. The reason for this may be that many parents have come to realize that

daycare has become so expensive that they do not actually save money by having others raise their children.

In addition to many certified, private childcare options away from the family, our centralized government has also come up with more centralized day care solutions for the many problems that may have been caused by the drastically increased cost of centralization. And, certainly, within both privately owned and government-created daycare centers, masses of children can certainly be kept safe and learn valuable lessons while being parented by trained and certified workers or specialists.

However, as our research seems to suggest, even if the children may be kept safe and have positive learning experiences with childcare workers, much may be lost within this kind of reconstruction of the family, affecting human i.e. moral development and happiness for both children and their parents, for the sake of “efficiency”. Even though many children may do well, in spite of often spending very little time with their parents and other family members, it is difficult to assess what, and how much, is lost for both children and parents with the recent reduction of interactions within the family, the children’s first and most important, small, moral community.

When children spend most of their waking hours with a few, government trained workers, for example, this greatly reduces the amount of opportunities for parents to impart or transmit the variety of ideas and values that individual parents may possess. Thus, the children’s “idea pool” may be greatly diminished. Granted, many parents may not all have good ideas to share. Still, in order for children and all human beings to be creative and develop their ability to think critically, they need to be exposed to more than one set of (centralized) politically correct ideas, for example.

The great reduction of *time* for parents to share their ideas or values with their children is not only a loss for both the individual parents and their children, but also for their children's children and the future of the American culture. George Orwell once wrote that the loss of a person equals the loss of an entire perspective: "One mind less, one world less."¹ What Orwell says here may certainly be applied to the losses associated with the great reduction of opportunities for parents to discuss their ideas with their children, which may provide unique fodder for their children's development and for the continuous human or moral development of the parents.

Indirectly, the use of daycare centers removes innumerable opportunities for masses of America's parents to respond to their children at specific, sometimes crucial moments, when the children may benefit greatly from careful responses from someone who knows them well. Every waking hour may include precious, on the spot moments, for transformative interactions between parents and children, which will be lost forever, if they are far away from each other. Needless to say, not all parents who do have ample time to spend with their children use such time wisely. However, parents who do spend time to interact and connect with their children, have a multitude of opportunities to model adult behaviors for them, while introducing them to a variety of experiences that may help their children discover early in life, how different kinds of happiness may be related to certain ways of being, for example, as they help their children (and themselves) move toward moral maturity and true happiness.

In spite of phenomenal technological advances, which provide us with instant access to all kinds of information, for example, there seems to be fewer new ideas

¹ Orwell, "A Hanging," *The Adelphi*, August 1931.

showing up within the American society today, having to do with what it means to be human or how one should live, for example. When it comes to ideas regarding morality, several generations of Americans today seem to be stuck within an intellectual or spiritual war between two (centralized) rigid and narrow-minded sets of ideas/beliefs. “Politically incorrect” conservatives seem to be at war with people they characterize as being “politically correct” liberals, who the conservatives say are behind the idea of our big and growing the central government. The ongoing verbal war between two large groups of Americans seems to have a somewhat paralyzing effect upon creativity and the ability to think individually and critically among today’s Americans, also when it comes to political issues.

There are other problems that also seem to be related to both parents working outside the home. Many exhausted parents, who work long hours away from their homes, often feel guilty for not being more present in their children’s lives. When they finally get to spend time with their children after work, they often play (like children) with their children or watch (often mindless) TV programs, which they do not have time to discuss. Consequently masses of American children do not see their parents model morally mature, adult behaviors. Instead, the children may find their adult models on TV, or they may simply miss any kind of consistent model of adult behaviors altogether.

Also, in order to be able to pay for the centralized way of being, masses of American parents find themselves working within government created, centralized-system-jobs. These centralized system-jobs are often much too complex to be understood by any one person or worker. At best, a few, trained specialists may come to understand one small slice within such enormous system-jobs. When parents and people in general,

do not understand their jobs including the purposes or goals they may be working for, their work experiences tend to become meaningless for many. Thus experiences within the workplace provide fewer opportunities for workers to ask themselves and others important questions regarding the moral goodness or badness regarding the goals and other aspects of their jobs, for example. Such hollow or superficial work experiences may also tend to silence other kinds of creative thinking and activities for many parents, who therefore may have less and less to share with family members when they do get together.

About America's Centralized Public Education

As mentioned when we discussed certain aspects of the institution of the family (above), this next section will also include only some examples of the ways our centralized public education may be affecting human or moral development and happiness for masses of Americans, which is at the center of this exploration.

When public education was first established in America by Puritan settlers in 1635, it was initiated by the Church. America's founders believed that all useful education (public and private) had to be grounded in Christianity. The students were exposed to a rich variety of information, all of which, in the beginning, had religion (Christianity) and the rest of the humanities at its center. Small, initially one room schools, with students of different ages and abilities, provided excellent opportunities for direct interaction between teachers and a great variety of students. Within each school the teachers were encouraged to be involved with the creation and application of most aspects of education. At that time the students' parents were also involved with different aspects of the creative process of formal education within these local, moral

communities. In other words, most members of these small, moral communities were faced with many challenges that made it necessary for them to be creative and to consider a variety of moral questions regarding education. All such activities affected both the field of education and the individual, human development of all who were involved.

Even fairly recently, but before the most recent, escalating degree of centralization, small community teachers still used to be deeply involved in the very fertile, complex process of creating curriculums, syllabi, methods of testing and so on, and they participated in many other aspects of public education within their communities. Being allowed and even encouraged to be involved in all aspects of education kept providing many opportunities for both teachers (and parents who still were involved) to practice and develop their abilities to make moral choices and come up with new ideas (being creative, as Ellul spoke about). All such challenging activities involved in local efforts to create good public schools, for example seemed to allow for a multitude of virtuous practices, which Aristotle described as necessary for full human or moral development and happiness.

However, within centralized America today, although private schools are still somewhat independent of the central government's enormous systems, more and more aspects of public education are being created, regulated and controlled by government experts "at the top". Standardized curriculums and systems of testing are being produced to make sure certain measurable levels of efficiency are being met to satisfy material goals like productivity and financial gains. Such prefabricated or ready-made educational system are being handed down to individual teachers, whose own creative abilities and

understanding of what excellent education may entail, are thereby being put in straitjackets or discouraged in multiple ways.

Recently, some educators and others who are interested in education and our public schools have started to protest against many current trends regarding public education. It is becoming apparent to some teachers, parents and older students that “improvements” that have been measured or observed since public education has become very centralized, may have very little to do with the quality of education. Instead, recent “successes” within our centralized public education systems may simply reflect the increases in the systems’ ability to measure certain variations based on a colossal increase in standardized testing. Such, often arbitrary sets of standardized tests, for example, may help the government seem more efficient, but may not be helpful for America’s continuous search or strive for excellent education for all students, requiring openness to ideas from all teachers, parents and students within their local schools and communities.

Concerned teachers and others have begun to talk and write about the ways public education seems to be reduced to meeting certain demands for efficiency, as in training students to think and act in ways that may lead them toward certain professions and levels of financial success. It is also of concern that all public schools are forced to comply with the latest, constricting and often arbitrary demands of the central government, or their school districts will not receive the financial support they need (from the government) in order to remain open. Many of recent changes within public education seem to indicate that our government may have forgotten to consider that behind every educated carpenter, doctor, parent, teacher and so on, is a human being, who, if not educated well, will not really succeed as a person or a professional.

In America today, in order to receive necessary, financial support for public education, it all seems to depend upon how well students do on certain, arbitrary, standardized tests. And in order to help the students to do well on such tests, so that their school will remain open, more and more teachers feel pressured to reduce their education to “teaching to the test”.

Sir Ken Robinson is an internationally known author and speaker, who writes and travels all over the world to help make public education get better. He is a leader in support of facilitating the development of creativity, innovation and human resources in education (and also in business). He has worked with governments and educational systems in Europe, Asia and America. He has written several books on the subject of education, suggesting that education must be changed from the ground up. With that he means that changes must come from the level of practicing teachers, parents and students, instead of from the top down, from the level of the central government. As a speaker he has had some significant impact on audiences all over the world.

His most important message (which also was one of Ellul’s major concerns) is that we seem to have forgotten the significance of creativity. Robinson suggests that creativity is just as important as literacy. Children are born artists, he says; but we seem to educate them out of it, starting from the day they begin their education. Instead of teaching children to think for themselves, grapple with moral and other issues or ideas, says Robinson, America (for example) keeps asking their students questions to which questions they have the choice of four given answers. This kind of education, he argues, seems to produce good workers or operators at best, rather than authentic, creative thinkers.

Robinson also talks about the importance of the relationships between teachers and learners and suggests that such relationships can also be created between students (learners) who can teach each other in groups. Working in groups does not only benefit students in important ways, he suggests, but may also in some modest ways help reduce the enormous cost of public education.

Again, such person to person relationships provide multiple levels of opportunities to practice the multifaceted kind of direct, human interactions, close to the heart of this dissertation. Such resourceful or potent interactions are the beginning of a community. It is a community, and has the potential of facilitating human or moral development and true happiness in very powerful ways among all its members. On the contrary, our present, centralized system of public education, with its long distances between program designers, teachers and students seems to be single-mindedly committed to satisfy the newest and narrow goal; economic efficiency.

The central government-initiated changes have not only affected early education and grammar school teachers. The same zeitgeist, or the spirit of efficiency, has also created changes within higher education in ways that do not seem to value or reward excellent education, excellent teaching. In his book *Scholarship Reconsidered, Priorities of the Professoriate* (1990), Ernest L. Boyer discusses the important issue of the relationships between professors and their students and other issues affecting higher education in America today.

Boyer talks about a new preoccupation with research and the production of new knowledge, and how these new goals, which bring in grants and recognition for colleges and universities (efficiency), seem to have come to undermine the practice of excellent

teaching. Boyer understands the importance of research, of course. What he discusses in his book is the *amount* of time spent by professors to do research, which he suggests is taking away much time needed to provide optimal education.

Boyer says “the tendency in recent years has been to impose a single model of scholarship on the entire higher education enterprise.”² He argues that prior to this recent change education and professorship had valued both discovery (of knowledge), integration of knowledge, teaching and service. He is not suggesting that original research should be banned, of course. But, neither should all other, vital aspects of teaching be eliminated or ignored! Instead, he says: “The work of the scholar also means stepping back from one’s investigation, looking for connections, building bridges between theory and practice, and communicating one’s knowledge effectively to students.”³

Like Ellul, in his singular way, Ernest Boyer and others are suggesting that we do not limit ourselves to simply demand-specific, predetermined results, but that we encourage both teachers and students to approach the unknown, for its own sake and allow the often very meaningful process of exploring subjects from multiple points of view. It takes time to discover and discuss the possible connections between isolated facts and recognize the complex connections between different fields of knowledge.

The preoccupation with production of isolated pieces of published research, which may bring about short term “successes” and financial benefits, has made it more difficult for both teachers and students to take or find the time needed to look for

² Ernest L. Boyer. *Scholarship Reconsidered, Priorities of the Professoriate* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990), 54.

³ Ibid., 16.

possible, deeper connections between different fragments of research, and to interpret their findings. For this reason also, it seems that higher education is being reduced to impressive collections or even hoarding of more or less meaningless, separate facts.

Instead of exposing the young to a variety of information from all fields of knowledge, sowing the seed, which constitutes true education and helps encourage creative and critical thinking and also tends to facilitate individual human or moral development, public education in America today seems to spend much time indoctrinating and training their students to become more and more like machines (as Ellul predicted), serving the centralized America's new religion, efficiency.

One classic example showing how this new, efficiency-driven goal of education has become the norm in America is a comment that was made by former President Clinton, when he spoke to Americans regarding education during his State of the Union Address, January 25, 1994. In a voice of great urgency he asked the nation: "Are our children learning what they need to know to compete and win in the global economy?" for which question he received a standing ovation. For the sake of "efficiency" it seems that all America's institutions, including the family, public education and other moral communities have all been gradually, eventually drastically changed, so that (unintentionally), our entire culture, which shapes all human beings, have become unfit soil for the American soul.

A tendency to undermine the humanities within public education, including our major religions, philosophies, great fiction and the arts, for example, has removed multiple, important opportunities for masses of young Americans to study, from many different angles, and ponder upon the crucial, uniquely human or moral questions

regarding how we should live and what it means to be human. In his book, *Handing One Another Along, Literature and Social Reflections* (2010), Robert Coles talks about the importance of the vicarious, possibly transformative effects of reading great fiction, for example. When people read great stories about other persons' lives, they may identify and (vicariously) interact with such fictitious persons and consider such characters' moral dilemmas and develop compassion toward them. Readers of important fiction may feel challenged and inspired by the moral choices revealed as they "interact" with, and try to understand, how and why different fictional characters think and act the ways they do. Such vicarious experiences can help readers connect with people who are different from them. They may feel compelled to evaluate their own lives, asking themselves what they would have done if they had been in the same situations as the fictional characters find themselves and so on.

Also, by learning in such vicarious ways, about devastating consequences from morally immature choices being made by fictional characters may help young readers avoid making certain, similar bad choices. Great fiction can open our minds and help us better understand both others and ourselves. Stories may also help readers discover the many moral contradictions that appear within our lives and may help develop great empathy for all kinds of human beings, some of whom may find themselves in very complicated situations. Instead of judging other persons' behaviors, from the outside only, reading great literature may help people identify with others, and offer understanding and compassion rather than superficial judgment. Realizing how much more alike than different we are as human beings tends to bring about the important sense

of empathy which may greatly help us all as we interact with others in all kinds of situations, as we act locally and think globally.

In another book *The Call of Service* (1993), which will be discussed more later on, Robert Coles also argues that *service* should be an important component of higher education, because contemplating the individuals' ties to the larger community, what the individual student is able to offer locally and in the world, is a vital part of what colleges and universities are all about.

As touched upon earlier, an increase in the attention to the study of the humanities, including great fiction, can help students better understand and empathize with the thinking and actions of persons from different layers of society, for example. Such compassionate awareness helps students develop open and peaceful relationships with others, rooted in basic values and concerns that all human beings have in common, while they can also appreciate the many interesting differences between persons. These developing abilities are important for our direct relationships within our families and other local communities, but also as we relate directly and indirectly with people of different cultures, religions and nations.

About Centralized America's Loss of other Small, Moral Communities including Neighborhoods

As we have talked about earlier, the family is a human being's first and most consequential community. It is the most important community for the child's development, due to the fact that the younger the brain is the more pliable, impressionable and vulnerable it is. Therefore our earliest experiences do not determine, but play a most important role in shaping our character in ways later experiences cannot.

Later experiences can make remarkable differences, but the foundational childhood experiences will always play an important role within later experiences. Because moral development is a life-long process, it seems to follow that all societies should keep maintaining and improving a variety of moral communities also beyond the nuclear family, so that if one community fails, people may get involved in other moral communities, where they may begin or continue their human or moral development.

The important introduction to the larger world, beyond the nuclear family, may first happen within one's neighborhood, followed by local schools, churches and so on. As Robert Coles and others have suggested, in order for individuals to continue to grow and be truly happy, it is crucial that the young are vigorously helped to break out of their natural tendencies toward self-centeredness, viewing themselves and their family for example as more important or valuable than everyone and everything else. Starting within the family, all young persons will benefit greatly from being gradually, but consistently exposed to, and learn to interact in compassionate ways with others and the larger world of which they all are original and indispensable members. Respectful interactions with others, on many levels, may not only help the ones who initiate such interactions as they develop toward moral maturity and happiness. Such relationships also tend to affect others and the larger world in positive ways toward peace.

As we have discussed before, ever since "work" became centralized and centralized living has gradually become very costly, masses of Americans are spending considerably less time with their families in their homes. A neighborhood is made up of a group of homes. However, when people spend most of their time away from their homes,

they do not spend time in their neighborhood either. Hence, they do not get to know their neighbors and the neighborhood no longer functions as a moral community.

Most American neighborhoods today have turned into so called “bedroom communities”. In these neighborhoods, expensive, often very fancy houses are being used as warehouses or hotels, where masses of Americans keep their many material possessions and sleep, after spending their days working for one of many centralized systems far away from the rest of their families, neighborhoods and other, local institutions.

Since masses of Americans do not spend much time within their neighborhoods, they do not get to know their neighbors enough to have meaningful relationships with them. As will be discussed later, in the 1950s and 60s America still had its (imperfect) neighborhoods and other, small moral communities. Half a century ago, it was still necessary for people to get to know their neighbors for many reasons, including having to rely on neighbors when someone had an emergency and needed help. Back then, there were very few centralized systems that could be called upon to take care of individual problems and relationship issues. Neighbors within these communities, who tended to know each other, were often able to help taking care of many such difficult or challenging situations. And such helpful interventions may have been very helpful for those who were helped, the helpers and the neighborhoods as a whole.

In America today, it is quite common that next door neighbors are complete strangers to one another. Very often people do not know anything about their neighbors until some unfortunate event forces them to call “911”, or they find out on TV news that a tragedy has happened next door, and they are all shocked. *If* neighbors today had more

time for respectful (virtuous) and direct interaction with other neighbors, if such relationships were still valued and encouraged more (through families, education, church and other moral institutions), many healing and character-developing relationships could again be developed inside our neighborhoods today.

Within all neighborhoods there are obviously great differences between neighbors, each of whom has a unique variety of potential and developed strengths and weaknesses. According to Aristotle's theory, such differences are excellent opportunities for moral development, human flourishing, if neighbors connect with each other based on what we all have in common, that we are all imperfect and in need of practicing the virtuous life, so that we may become virtuous. And if neighbors, like Aristotle also explained, do not stand "outside" such potentially high-yielding and creative human interactions, passively using their theoretical knowledge to simply judge the visible behaviors of their neighbors, and instead attempt to get to know their neighbors circumstances, and thereby becoming able to translate their theoretical wisdom to practical wisdom, then great good, including excellent moral development may come of such connections for all involved.

Inside our barren neighborhoods today, people seem to miss out on a multitude of opportunities to interact with neighbors in very meaningful, creative, helpful ways. Such, often inspiring and inspired neighborly acts of kindness, for example, which do not seem to be important or encouraged in our society today, are among the activities that Aristotle describes as (true) happiness. And as such virtuous activities help facilitate individual moral development and happiness among those who practice them, such activities also tend to help improve the neighborhood community.

Being a true neighbor can be compared to being a more or less committed volunteer. In his book *The Call to Service* (1993), Robert Coles examines idealism, the drive that motivates people to be of service to others. Coles' research is based on interviews with volunteers, many of whom have worked in community hospitals, schools and the like. Such volunteers, (including Coles himself), talk about both the deep satisfaction and the hazards that come with this kind of service. Coles makes sure his readers understand that individuals who give of themselves and their time in this way, also see themselves as receivers and learners (aspects of happiness).

Coles talks about the ways volunteerism often grows beyond the limits of the neighborhood; and how it can have a transformative effect upon those who practice helping, even though such helping often include disappointments, doubts and sometimes even despair. The happiness that tends to accompany such service seems to also be a testament to the importance of "small interactions", which sometimes can also lead to lasting social and political change.

During his research Coles discovered that the volunteers who were most successful were the ones who genuinely liked the people with whom they interacted. They did not see themselves as martyrs, but as receivers of gifts, of greater understanding, for example. Also, Coles saw that this kind of service in most cases was not hierarchical but reciprocal. The latter seems to have much to do with an attitude of respect, which Aristotle, for example, also emphasized.

Within the relationships Coles observed, the distinction between teacher and pupil, helper and the helped seemed to disappear. Coles also reminds his readers of the natural connection there is between practicing small community service and coming to

understand the role of service by *all* individuals, not only within their small community, but also within their nation and all nations. Services that are provided by centralized government systems, like our welfare programs, for example, tend to be hierarchical and impersonal. Most often the passive recipients of such services do not have any kind of reciprocal relationship with such a faceless system.

It may be important to talk about the particular kind of small, moral communities that appear to be disappearing within centralized America today. The German sociologist and philosopher Ferdinand Tönnis (1855-1936) is well known for describing the significant difference he saw between “*gemeinschaft*” and “*gesellschaft*”, similar to the distinction between a moral society and a utilitarian or civil society. Tönnis says that within “*gemeinshaft*”, or a moral society, the members of this kind of society tend to consider the interests of the group at least as much as they consider their own, individual interests. They also tend to allow themselves to be regulated by common beliefs regarding what constitutes morally good behaviors for the sake of the individual and the group. All of this seems to be similar to Aristotle’s description of the polis, or the ideal community for virtuous living. Tönnis regarded the family as the perfect example of a moral society.

In contrast, Tönnis described “*gesellschaft*” or civil society as a community or society that tends to value the individual’s self interest and preferring impersonal, monetary connections with others. Social ties tend to be instrumental and superficial and self interest and exploitation often become the norm. Tönnis used modern business associations as an example of such civil societies. In business, members may not care deeply for other members or the product they are making. Tönnis’ description of

“gesellschaft” seems to in many ways be similar to the way America’s centralized systems are functioning today.

Again, we are talking about suggested problems related to the ways recent centralization has made it seem necessary for masses of Americans to leave family, neighborhood, and other small, moral communities for most of their time. Obviously, even within today’s centralized America, there are many exceptions. There will always be persons who manage to create and enjoy excellent family lives, neighborhoods, local churches and other small, moral communities. Many Americans are still able to make such morally good choices for themselves and their families, often as a result of themselves having grown up within prosperous families and their already established communities.

On the other hand, if a parent, for example, who is not independently wealthy, should decide to reject the centralized “gesellschaft” way of being, and instead attempt to rely on a modest income from one parent, so that the other parent can stay home with their children, he or she may very easily fall through the centralized society’s “cracks” and end up homeless or worse. In *Brave New World* (1932), Aldous Huxley describes the dreaded “wilderness”, where centralized citizens of his fictional One World State ended up, if they refused to go along with their central government’s rules.

Technological advancement has made it possible for masses of Americans today to have instant access to all kinds of information and superficial interactions with those who provide such pieces of information from all over the world. However, such interactions or relationships are very limited or restricted. They engage only certain aspects of whole persons, who may still continue to live barren lives. Isolated fractions of

information do not have much meaning unless they become part of a person's larger body of information.

Making meaning out of isolated experiences, (intellectual and other) is a challenging process. It requires time and intentional, creative efforts of thinking and practicing individuals, who will benefit greatly by being able to present or share their ideas with other persons, 1:1 and/or within small groups. Such small-community interactions have the potential of engaging all aspects of individuals involved. Within 1:1 relationships and small groups important information can also be communicated through body language, facial expressions, tone of voice and so on. There is great potential for better understanding through such intimate interactions. And the kind of creativity that may come about within smaller groups tends to facilitate human flourishing and happiness. Naturally, since these kinds of interactions, described above, require both time and the will to create and maintain small, moral communities, such activities tend to be considered very inefficient and therefore not important in centralized America today.

Part Two

Chapter 8

What May Have Happened to Masses of Centralized Americans over the Course of the Last 50-60 Years?

In order to understand better the nature of the supposed, recent decline in human or moral development and happiness among masses of centralized Americans, one may compare the centralized way of being to the lifestyle of certain persons who change their way of being in often impulsive ways in order to find other promised short-cuts to happiness, as in gambling or turning to a life of using drugs, for example. Are there certain similarities between all kinds of behaviors that are based on the illusion that a person may find happiness by manipulating others and the world rather than being engaged within respectful interactions with others and the world in direct and authentic ways? When individuals learn to use and abuse other persons and the world in order to be “happy” or “successful”, instead of practicing and developing their own, uniquely human abilities, it seems obvious that such persons will actually become weaker and weaker as their abilities decompensate. And as people become weaker it seems to follow that they will become increasingly dependent upon others and addicted to whatever exterior sources of “happiness” they have been led to trust, through experiences within their institutions.

In his insightful book *The Addictive Personality; Understanding the Addictive Process and Compulsive Behavior* (1996), Craig Nakken explains the many aspects of the destructive process of developing the addictive personality, including possible causes, stages of development and the many, devastating consequences. What is important about Nakken’s thesis is that he moves beyond the most common descriptions, which tend to

limit addiction to the realm of alcohol and other drug addiction. Instead, Nakken talks about the common denominator of *all* kinds of addiction and dependencies, and describes how very different forms of addiction still lead the addicted persons to varying levels of emotional isolation, shame and even despair. And as we have discussed within this exploration, Nakken has also found that America's institutions today (unwittingly) often tend to encourage addictive behaviors.

Again, it seems that our overall way of being in the world, our intellectual and other behaviors including attitudes, affect our development on many levels, especially our psychological and spiritual development. Within this study we are looking at ways that the progressive centralization of America's institutions may have led many Americans toward an increasing dependency upon their centralized institutions and increasingly addicted to a variety of illusions of happiness, which our centralized systems seem to both promise and provide.

Nakken asserts that humans are naturally spiritual, meaning-seeking beings and that it is only when they dive into the world and exercise their "spiritual principles" that they come alive and can grow or develop as persons. He describes the nature of being spiritual as "...being connected in a meaningful way to the world. It involves having the ability to extract meaning from one's experiences. The feeling of belonging and being an important part of the world is lost as addiction progresses."¹

The author defines addiction as a spiritual disease, and explains further:

"Everybody has the ability to connect with the soul and spirit of others. Because

¹ Craig Nakken. *The Addictive Personality: Understanding the Addictive Process and Compulsive Behavior*, (Center City: Hazelden, 1988), 54.

addiction is a direct assault against the Self, it is also a direct attack on the spirit or soul of the person suffering from an addiction. A person's spirit sustains life; addiction leads to spiritual death."²

Nakken talks about the loneliness, or growing sense of isolation, which is another devastating reality within the addict's self-centered (and therefore isolated) way of being. "Because addiction blocks a person's ability to effectively connect with his or her own spirit, there is little chance to connect with the spirit of others."³

Craig Nakken also emphasizes the many ways attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviors within America's families and other institutions today can very powerfully, though unwittingly, lead the young toward developing the addictive personality. There is a growing focus on attempts to perfect the world around the person, through increased efficiency, for example, which provides many Americans with a false hope that perfection and perfect happiness can be reached "out there" in the materially progressing world.

As we have discussed previously, within the last 50-60 years of steadily increasing centralization of our institutions, Americans seem to have lost, or gradually handed over to our centralized systems, myriads of opportunities for individual citizens to "reach out" (as Nakken says). Our centralized systems have come to absorb many creative, character-shaping individual practices or challenges that always involve a certain level of struggle. And it seems to be these kinds of challenges or struggles that grow toward human or moral maturity and true happiness. In the not so distant past a

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

wealth of such challenges seemed to still belong to most American parents, neighbors and teachers, for example.

As mentioned earlier, Nakken emphasizes that in order for naturally immature persons to become mature, flourishing and happy adults, they must bring forth their unfinished, immature, anxious, but true selves, to engage with others in authentic, non-manipulative ways. This may happen within any moral community of two or more. Such communities seem to be crucial for all individuals, especially when they *begin* their most important work toward connecting with and becoming their true selves. We may compare such a small community to a pot of fine soil, which is crucial for the tender beginnings of the development of the complex and delicate seedling, before the seedling may be introduced to the larger world or earth.

Naturally, it is important that our smaller institutions are designed in ways that help encourage more and more complex interactions that also help people continue their life-long process of human/moral development, as parents, teachers, neighbors, political leaders and so on, as Aristotle, Kohlberg and the German-born, American developmental psychologist Erik Erikson all suggested.

About the often devastating process of developing the addictive personality Nakken argues that addicts come to buy into more and more false and empty promises of relief, false promises of emotional security, a false sense of fulfillment, and the false sense of intimacy with the world. Americans bought into the idea of endlessly accelerating forms of centralization for the sake of efficiency, with a false hope or promise of future perfection and happiness through great material or economic progress. What masses of Americans seem to have forgotten is that the implementation of

enormous institutional changes would not only change America, or the world around them. It would also introduce a new way of being, which would change *them*, the American souls.

Within the complex process of human development Nakken reminds his readers of the fact that in addition to the important human drive for connection, individuals also must deal with two other drives, the drive for power and pleasure, which we share with other animals. Still, the most important human drive, he says, is the drive for meaning. He says that spirituality is all about being connected to others and the world in meaningful ways.

Nakken asserts that the practicing drug-addict, for example, is unable to create a meaningful life because the nature of addiction is truly meaningless and leaves people isolated. Unwittingly addicted persons seem to sacrifice a meaningful life and settle for being controlled by their also natural, non-spiritual drive for power or pleasure. Without authentic and respectful interactions with others and the world, which are necessary components of connectedness, moral development soon becomes arrested within *all* kinds of addicts.

Many of the examples Nakken uses to describe the addictive process are persons who fall into the use of alcohol or other drugs, for the experience of illusions of happiness. However, he also gives examples of many other kinds of behaviors, even seemingly “respectable” ones, all of which produce illusions of happiness, and to which people become addicted. For example, people may become addicted to the illusion of happiness that may be associated with an ever-increasing bank account, or being praised, or being “right”. Others become addicted to illusions of being able to control others,

which they believe is their source of happiness. Whether it is drugs or other addictive behaviors people come to believe they need to be happy, all such dependencies will soon reduce and eventually destroy all meaningful interactions these persons may have with others and the world, as they sink deeper and deeper into a world of isolation, emptiness and grief.

Nakken's theory is based on his thirty years of research and work with individuals he has helped at different stages of the devastating progression involved in the development of the addictive personality. Without intervention, he says, the destructive practices of dependent and addicted persons keep changing these individuals until they eventually become ruled by an ever-increasing, desperate dependence upon drugs, or other addictive behaviors. And, needless to say, while this destructive process is going on, the addicts' true or authentic selves remain undeveloped, dying.

When thinking about America's recent centralization of our institutions, and how it may have affected the process of human flourishing and happiness among Americans, we may return to our example of the interactions between plants and the condition of the soil, their culture. Acorns, for example, will not develop into healthy oak trees if we make drastic changes to the soil or ground where they grow. It seems obvious that we must always consider, not only what we know, but also respectfully remember that there are still many aspects of the life-fulfilling interactions between trees and their soil that we still do not know. Similarly, there is still so very much we do not know about the endlessly complex process of human or moral development. Nevertheless, it seems as if Americans forgot or ignored this important fact, when we chose to make drastic changes

to our institutions to satisfy the requirements necessary to bring about the new primary goal of efficiency and economic growth.

It is well known that before the most recent, radical forms of centralization were established, Americans also participated in many immoral or evil practices, like slavery and other forms of terrible, racial injustices, for example. However, within the very imperfect, smaller communities in America 50-60 years ago, individual Americans were *also*, directly and indirectly encouraged to reach out and get involved when they witnessed other human beings being treated unfairly or cruelly, for example. This was partly because there were not many centralized systems established at that time to take care of such problems. Also because there was more time spent within smaller, moral communities, like families, local schools and neighborhoods and churches, older generations had both place and time to model and encourage virtuous behaviors for the young. Hence, it was not only necessary but also natural for more individual Americans to be creative, reach out and help solve the morally significant problems they witnessed right in front of them.

As mentioned before, Nakken says that a most important underlying reason for the development of the addictive personality is that people are not helped to understand and embrace the many difficult and sometimes painful emotions that are natural aspects of the process of human development, and also helped to accept that such struggles never disappear. No one reaches perfection. In addition, people who develop addictions often live within institutions, like their families, for example, where no one models courageous, authentic behaviors. Instead, their parents often model a variety of manipulative or

inauthentic behaviors, which provide escape from reality and opportunities to avoid dealing with life's normal problems or rather, challenges.

It seems as if all our centralized institutions, and especially our centralized families, public education and neighborhoods are constantly distracting Americans from the most important work or practices involved in developing their true selves and be truly happy. When people are led to believe that happiness is something that can be bought, for example, they will tend to treat the world as a business and people as competing business associates. Instead of focusing on the moral i.e. human relationship between them, people will tend to *use* other human beings as a means to get something from outside themselves which they think will make them happy.

When people keep living in ways that provide escapes from doing the challenging (virtuous) behaviors that tend to lead toward moral maturity, whether such escapes are drugs, excessive shopping or allowing some centralized government system do the developing work for them, such persons tend to remain underdeveloped and become weak or disabled. As they grow weaker they become increasingly dependent upon the institutions that may have led them astray, and addicted to the illusions of happiness that such arrested states of development may also produce.

Again, this exploration is looking at some under-researched consequences of the changes in Americans' way of being, brought about by the recent increases in centralization of all America's institutions. Based on a fairly new (materialistic) idea, Americans came to choose and implement drastic institutional changes for the sake of economic development, maybe without considering carefully enough the many serious, negative effects such changes could have upon Americans' way of being in the world,

affecting their human development, and maybe leading many Americans to develop what Nakken describes as the addictive personality.

It is not the intention of this writer to suggest that our economy and the material world around us do not matter. It is not being argued that our institutions are all about either facilitating economic *or* human development. Instead the mature choice seems to be based on an awareness of and respect for both (or all) aspects of our existence. Human beings need both business communities and moral communities.

When discussing the apparent and always present temptations for human beings to give in to behaviors or activities associated with lower levels of good, it may be important to remember that no person, even highly developed and truly happy persons are feeling happy all the time. There is always something “wrong” with all human beings. Some people call this problem sin. We may call it self-centeredness. We are born immature, but with natural abilities to be developed toward moral maturity within our many human institutions. And the more experience people have of the happiness that is a true part of all virtuous or morally good activities, the less likely they may be to make costly mistakes, which do not only hurt them, but also others and their society.

In order for moral development and happiness to happen, Aristotle emphasized the importance of the small, moral community, “polis” or “city state”, a body of citizens that has as its goal to allow and encourage persons to strive for the ultimate good (happiness). Within this kind of institutions the relationships or interactions between citizens involved with child-rearing, education, political debates and so on, were all geared toward helping all citizens to become fully self-sufficient. These helping relationships always were to exist between the self-sufficient persons and the non-self-

sufficient. Such moral communities were aimed at human flourishing and happiness for all.

Our research, looking into possible, unfortunate consequences of the centralized way of being upon moral, i.e. human development and happiness, suggests that certain aspects of our centralized living have come to eliminate many forms of small, moral communities and have been replaced by large business communities aimed at economic flourishing.

Searching for words to help describe what the virtuous way of being involves, we may again visit Erich Fromm. In his book *The Art of Loving* (1957) he suggests that to love is the ideal, morally good way of being. However, he emphasizes that learning to “love one’s neighbor as oneself” involves hard work. Like all artistic expression, it requires knowledge and effort. Fromm says the art of loving is based on developing the capacity to love others with true humility, courage, faith and discipline. “Genuine love is an expression of productiveness and implies care, respect, responsibility, and knowledge. It is not an “affect” in the sense of being affected by somebody, but an active striving for the growth and happiness of the loved person, rooted in one’s own capacity to love.”⁴ Fromm also adds: “In terms of this discussion of the practice of the art of loving, this means: love being dependent on the relative absence of narcissism, it requires the development of humility, objectivity and reason. One’s whole life must be devoted to this aim.”⁵ What Fromm says here is not what seems to be an important goal for members within our centralized institutions in America today. Fromm is very critical of present day

⁴ Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1961), 59.

⁵ Ibid., 120.

western society, run by a managerial bureaucracy aimed at producing more and consuming more as the main purpose of life.

He says: “If it is true, as I have tried to show, that love is the only sane and satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence, then any society which excludes, relatively, the development of love, must in the long term perish of its own contradiction with the basic necessities of human nature.”⁶

Erich Fromm talks about the importance of objectivity in our interactions with others, stating that we must seek objectivity in every situation, striving not to judge others according to our opinions of others, as such judgments are rooted in our own self-centeredness or narcissism. Instead, like Aristotle emphasized, Fromm maintains that we must learn to discover the other person’s reality as it may be framed by the *other* person’s interests, needs and fears. Only then is there a true interaction or connection between two persons. Such authentic connections are also what bring people out of the isolation that is created by self-centeredness.

It is perhaps impossible to determine a strict causal connection between 1: America’s recent centralization of all its institutions for economic development, including transferring multiple, character-shaping practices from masses of Americans to the centralized systems and 2: a decline in moral development and happiness and a possible development of “an addictive personality” among many Americans. Nevertheless, we have found that recent, excessive forms of centralization of our institutions have indeed removed, or made unnecessary, many individual practices, which in the past may have helped Americans engage more with others and the world in

⁶ Ibid., 133.

meaningful ways, which may have helped facilitate their moral development. Many writers, including Fromm, argue that Americans today seem to settle for a life of self-centeredness (narcissism) and passivity regarding others and community, while depending on others and the world around them to provide them with addictive illusions of happiness.

In *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle talks about the relationships between theoretical and practical wisdom. Both kinds of wisdom are important and work together. When persons make morally good choices as they interact with others in everyday life, they help make provisions for something that is morally good to happen. When one person attempts to respectfully convert general virtuous principles to become true within each particular person and circumstances at hand, this counselor develops practical wisdom. Through such efforts the counselor is transformed.

According to Aristotle, practical wisdom is the cardinal virtue that makes all other virtues possible. He says: “For virtue determines the end, and practical wisdom makes us do what is conducive to the end. Still, practical wisdom has no authority over theoretical wisdom or the better part of the soul any more than the art of medicine has authority over health.”⁷ Aristotle believed that a person needed to understand universal truths in order to become practically wise. Absolute truths seem to work as boundaries while persons exercise practical wisdom.

When it comes to the art of applying universally good principles correctly it is important to also take into account the many cultural differences that come into play at different times in history. As mentioned earlier, at the time of ancient Greece, slavery, for

⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962), 173.

example, was generally accepted. Aristotle found a way to make slavery “fit” within his general philosophy, stating that slaves were necessary to sustain the Greek social and economic system, and that they therefore helped prevent social disorder or chaos. In this case it seems that Aristotle was able to deem it virtuous to accept the lesser of two evils. Aristotle still argued that slavery should be limited to those who were naturally mentally deficient and virtuously inferior. Aristotle also insisted that masters should treat all their slaves well, and he spoke in favor of freeing slaves who seemed to develop capacity for reasoning and virtue and whose conduct had improved.

In America today our culture is very different from the days of Aristotle. Thankfully, in spite increasing levels of centralization, we have moved far beyond the horrors of allowing slavery, or even having to view it as a good practice under any circumstances. However, even if we now have laws that deter people from many observable forms of discrimination, there are multiple other, less observable ways in which Americans continue to discriminate against persons or groups of persons for being “different” from the masses. Such practices seem to be rooted in old, maybe fearful and self-centered attitudes, looking to protect oneself against people who are different from the norm, by rendering them inferior, dishonest, unethical, or wicked.

Although we may have come a long way in some ways, Americans, and humanity in general, while experiencing progress in some areas, are still very far behind perfection, in multiple other ways, including social structures and our way of being within such structures. The hypothesis of this dissertation suggests that our recent, extreme forms of centralization may indeed be hindering rather than facilitating the natural process of human flourishing among today’s Americans.

It has been mentioned earlier that Kohlberg came to the conclusion that most Americans do not develop beyond the conventional level, within which level people tend to make their moral choices based on their self-centered desire to gain the approval of others, or passively seeking to obey existing laws, based on a sense of obligation or fear of punishment. Kohlberg still believed it is possible for human beings to develop morally and learning to appreciate the existence of universally good principles. Like Aristotle, Kohlberg understood that moral development is not something that happens automatically, or that it can simply be handed from one person to another. He understood that this uniquely human development is an endeavor that includes continuous, intellectual and other kinds of work or struggle by each individual within community or institutions that are structured to support this most important enterprise. Kohlberg therefore recommended that (in addition to other institutions) the institution of public education should give the young plenty of opportunities to practice making moral choices within the classroom, which is also a moral community. He suggested that teachers could simply present their students with hypothetical moral dilemmas within the classroom setting, through storytelling, and help students work toward finding universally good solutions to difficult moral problems.

Like Aristotle, Kohlberg believed that such moral education would help the young gain a better understanding of the universally good principles and how to apply such principles within each particular situation. Such practices would help persons become virtuous or bring them into the post conventional level of moral development.

As we continue to look at what may have happened to moral development within America's centralized institutions, especially within the last half a century, it may be

important to look at other observations and views regarding the ideas regarding certain structures of nations and their institutions. Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) came to America in 1831 to explore *Democracy in America* (2003), comparing American democracy to the older French aristocracy. While Tocqueville appreciated the remarkable uniqueness and strengths of the new democracy in America, emphasizing individual freedom, equality and independence, he also warned against the many ways he thought such emphasis on individual freedom could also lead Americans toward increasing self-centeredness and isolation, and cause fragmentation of older, established communities that are essential to true freedom.

While Tocqueville believed in a limited perfectibility of human beings, he felt that democracy's new sense of equality might lead Americans to believe that human perfection was indeed possible, and that they would change their institutions according to this erroneous belief, and thereby possibly destroy both their institutions and themselves. He felt that for this reason aristocracy, although not perfect, offers a safer social structure:

When citizens are categorized according to position, profession, or birth and are all forced to follow the path chance has placed before them, each man thinks that he can see in his own vicinity the utmost limits of human power and no longer seeks to struggle against an inevitable fate. While not absolutely denying man the faculty of improvement, aristocratic nations do not consider it as lasting indefinitely. They entertain progress not total change. They conceive that the condition of future societies is better but not different and while admitting the great steps made by human kind and the possibility of more to come, they restrict its progress within certain barriers which cannot be crossed.⁸

Tocqueville feared that democratic societies would disintegrate if old traditional values, especially *religious* ones, were no longer considered an authority, able to impose religious values upon individual citizens, and explains:

⁸ Alexis de Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*, trans. Gerald E. Bevan. (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 522.

Every single religion places the object of man's desire beyond and above possessions of this earth, and by its nature lifts his soul toward those regions which are much above the senses. In addition, they all impose upon each man certain obligations toward the human race or encourage a shared endeavor, sometimes drawing him away from a contemplation of himself.”⁹

Tocqueville worried that Americans' desire and allowance for increased freedom for the individual would encourage citizens to forget about the larger society, including important religious and political communities, and lead them toward individual isolation and increasing narcissism, starting with a preoccupation with private needs and wants, including a new emphasis on material acquisitions and comfort. Tocqueville predicted that the new emphasis on equality and freedom people would also tend to isolate themselves within small groups of friends, all of whom think and act like they do, and simply forget about the larger society, which would consequently fall apart. For Tocqueville a life without great challenges, including direct, religious and political involvement was not only a substandard way of life for individual citizens, but would also lead to failure of the nation.

Looking back, it seems that many of Tocqueville's ideas and predictions regarding certain potentially negative aspects of democracy, including its push for centralization, which he also acknowledged, were well grounded. Some of his predictions are recognizable among the many of the proposed problems centralized Americans are struggling with today. As we have discussed earlier, for the sake of efficiency and material progress, for example, Americans have come to hand over important, uniquely human activities to enormous machine-like, centralized systems and an increasingly powerful central government, leaving masses of Americans isolated from participation

⁹ Ibid., 512.

within local, religious and political communities. Tocqueville worried about the development of democratic despotism. He did not think that the majority would somehow use its power to violate the rights of some minority, but that Americans would come to surrender their right to govern themselves by handing over their individual power or duties to the rule of an all-powerful central government.

As we have seen, the decline in individual participation by individual Americans within moral communities has been gradual. Even 50-60 years ago, many Americans were still active within a variety of local, moral communities, which may have greatly helped numerous earlier Americans become more mature and happy human (i.e. moral) beings.

In his book *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville says:

I have said how the fear of disorder and the love of comfort imperceptibly led democratic nations to increase the functions of central government which seemed to them to be the only authority strong, intelligent, and stable enough of itself to protect them from anarchy. I hardly need to add that all the special circumstances which increase the trouble and instability of a democratic society enhance this general feeling and lead individuals increasingly to sacrifice their rights for the sake of their tranquility.¹⁰

Democracy was initially about leaving old, aristocratic traditions behind, breaking with the past and therefore leaving homes, churches and other old, moral communities behind in order to begin anew, finding oneself and so on. Such changes do not necessarily mean that one cannot also create new, democratic, moral communities, based on basic, universal or self evident principles or truths. Unfortunately, it seems as if Americans may have been so eager to obtain freedom from old tyrants or oppressors that they may have come to “throw the baby out with the bath water”. They may have

¹⁰ Ibid., 788.

forgotten to consider the importance of certain, knowable basic truths and a continued respect for the still larger mysterious aspects of human existence, which we do not know, as we have discussed earlier within this study.

Tocqueville was afraid that Americans' wish for freedom and equality was based on an immature wish to be free *from* having to practice the uniquely human way of being within all kinds of moral communities, which would not only help develop individuals, but also their society. Americans seemed to be giving less thought to what their democracy may help them become free *to* do, including active participation within religious, political and other moral communities.

One of Tocqueville's descriptions of masses of Americans, as they moved toward an increasingly centralized government, which he predicted would not have as its aim to "prepare men for manhood" but seeking to keep them "in perpetual childhood", as they seek to enjoy themselves, goes like this:

I see an innumerable crowd of men, all alike and equal, turned in upon themselves in a restless search for those petty, vulgar pleasures with which they fill their souls. Each of them, living apart, is almost unaware of the destiny of all the rest. His children and personal friends are for him the whole of the human race; as for the remainder of his fellow citizens, he stands alongside them but does not see them; he exists only in himself and for himself; if he still retains his family circle, at any rate he may be said to have lost his country.¹¹

150 years later, in his book *Habits of the Heart; Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (1985), Robert Bellah, who used Tocqueville's expression "habits of the heart", wrote about the five year study he and his colleagues carried out, interviewing Americans about their thoughts regarding individualism and the need for community and

¹¹ Ibid., 805.

commitment to one another. Many of their findings seem to agree with most of Tocqueville's predictions and conclusions fifty years earlier.

Both de Tocqueville and Bellah seemed to think that a moral community should be based on a "thick" consensus. In order for a community to "work", i.e. helping individuals become morally mature and happy, while also taking care of their society, Tocqueville and Bellah seemed to agree that individual members had give up some of their individualism or private ideas and simply commit to old, highly valued traditions. Bellah tells a story of a typically individualistic member of a church, Sheila, who expressed her own interpretation of aspects of the Bible. The book suggested that Sheila was not really part of the Christian community she belonged to. Instead, she was committed to "Sheilaism".

Jacques Ellul, who was a Christian anarchist, whose theory we have discussed earlier, emphasized the importance of authentic, individual participation within all aspects of our lives, and emphasized that human beings should think for themselves and grapple with their moral choices based on their personal convictions. If a person expresses his or her own authentic interpretation of one or many mysterious aspects of the religion to which they are committed, does that mean they thereby are no longer important members of such a community? Is it possible that authentic and creative community members like "Sheila" are helping religious and other communities remain alive and well, as the community and all its members continue to grow?

Thomas Moore (born in 1940), who was, and still is, deeply involved within the Catholic Church (community), earned a PhD in religion, but decided not to become a priest. Instead he chose to work as a psychotherapist and spiritual writer. Moore writes

and lectures in the fields of archetypal psychology, mythology and imagination. He does not see a problem with community among persons of different religious and other orientations. Rather, he sees it as a great source of enrichment. In his book *A Religion of One's Own. A Guide to Creating a Personal Spirituality in a Secular World* (2015), Moore emphasizes the many benefits of remaining within a greater religious community while we do our personal work. At the same time he also talks about the equally important and meaningful, personal dimension of religion, which he believes must be allowed and encouraged:

...A religion that comes out of our hearts and minds and is tailor-made to our own values and sensitivities. This new approach looks to formal religions for insight, but it takes root and flourishes in an individual life. When I speak of a religion of one's own, I'm not talking about a selfish, ego-centered, loosely patched together spiritual concoction. I am recommending a courageous, deep-seated, fate-driven, informed, and intelligent life that has sublime and transcendent dimension. It can be shared in a community. It can be accomplished inside or outside a traditional religious organization.¹²

Returning to Nakken's description of the addictive personality and the non-virtuous, dishonest, crippling way of being that leads many toward a life of unhappiness, dependency, and addiction to illusions of happiness, we can see some similarities between certain personality traits of many centralized Americans today and the addictive personality that develops among persons who get into a meaningless life of dependence upon and addiction to drugs or gambling, for example. As we have learned; without receiving plenty of exposure to the transforming experiences of direct, respectful interactions between individuals within moral communities, many centralized Americans, like drug addicts, for example, seem to become isolated and unhappy, looking for

¹² Thomas Moore. *A Religion of One's Own: A Guide to Creating a Personal Spirituality in a Secular World*, (New York: Penguin Random House, 2014), 12.

happiness in self-centered ways, which do not lead to true happiness. Instead such search often leads Americans toward a life of increasing dependence upon the central government or its many centralized systems and addiction to centralized America's increasing provision of meaningless illusions of happiness.

Being encouraged by the structure of one's society to practice the good life within community, does not mean that such a life is not also full of challenges, as we have discussed before. A good life may at times be extremely difficult, involving tasks that may also seem very "inefficient" within a centralized society, as Ellul discussed. However, with the virtuous attitude and practices that Aristotle describes, all such challenges may lead to great strides in human development and be enormous sources of true happiness.

There is another important point that may be worth mentioning as we discuss what may have happened, and may be happening, to or among masses of centralized Americans. When persons who have become addicted to drugs, for example, discover that their addictive behaviors do not really make them happy, they do not typically think that their lifestyle or source of "happiness" may be worthless or detrimental to them. Instead, addicts tend to figure that the reason their extrinsic sources of "happiness" are not working is simply that they are not getting *enough* from their source. Drug addicts may blame their doctors or drug dealers. Centralized Americans may blame the government for not simply giving them what they feel they are entitled to receive. This kind of thinking leads already dependent people into deeper and deeper dependence and misery, as they keep increasing their inauthentic, destructive practices, manipulating

others and the world around them in order to receive more illusions of happiness to which they have become addicted.

As discussed earlier, the *virtuous* activities that Aristotle identifies as true happiness as “desirable in themselves” have become irrelevant for very many Americans today. A conversation between two persons, who are simply interested in each others’ ideas, is just one, simple example of such a morally good activity associated with true happiness. Other kinds of activities, says Aristotle may be “necessary and desirable only for the sake of something else”.¹³ Business-like interactions comes to mind as an example of the latter.

Aristotle carefully explains why he defines happiness as an activity, related to a way of being, rather than a (biological) human trait: “We stated, then, that happiness is not a characteristic; (if it were,) a person who passes his whole life in sleep, vegetating like a plant, or someone who experiences the greatest misfortunes could possess it. If, then, such a conclusion is unacceptable, we must, in accordance with our earlier discussion, classify happiness as some sort of activity.”¹⁴

Still, many centralized Americans seem to believe they are happy being “comfortably numb” (Charles Barber) or being constantly distracted by an endless variety of extrinsic sources of happiness. Centralized America has made it very possible and enticing for very many to keep increasing their collections of material goods, get more antidepressants, more entertainment and so on. This is all part of the very nature of dependency and addiction.

¹³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962), 286.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Based on the theories we have examined, it appears that moral development and true happiness always involve many challenges or struggles, which may be necessary in order for a person to grow as a human being, like work that involves lifting helps muscles develop. Brene Brown, a writer and research professor has written a book, *The Gifts of Imperfection. Let Go of who You Think You're supposed to be and Embrace Who You Are* (2010), uses a different kind of language as she offers a unique description of what she sees as most problematic among today's Americans' way of being, affecting their ability to develop into truly human, authentic and happy persons. Brown has interviewed men and women from all walks of life, and discovered some basic problems or challenges that seemed to stand in the way of these persons' development within their private lives as well as in their involvement within religious or political offices.

In some way resembling the theories of Fromm, Zukav, Nakken and other writers we have discussed earlier, Brown talks about love and belonging as being essential to the human experience. Through her research she found that the main thing that separated those she interviewed, who did feel a deep sense of belonging, from those who did not, had to do with their sense of "worthiness". People in our individualist society were comparing themselves to others as if life is a competition. Those who figured they were unworthy of love or belonging tended to feel shame.

This author and speaker talks about the importance of courage, compassion and connection and describes what many of the self-centered, fearful Americans she interviewed (including herself) tend to do instead of getting started being authentic within their interactions with others. "When we spend a lifetime trying to distance ourselves from the parts of our lives that don't fit with who we think we are supposed to

be, we stand outside of our story and hustle for our worthiness by constantly performing, perfecting, pleasing and proving.”¹⁵ (p. 23) Brown also found that people seemed to be very afraid of natural feelings of uncertainty. She was surprised to find that it was not only scientists who sometimes found it difficult to embrace faith when it comes to the unknown. She also interviewed persons of faith, especially persons who lean toward fundamentalism or extremism, who seemed to choose certainty over faith.

When addressing the importance of being authentic, of becoming honest within our interactions with others and the world in order to grow as moral beings, Brown uses an example from her own experiences and practices as a public speaker:

I try to make authenticity my number one goal when I go into a situation where I’m feeling vulnerable. If authenticity is my goal and I keep it real, I never regret it. I might get my feelings hurt, but I rarely feel shame. When acceptance or approval becomes my goal, and it doesn’t work out, that can trigger shame for me: ‘I’m not good enough.’ If the goal is authenticity and they don’t like me, I’m okay. If the goal is being liked and they don’t like me, I’m in trouble. I get going by making authenticity the priority.¹⁶

Brene Brown says about authenticity that it is a choice that goes along with accepting that we are imperfect human beings.

Choosing authenticity means cultivating the courage to be imperfect, to set boundaries, and to allow ourselves to be vulnerable; exercising the compassion that comes from knowing that we are all made of strength and struggle; and nurturing the connection and sense of belonging that can only happen when we believe that we are enough.¹⁷

She adds that authenticity demands wholehearted living and loving, even when, (or maybe especially when) this is difficult.

¹⁵ Brene Brown. *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You’re Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are*. (Center City: Hazelden, 2010), 23.

¹⁶ Ibid., 54.

¹⁷ Ibid., 50.

Brene Brown's research seems to be in agreement with Aristotle's theory that we become courageous, compassionate and connected by practicing these behaviors. "You learn to swim by swimming. You learn courage by couraging,"¹⁸ she says (allowing humor within her writing).

This writer defines the connection with others, which we all need and want, as "the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship."¹⁹

Because the suggested development of dependency and addiction among centralized Americans tend to happen over time, such a progression may be hard to assess, especially for persons who are very busy practicing the centralized way of being. Maybe many centralized Americans feel good, like the frog that found himself in a pan of comfortable, lukewarm water, and did not realize, as the heat was gradually turned up, that he was being cooked. Again, this dissertation is not supporting any kind of conspiracy theory. Instead, we have been looking at the ways our more or less conscious choice to centralize America's institutions to single-mindedly support economic development may be affecting human or moral development and happiness among today's Americans.

We seem to have found that Individuals who are *not* helped or encouraged by their institutions to break out of their (initially natural) immaturity or self-centeredness, seem to remain immature, isolated and unhappy while pursuing lower levels of happiness

¹⁸ Brene Brown. *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are*. (Center City: Hazelden, 2010), 7.

¹⁹ Ibid., 19.

(or illusions of happiness). People who remain immature naturally continue to make immature and often disastrous choices for themselves and their society as they try to figure out what to do about the many problems or challenges they face, some of which tend to be the consequences of their own self-centered choices. Needless to say, many such immature choices and practices may not only hurt the immature person, whose life, may end in absolute despair. Individuals who develop the addictive personality also tend to have a ruinous effect on their families, friends and society in general.

Obviously, the consequences of a person's addiction to, and dependence upon heroin, for example, may be more immediate and often far more devastating than the slower and more subtle, but still serious consequences for many centralized Americans, who become dependent upon our centralized systems that have absorbed a multitude of their uniquely human, character-shaping practices and thereby possibly seriously hindering their development toward moral maturity and true happiness.

Chapter 9

About Another Way of Being: Moral Development of Children and Adults

We have discussed at length the ways America's centralized society may have affected human or moral development and happiness among masses of Americans today. It has been suggested that our increasingly centralized institutions, which have been created to facilitate material progress, may have removed many aspects of the kind of environment or culture that may be necessary in order to help facilitate human development toward moral maturity and happiness among Americans.

The centralized way of being has been contrasted with Aristotle's description of the morally good or virtuous way of being, which he perceived as the only way of being, within which human beings may be able to develop into morally mature and therefore happy persons. Aristotle also talked about the importance of a certain size of institutions or the moral community (polis) within which citizens live, if they were to provide the greatest amount of opportunities for direct interactions between citizens and others and the world and thereby encourage and support human flourishing, human excellence.

"Think globally, act locally", is an expression that has been attributed to Jacques Ellul. This statement is a great reminder of the fact that a person can only interact directly or fully on the local community level. Still, Ellul says, whenever we act locally in a virtuous manner, our actions must also reflect our awareness of other ideas besides our own, and the equal value or rights of other individuals, other groups of individuals and other nations.

It should be mentioned again, that even though increasing centralization of our institutions may have made it difficult for numerous Americans to discover and practice

the virtuous and therefore fulfilling life, many affluent Americans, who have both intellectual and financial resources, have still managed to create the kinds of small, moral communities that help them and their families to remain connected and interacting with others in many important ways and therefore truly flourish as human beings and make great contributions to their communities. Nevertheless, within this study the main concern is that for masses of Americans who may have been affected by the materialistic spirit of technique and the advancing centralization of our institution in ways that have made the art of the virtuous living, which facilitates human or moral development and true happiness, seem both far removed and insignificant.

A Powerful Example of Excellent Moral Development in America, Before the Most Recent Increase in Centralization Changed the Structure of Our Institutions Again

Through his writing the American author and child psychiatrist, Robert Coles, who we have visited before, has also given his readers some wonderful examples of healthy human or moral development in America's past, 50-60 years ago, when he did extensive research among black and white youngsters in New Orleans and many other areas of America, during the time when students had to face segregationist mobs in order to go to school, for example. Coles was amazed to find that even children could be very aware of complex and important questions regarding what is right and wrong and how one should live.

As mentioned earlier, before the most recent, enormous, centralized systems were created to take over myriads of challenges that used to be important aspects of the daily lives of individual citizens, there were plenty of opportunities and a need for masses of

Americans to participate on many levels, as parents, educators and other kinds of leaders for example within their (very imperfect) small communities. Within local, moral communities 50-60 years ago people were also faced with multiple, often very difficult challenges they *had* to deal with in order to survive. For example, there were plenty of appalling, unresolved social and political problems at the time. Often enormous challenges were waiting for members of these small communities to take action. Undoubtedly and unfortunately, such serious racial and other social problems also presented opportunities for some members to react in destructive ways.

Still, within the communities where Coles worked and did his research, he discovered a sense of responsibility, which was communicated to the younger generations, verbally and by example, by older community members within their families, local churches and neighborhoods. At that time different generations also spent more time together than what is common today. From Coles' interviews one can tell that direct, interactive relationships between the generations were very alive and well at that time. It seemed to be a natural part of the daily lives for most members of these communities to show all community members, including the young, that they were truly connected to each other and that one person's problems were everybody's problems, to be taken care of by all.

By being allowed and encouraged to get involved within their small, but troubled communities, many Americans, who experienced the often violent struggles connected with civil rights movements in the 1960s, seemed to develop into remarkably mature, strong and unique individuals. Their morally good actions did not only take care of immediate problems, but often helped facilitate social change, one step at a time.

Robert Coles interviewed both black and white children, some of whom had been in the middle of the horrific experiences of marching through crowds of often violent people who were lined up around local schools to protest against integration of black students into white schools.

Coles did not spend much time analyzing these children's backgrounds or put them into certain philosophical or psychological systems. Rather, he let the children speak, describing their experiences by simply telling their stories. The stories spoke volumes about these children's abilities to think as moral beings. Being a psychiatrist, Coles admits that in the beginning, like many psychiatrists and psychologists, he was looking for possible psycho-pathology within these youngsters, who were facing incredible social injustice and violence. To his amazement he found that these children instead possessed a keen sensitivity to moral and even political values and ideas. He observed that many of these youngsters, with the support and guidance from their parents, grandparents, teachers, preachers, neighbors and other community members, had developed into courageous, morally sound and happy young persons in spite of (or because of?) multiple unresolved, serious problems in their lives within these communities.

Coles saw the family and the small community as something like a miniature state, characterized by the same moral and political concerns as a nation. He observed amazing moral development within youngsters, who had been taught and encouraged by their institutions (family, local churches and neighborhoods) to participate and practice virtuous behaviors within their communities, which were fraught with social injustice and poverty.

In his book *The Moral Life of Children* (1986) Robert Coles tells his readers the amazing story of Ruby Bridges, one of many ordinary people, who also grew up in New Orleans during the years of great social injustices in the 50s and 60s. Coles interviewed Ruby when she was ten years old and asked her to tell him about her last four years of a very unusual school attendance during the attempts to integrate black children into the previously all white schools. At age six this black little girl walked past very hostile crowds of protesters in order to get to her classroom. At age ten, this is Ruby's prodigious story told in retrospect:

"I knew I was just Ruby, just Ruby trying to go to school, and worrying that I couldn't be helping my momma with the kids younger than me, like I did on the weekends and in the summer. But I guess I also knew I was the Ruby who had to do it...go into that school and stay there, no matter what those people said, standing outside. And besides, the minister reminded me that God chooses us to do His will, and so I had to be His Ruby, if that's what He wanted. And then that white lady wrote and told me she was going to stop shouting at me, because she'd decided I wasn't bad, even if integration was bad, then my momma said I had become 'her Ruby', that lady's, just as she said in her letter, and I was glad: and I was glad I got all the nice letters from people who said I was standing up for them, and I was walking for them, and they were thinking of me, and they were with me, and I was their Ruby, too, they said."¹

This poignant story shows that Ruby had already developed the moral ability to observe herself, her behaviors and her motivations, by growing up while interacting within her family and many other, influential community members and also her adversaries. As she talked about her experiences she also expressed concern for her mother and siblings. She talked about the happiness she felt when she realized that her courageous behaviors had not only helped her, but had also helped affect positive changes in her adversaries and many others.

¹ Robert Coles. *The Moral Life of Children*. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), 9.

We have discussed Lawrence Kohlberg's research and theory earlier, regarding different levels of moral development, which he observed get started in childhood. He found that elementary school children tended to behave in socially acceptable ways in order to simply avoid punishment from teachers or parents (Kohlberg's pre-conventional level of moral development), for example. The next level of moral development, the conventional level, also seemed to be based on a somewhat self-centered attitude that seeks to do what will secure approval of others, for example. Kohlberg felt that most people in society did not develop beyond the conventional level. Still, Kohlberg described a post-conventional level of moral development, which he believed could be greatly encouraged and stimulated through certain forms of education, which will be discussed. This post-conventional stage includes an understanding of social mutuality and a sincere interest in the welfare of others. This stage is based on respect for universal principles (rather than subjective likes and dislikes) and requires a developed conscience.

With Kohlberg's theory of moral development in mind, it seems that the amazing Ruby Bridges in some ways had entered into Kohlberg's post-conventional level of moral development quite early in her life. With encouragement from her family, church and other small, moral communities and plenty of opportunities, including need for virtuous or morally mature behaviors all around her, Ruby, seemed to have developed very early a genuine interest in the needs of everybody around her. She even demonstrated love and concern for people who attacked her as she was trying to "do the right thing"; something we know seems to be very difficult for most people, even religious and political leaders.

Ruby seemed to have developed an understanding of social mutuality, even when this kind of empathetic view was very difficult for her to consider. Ruby's story is

certainly a wonderful testimony to the truth of Aristotle's assertion that it is through *practicing* morally good or virtuous behaviors that we may become morally mature.

From Ruby's story we come to understand that moral conflicts were being discussed within her family, neighborhood and other local communities like her church. Such discussions and encouragement from the adult generations to not just react in self-centered ways, but to act in creative ways for the common good, may have had much to do with Ruby's move toward higher stages of moral awareness and development. Her story is therefore also an example of the great benefits that may come from formal and informal, guided discussions of moral dilemmas in schools, as Kohlberg advocated for.

Like Aristotle, both Piaget and Kohlberg also believed that moral development happens as a result of an awareness of cognitive conflict between different ideas or between moral convictions and one's actions, all of which each individual must work through. This kind of development does not happen through education alone, we know. Such transformation happens within community, through social interaction. Not only had Ruby become able to observe her own behaviors, which is a crucial part of human or moral development. She was also able to observe the behaviors of others without prejudice, being respectful and empathetic even toward those who fought against her. Ruby mastered the kind of attitude that is necessary for everybody, including our political leaders, in order to help bring about peace and opportunities for all parties involved to flourish.

As mentioned earlier, excellent moral development does of course not require that people find themselves in devastating social circumstances. However, such a transformation seems to require both education and most importantly, the practice of

morally good or virtuous behaviors. Only when the young also practice or apply what they may have learned (intellectually) can they discover for themselves the powerful, almost mysterious dimensions involved in the excellent way of being, which may previously have been just a theory to them. And as we have also talked about before, the (true) happiness, the sense of meaning and connectedness with others, which are almost tangible parts of such activities, makes the young want to continue practicing such a way of being.

Although our present level of centralization in America is being discussed as possibly hindering important aspects of moral development and happiness, it is not the intention of this writer to suggest that we should not have any centralized laws and/or supervision by certain institutions. Centralized laws that are based on excellent, universal principles are both necessary and good, making it possible for people to live together in a society. We need traffic laws, for example, to make it feasible to travel from place to place in our cars. However, laws in themselves do not transform people.

Much progress has been since the 50s and 60s with the introduction of new and necessary, centralized laws that have made many deplorable forms of racial discrimination illegal, for example. Still people continue to discover new, often more subtle ways to discriminate, to judge other human beings they perceive as different from them as therefore inferior to them. Such self-centered behaviors tend to impede healthy moral development and happiness for the ones who judge or discriminate while they also tend to create much suffering for those who are being judged or discriminated against.

All such destructive behaviors seem to be rooted in moral immaturity or self-centeredness and continue to cause enormous problem today among centralized Americans of all ages and among our leaders.

Again, this seemingly inherent, human tendency toward self-centeredness or immature behaviors cannot be changed by simply continuing to introduce new, centralized laws. Instead, or in addition to basic laws to protect the innocent and prevent abuse, it will be suggested within this dissertation that more exposure to the humanities within education and an increase in opportunities and encouragement for the young to practice the virtuous way of being with others in the world, within local, public schools and other moral communities, may help facilitate moral development in many.

Unlike the case of Ruby Bridges, we know that masses of today's centralized, young Americans do not get much guidance through participation within local, moral communities. Today's young Americans tend to spend less time with their busy parents. They often do not know their neighbors or participate within other local communities, like neighborhood churches, for example. Within centralized America's efficient, business-like communities, there is not much room for activities that may help the development of authenticity and compassion, the kinds of practices that were both necessary and otherwise encouraged within Ruby Bridges' challenging, daily life.

About the Important Role of a Certain Degree of Discomfort or Growing Pains

“Life has its own wisdom. Who tries to help a butterfly to get out of the cocoon, kills it. Who tries to help the seed get out of the sprout, destroys it. There are certain things that have to happen from inside out.”

--Rubem Alves (1933-2014)

As we have discussed earlier, centralized America seems to have created a new habit of medicating or entertaining away, important aspects of the often uncomfortable, but crucial process of moral development, the challenging, but also life-fulfilling journey away from immaturity and self-centeredness toward maturity and all-centeredness or altruism.

In his book *The Evolving Self* (1982) Robert Kegan, describes the significant role of a certain degree of anxiety, for example, within the process of human or moral development, as human beings must grapple with all kinds of universal, moral issues, in order to make sense and *meaning* out of their intellectual and other experiences. According to Kegan (along with Erik Erikson and many other psychologists and psychiatrists), meaning-making is a lifelong activity, which begins in early infancy and evolves through many stages till the end of one's life. Kegan asserts that such internal experiences of growth and transition do not come without costs and disruptions, all of which are both natural and necessary aspects of growing up.

Kegan talks about a certain degree of tension, for example, which is present within all individuals, as they try to understand themselves and their lives through their experiences. He says such tension stems from a natural, ongoing dissonance between the powerful, universal human need to be connected with others and on the other hand to be *distinct*, independent and autonomous, for example. Kegan is an impassioned opponent to the health-illness approach to psychological distress, and is another voice in the growing interest in lifelong, human i.e. moral development.

The well known writer and spiritual teacher Gary Zukav has a view of human development and happiness that is both unique and noteworthy. In his book *The Heart of*

the Soul (2001), Zukav discusses different aspects of moral development, both on individual and collective levels. He reminds his readers that the whole of humanity is also still in the process of working through different stages of human development or human evolution, which has been going on since the beginning of time.

Zukav maintains that after human beings have been focusing on the world *around* them for thousands of years, in order to learn to survive physically, we have now arrived at a stage where we are capable of an unprecedented transformation. Humanity has reached a new level of perception, he says, beyond the five senses that help ensure physical survival. The newer level of perception helps us develop emotional awareness, he says, which is central to our spiritual development and makes us capable of authentic power. We are no longer limited to seeking power *over* others. Instead we can seek to empower everybody, including ourselves. Zukav calls this power love.

Gary Zukav says that in spite of all these new possibilities for growth or transformation, it seems as if people have forgotten, or never been helped, to move forward, and have instead become stuck or fixated on accumulating more and more material objects and continue to exercise power over others. We seem to still pursue external power, which he believes also produces physical violence and destruction both between individuals and between nations.

In agreement with Buddhism, Zukav believes that human beings are unhappy because they attach themselves or keep hanging on to illusions of happiness, which they hope to find in some other person or things outside themselves. When happiness is believed to come from somewhere external, all such hopefuls become dependent upon people, things, drugs or government systems that seem to promise such happiness. Zukav

says that, unfortunately, what enabled us to survive in the past has now become our new poison, an obsession with the material, external world.

Zukav compares the process of human development to being a student within “earth school”. All kinds of learning, he says, include struggle, pain or discomfort. He suggests that human, moral or spiritual development and true happiness cannot be reached without facing the ongoing emotional conflicts between the immature aspects of the self, which he calls the ego, and our given ability to love or respect others as our selves.

This well known writer and speaker argues that the central purpose of human life on earth is for each individual to learn to trust the universe; trust that all life experiences are important life lessons or gifts. He claims that our experiences on earth are not good or bad. Instead, they are all good in that they all represent important life lessons. He reminds his readers of the fact that we have very little control over what happens to us. However, we can learn to embrace our experiences and realize that altogether they are (or can be) the path to a natural transformation toward moral maturity, true freedom and true happiness, if we are willing to do the walking.

Zukav does not discuss any specific ways to tackle violence, except with love, which leave some important questions unanswered for many. His writing focuses on the possibilities he sees within our emerging consciousness, which he believes will eventually move humanity away from violent behaviors, toward a much greater level of human maturity. As mentioned, Zukav calls the respectful, mature attitude and way of being love, much like Erich Fromm, who in *The Art of Loving* (1957), also talked about love, not as a feeling, but as an attitude or approach to ourselves, others and the world.

Zukav also describes how the authentic power he calls love can help people free themselves from all kinds of inauthentic obsessions and addictions that prevent them from living creative, fulfilling and meaningful lives.

Chapter 10

Suggestions for Change, Starting With Early Public Education

Setting the stage: For many generations now, masses of Americans have been practicing the increasingly centralized way of being. The increase in large, business-like communities for the benefit of economic development seems to have decreased the availability, need and appreciation for small, moral communities. Half a century ago a multitude of small, local communities, like family, neighborhood, local, public schools, churches, for example, were available, within which moral communities there was still plenty of opportunities and need for Americans to practice a way of being that facilitate positive, human development.

Most recently America's centralized institutions and government systems have come to take over a growing number of services that used to be part of the daily lives for Americans within their still functioning moral communities 50-60 years ago. Such centralized, government initiated services are no longer limited to emergency situations, but have come to cover more and more creative activities or challenges that in the past used to be important aspects of parenting, education, neighboring and so on. For example, within the field of public education half a century ago, individual teachers, parents and other community members used to be involved with most aspects of education, including the creation of curriculums and choices of text books. Today many of these creative, character-shaping activities or practices, which also include having to make a variety of moral choices, have been transferred to central government systems and their specialists. As we have discussed before, one of centralization's primary goals, is to facilitate economic or material progress through greater and greater efficiency.

Practices or activities that facilitates in human or moral development require many inefficient processes, which therefore must be ignored, as Ellul said.

While we also acknowledge numerous benefits associated with many aspects of centralization, within this study we are also attempting to address certain, possibly very negative consequences associated with having chosen to allow America's central government systems to take over myriads of activities, which used to belong to masses of Americans in the past; human practices that have been suggested as possibly necessary for human flourishing.

We have also mentioned earlier that even though many, new centralized laws have been very beneficial in that they help prevent different forms of potential abuses, many of these new, centralized laws have also come to limit much of the freedom that America's public school teachers, for example, used to enjoy when they were allowed to develop their talents and be creative as they worked on so many levels to help turn their local schools into communities of excellent public education.

Many Americans have argued that creating the ideal "soil" for the young is the duty of parents. As we are going to look at what may be done today, to help make some positive changes within America's centralized institutions, we need to keep in mind that masses of Americans, including parents have lived the centralized way for several generations. Unfortunately, many of today's parents are just as morally immature or undeveloped as their children, rendering many unable to really guide or lead their young.

Therefore one cannot expect that most parents in America today are ready and able to simply make the changes that may be needed to address the many problems they are facing today within their families, public education and the world.

Where and how to begin? There may be many approaches or ways to help affect positive changes within America's exceedingly centralized society. Based on our research it appears that looking at America's public education may be a most natural and reasonable place to begin, starting with suggestions for some fairly simple, grassroots ideas. The hope is that certain, seemingly manageable changes within our institution of public education, for example, which will be discussed, may affect students and teachers in ways that may also enable such (affected) persons to also affect changes within other persons and institutions around them, including their families, neighborhoods and local churches, for instance. If more Americans are again encouraged to participate within their local, moral institutions, including families, public education and neighborhoods, it is reasonable to think that this kind of increased participation may eventually also lead more Americans to also get involvement in politics and policy making, which may have positive effects far beyond the local communities.

It is well known that one's brain affects one's behaviors. Likewise one's behaviors also affect one's brain and personality development, as described by Nakken and many others. As it has been hypothesized, living within centralized systems for many generations may have shaped many Americans in important ways. Their perception of what is good or ideal has changed. The new ultimate goal for very many Americans seems to have become machinelike efficiency and material progress above all, as Ellul claimed. Myriads of new sources for illusions of happiness, including drugs and entertainment have also become available for all, which helps mask the truth about what is really going on. For these reasons also, the need for change does not seem urgent for many "comfortably numb" Americans today.

Many Americans have also become addicted to the many “secondary gains” that tend to accompany the development of an often disabling dependency upon a centralized government. (“Secondary gains” has been described by Sigmund Freud as perceived social, physical and financial benefits or feelings of happiness associated with regarding oneself as sick or helpless.)

At the same time, some Americans have seen the need for change, especially within our institution of public education. Our central government has for several decades come up with new strategies “from the top down”, like the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, for example, addressing both elementary and secondary education. Most of these programs have not turned out to be successful, however.

As mentioned before, our centralized government has been recommending that a most important mission for all public education should be “to help our children compete and win on the international market” (former President Clinton). This goal tends to change education into systems that train or indoctrinate students to believe that economic or material growth is all that matters, while less and less attention seems to be given to subjects that may help students become creative, morally developing, critical thinkers, which is another crucial aspect of excellent education.

Other organizational problems have also kept getting in the way of attempts to change public education for the better. Since financial support from the central government to different schools depends to a certain extent on how one school can triumph over other schools, education has become very much about test scores and competition rather than cooperation among schools. In order to keep their schools open, teachers are being encouraged to focus on “teaching to the test”, for example. Some

teachers and schools even feel compelled to lower the educational standards in order to be able to “win” and stay open. All such practices have had a very negative effect upon the institution of public education, to the detriment of both students and teachers. Many teachers feel pressured to go against what they believe to be excellent education, while their students receive a substandard education at best. Charter Schools have been started, with some success, in that charter schools seem to be gaining a little more freedom and thereby allowing more creativity both for teachers and students. Nevertheless, we still have a very long way to go. Some argue that more private schools are the solution. However, as discussed earlier, private schools are still a solution that tends to be available only for a privileged few.

While keeping in mind that all our institutions need to be changed for the better, and that change may be initiated in many other areas and on many levels, we will spend some time here, focusing mostly on America’s centralized institution of public education. We will also visit some problems and possible solutions for higher public education, but will start with the possibly most important area of education, the early (public) education, within which intellectual and other experiences the young may be helped to discover their many (moral) challenges and possibilities. An excellent educator may help even young students get started practicing what they are learning theoretically, by encouraging them to exercise their ability to think critically. Within both thoughts and actions they may be asked to apply general, universally good principles into specific situations within their lives or the lives of others (as Aristotle emphasized within his theory of moral development, and Kohlberg later introduced as an important part of elementary education).

We will discuss the importance of allowing changes to happen “from the ground up”, within which processes all participants, including individual teachers, students, parents, local politicians and others can be engaged. When individuals on all levels are allowed or encouraged to participate and practice being more fully human, it may not only help lead to possible improvements within the field of public education, but will also facilitate greater human or moral development and happiness among all participants (recalling the before-mentioned, great principle of subsidiarity).

As indicated earlier, many individual teachers, writers and speakers have already begun talking and writing about what they see as wrong with our government-run public education. And many of them have started to come up with important ideas for a better approach to public education. One such person is the internationally known author and speaker Sir Ken Robinson, for example, whose ideas have also been discussed earlier. Robinson emphasizes especially the need for schools to facilitate the development of creativity (like Jacques Ellul did in his way), innovation and human resources. Ken Robinson works with people both within the field of education and in business. He has also collaborated with governments and educational systems all over the world and has written several books on the subject of education, emphasizing the importance of allowing changes within the field of education to happen from the ground up, from the level of teachers, parents and students, instead of handling things the old, unsuccessful way, from the central government down.

We have also talked about the work of Ernest L. Boyer and his important book *Scholarship Reconsidered, Priorities of the Professoriate* (1990), where he discusses higher education and the importance of relationships between teachers and adult students

within American universities today, for example. Boyer talks about the new government-induced preoccupation with research and the production of new knowledge among today's professors. He argues that these new goals, efficient as they may be in helping secure grants and recognition for colleges and universities, may have come to replace much of the interest in and practice of excellent teaching.

Again, we are talking about degrees of changes. Certainly research is also important. However, equally or more important maybe, are the possibly very fruitful and often challenging direct relationships between teachers and students. One good aspect of education does not have to be sacrificed for the value of another.

In agreement with the ideas of Aristotle, Ellul and many other more recent thinkers, including Kohlberg and the even more recent Ken Robinson and Ernest Boyer, this chapter will discuss suggestions that are similar in nature to what these authors, for example, are proposing.

In addition to maintaining education of basic, technical skills, it will be suggested that more time and opportunities may be given to students (of all ages and in age-appropriate ways) to discuss and attempt to *apply* great ideas that are presented to them as they study history, great philosophers, religions, and other pieces of great literature, for example. As we have talked about earlier, Kohlberg suggested that teachers could tell their students moral stories, and help students attempt to solve the moral conflicts or dilemmas within such stories. According to Kohlberg, such exercises would help facilitate moral development, including the ability to think creatively, critically and/or analytically.

Kohlberg's idea can be applied to the way many subjects are taught. There are always opportunities for teachers to help their students go far beyond simply remembering facts, by asking challenging questions related to the subject at hand, considering the ways all information may be used for good or bad. Excellent educators do not simply train their students to memorize information in order to succeed on standardized tests, but will try to help educate them by engaging their students in all kinds of ways that may help facilitate authentic, critical thinking, which also promotes their (most important) uniquely human i.e. moral development.

We have discussed the thoughts of Ellul, about the fundamental right for human beings to simply practice being human, including being given plenty of opportunities to make their own moral choices and be creative. Ellul felt that centralization had removed many opportunities for these kinds of practices as the new goal for centralized societies had become a purely practical and mechanical one, to increase technical efficiency in order to facilitate economic progress in the world around individuals. Ellul felt that the new goal of technique eliminated the need and even the right for individuals to live the kind of lives that would encourage them to respond to the uniquely human challenges within our crucial, daily experiences. (As we have mentioned before, Ellul did *not* believe that taking on such challenges would lead to moral development or happiness. He simply argued that it was all persons' right, duty or purpose to simply *be* human, i.e. moral beings.)

Aristotle on the other hand, saw the practice of virtuous way of being as the path to healthy human/moral development and true happiness. And therefore Aristotle talked about the crucial role of all our institutions, including formal and informal education,

when it comes to exposing the young to the good (virtuous) life, including both virtuous ideas and also providing the young with plenty of opportunities to apply such theoretical wisdom and turn it into practical wisdom.

In their book *Practical Wisdom; The Right Way to Do the Right Thing* (2010) Barry Schwartz and Kenneth Sharpe talk about “system changers”. They admit that we have benefitted from the courage of a few, individual teachers, “...canny outlaws who have the moral will and skill to practice well, despite the formidable pressures assembled against them: the stress of time restrictions; the constraints of rigid rules and standardized scripts; the impediments of specialization and efficiency that drain them of empathy; the pressure of incentives that lure them to do the wrong thing.”¹

Still, they continue by arguing that the courage to of a few to bend the laws is not enough.

We cannot rely on people doing the right thing in spite of the institutional structures in which they work. What we want is institutions that encourage the skill and the will to do the right thing. Such institutions are within our grasp, and there are people working to create them. These system changers are building institutions that encourage practitioners to develop practical wisdom instead of draining it from them. They are trying to change the law, not evade it. They are like the legislators and statesmen---the lawmakers and institution builders---whom Aristotle wanted to encourage in ancient Athens.²

Schwartz and Sharpe interviewed both teachers and students within in a variety of professional practices, including teaching, nursing, medicine, law and engineering. They soon discovered that all such practices were basically a great variety of exercises in practical wisdom. Those who became excellent within their profession were those who learned to be cooperative, respectful problem solvers with their students, clients or

¹ Barry Schwartz and Kenneth Sharpe. *Practical Wisdom: The Right Way to Do the Right Thing* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2010), 233.

² Ibid., 234.

patients, rather than acting like distant experts, who believe they already know (intellectually) how to solve problems *for* others, and that it sufficient to simply “preach”.

Instead of continuing with today’s methods of education, which has become more and more restricted to classrooms and academic instruction, Schwartz and Sharpe suggest a move toward apprenticeship, modeling and coaching by teachers, who act like mentors within different areas of education, in order to prepare all kinds of students to be able to “do the right thing” wherever they go. Regardless of what professions different students may be heading for, they are all human beings first. Their development as human beings is at least as important as the technical aspects of their chosen profession.

Obviously, the good life, what it means to be virtuous or do the right thing, was not described exactly the same way at the time of Aristotle as we may describe it today, although certain aspects of the virtuous way of being will always be the same. As mentioned before, there were practices in ancient Greece, like slavery and discrimination of women, for example, which at that time were considered natural, and therefore not immoral. Within the two thousand years since then, humanity has evolved and we have come to abandon such evil ideas. However, today we are becoming aware of new layers of habits or practices in America and all over the world that are also immoral and therefore hindering human or moral development and happiness for so very many.

Aristotle emphasized the importance of practical wisdom, saying that the virtuous person would only act, or apply his theoretical wisdom (the general principles), after he had first taken the time to understand the very specific circumstances, which make every person and every situation unique. Aristotle also pointed out the significance of acting

with the right attitude; that one must choose every right action for its own sake, because it is good in itself; not for the sake of some other, later reward.

Aristotle's focus was the development of the virtuous person, which may be considered "self-centered" by some. The modern notion of morality tends to focus on the interests of other persons, which may *seem* more altruistic. Still, Aristotle's truly virtuous acts would most likely be truly the best possible experience for both the actors and those with whom they interact. And since right action would also lead to political involvement for many, such actions would also benefit the Greek city state or polis.

In America today, we have instant access to information from all over the world, which also makes us directly and indirectly responsible for a much bigger world than they had to deal with at the time of Aristotle. Our new abilities to access information about the whole world also affect the way we must teach. Our literature and classroom discussions must not be limited to moral issues affecting my family, my church, my country, but must include a steadily increasing amount of moral issues involved in the ways Americans' new "way of being" may be affecting the rest of the world, for example.

Within the following section we will talk more about some specific, perceived problems within our public education systems today, and suggest some modest changes that may help support America's institution of public education, so that we may again allow able teachers to create new and better ways to embrace a wider range of subjects and help both students and teachers to find time and opportunities to learn specific technical skills, theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom.

One of the problems with America's public education system today, as mentioned above, lies in the increasing transfer of creative power to a few experts or specialists at the top (centralization).

Having allowed or invited the central government to take over more and more of the creative work involved in choosing subjects to be studied, text books, creating curriculums and so on, means that individual teachers, students, parents and others have given up, or lost, myriads of opportunities to exercise and nurture their life-long process of development and the happiness that is a vital part of such creativity. Naturally, there is a need for a certain amount of centralized, basic laws some institutions that may supervise individuals and groups of individuals, to help protect everybody from incompetency or abuse. Still, there is an all-important difference between having a limited, centralized system that may help protect students and teachers from potential abuses and allowing centralized systems to take over the actual performances or practices of competent teachers, parents and students.

Again, the beautiful principle of subsidiarity comes to mind, which suggests that all matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralized competent authority, including political decisions. With this principle in mind, changes can be made that may help give back to local teachers, students and others tremendous opportunities to create better ways to educate while encouraging creativity and human flourishing in myriads of ways.

In order to help make changes within our present, centralized structures and help bring character-building practices back to the smallest, lowest or least centralized competent authorities and again allow local teachers to create curriculums, for example,

we can and must also continue to discuss our ideas with other schools, teachers, students and parents. It may also be necessary at times to involve our political representatives, who may help allow new ideas to emerge “from the bottom to the top”. Closer to the top such suggested changes or ideas may also be turned into new policies.

Naturally, we must continue to address and readdress the many problems that have not only had adverse effects on early public education, but have also affected higher public education in very negative ways, ever since the single-minded focus on efficiency became the rule. Ernest Boyer, who we have visited earlier, reminds us that, for example, teachers within the institutions of higher education today no longer seem to be evaluated based on their abilities as teachers. Instead, professors seem to be evaluated or rewarded according to their history of published research, a kind of efficiency that has little to do with their teaching skills or relationships with their students. Again, this is not to say that research is not important. Rather, it is being suggested here that the time allowed for teachers to spend doing research should not replace or eliminate the time needed to establish very helpful and often mutually rewarding relationships between teachers and students.

Our institutions and our laws have always been changing since the beginning of time. Unlike Ellul, who seemed to think there is no way back for the western world after efficiency, serving materialist goals, was chosen as the new ideal, the new sacred in the western world, many other thinkers and writers (including this writer) believe we can still change, again and again. As we keep rethinking public education, education for human beings, it seems fundamental that we continue to visit and revisit the big questions having to do with what it means to be human and how human beings should live. With such

basic concerns in mind we can, on local, state and federal levels, continue to explore how public education can be greatly improved to help all citizens flourish as fully human beings.

As Ellul so accurately observed, when technique became the new sacred goal for humanity, the world, including education, had to be changed so that from then on all institutions would support the new, materialistic goals, emphasizing the kind of knowledge that would enhance this single-minded pursuit. Time and space needed for more creative kinds of activities, like reading, thinking, discussing and writing about ideas beyond those related to materialistic efficiency, soon became unnecessary and ignored. Based on this kind of reasoning public education seems to have become reduced to training of technicians or machines that can operate or run the centralized systems most efficiently.

It is for this reason also, it will be suggested that we again put a new emphasis upon the humanities in public education, starting as early as kindergarten or preschool. The humanities must of course be adjusted to the different ages of students. As we expose young students to the humanities, it should be done with a new approach, as also suggested by Ken Robinson, for example, who recommends that we make a radical shift from standardized schools to personalized learning, by creating certain conditions that will allow and encourage the children's own latent creativity to flourish. Pablo Picasso is (also) remembered for saying "all kids are born artists; the problem is to remain an artist".

In his book *Handing One Another Along* (2010), Robert Coles also emphasizes the tremendous value in creating great opportunities for the young to make difficult moral

choices, also through their interactions with great fictional characters. Such vicarious experiences can be very valuable in that they can help children of all ages develop toward moral maturity, especially if such reading is accompanied by class discussions and writing assignments, for example. This is also in full agreement with one of Kohlberg's idea that we may facilitate more development through storytelling followed by classroom discussions.

In addition to providing education regarding necessary basic skills like reading and arithmetic, it seems reasonable that we can and should be at least equally eager to educate the whole person, the whole student. Technicians and other kinds of specialists are human beings first. Without having much exposure to the humanities and being helped to practice critical thinking or moral reasoning, for example, such technicians may become dangerous both to themselves, others and the world. They will possess tools that may be used both for great good and great evil. Uniquely human or moral questions, conflicts or dilemmas are always present in all persons' lives. Just because we *can* do something does not necessarily mean we *should* do it. There are many writers and speakers, some of whom have been discussed earlier, who have expressed their concerns regarding the government's funding for education having been moved away from subjects and activities that may be very important for full human or moral development.

This writer is certainly not proposing any kind of forced revolution. Instead, what is being suggested is that we continue to support and help implement changes that have already been suggested by many teachers, speakers and writers who also believe that our public schools can and should (again) be made to provide an excellent, more complete kind of education. A truly excellent education will prepare students to master many

technical skills, but will also help prepare students for their many challenges they are facing and will continue to face as human beings; as such an education will engage students in a variety of ways to always help facilitate the development of authentic, critical thinking, for example.

Through remaining connected with other individuals and groups of individuals, directly, and indirectly via the Internet for example, we may help facilitate a very positive evolution. When we interact in encouraging ways with others, who also want to help make positive changes within our institution of public education, we help activate and energize local (and other) teachers, parents, students and appropriate political leaders, while evolving ideas may be shared freely between all members.

Moral education, as Kohlberg also recommended, is a most important aspect of education, and seems to be very possible if American teachers are allowed and encouraged to teach according to “the Socratic method” of teaching, for example. The Socratic Method suggests that teachers, in addition to providing information, also keep asking their students questions about how and why such information can or should be used. In this way students are being challenged to grapple with vital, moral issues. They will learn to think for themselves while such exercises in application of information can be very formative, both for teachers and students. As mentioned before, this method must of course be adapted to the different age groups of students. The Socratic Method is the oldest and still most powerful way of teaching that helps develop critical thinking and creativity.

An important aspect of centralized Americans’ way of being, which may also be addressed within our institution of public education, has to do with the before-mentioned

loss of opportunities for many Americans today to *practice* the virtuous way of being, which is being suggested as necessary for persons to reach moral maturity and happiness. Most centralized Americans spend very little time within local, moral communities, like their families, neighborhoods and churches, for example. We cannot successfully and peacefully change any society from the outside. However, there are ways to begin affecting change by suggesting and initiating smaller, positive changes within the institution of education. Such changes may have far-reaching consequences.

Through a certain kind of writing assignments, for example, students may become more aware of the ways they treat other students in the classroom and during recess. Bullying, for example, which is a new name for very vicious forms of discrimination, is one of many, under-addressed immoral behaviors that are still being practiced in many overt and covert ways in American schools and elsewhere. It is also important to help students understand that bullying is not just a problem within schools and local neighborhoods, but is a form of destructive behavior that has also affected groups of people of different races, religions and sexual orientation all over the world.

Within local schools, in addition to providing counseling for individual students, if that is needed or wanted, bullying, for example, can be very effectively addressed within groups of students, under the guidance of a qualified teacher or counselor. Such groups can be very helpful both for those who are being bullied and those who do the bullying. All members of these groups may be helped to understand how bullying, for example, does not help anyone, but may have a crippling effect upon the psychological development of all who are involved, even bystanders. Students and teachers may also get together to create plays, within which stories, the same students may play the role of

both a bully and (at another time) the victim, for example. Such experiences can be life-changing.

A variety of extracurricular, small (moral) communities can easily be created both within schools and beyond. For example, it does not take many teachers and students to start small philosophy clubs, religious discussion clubs, poetry clubs, political clubs, and so on. It takes only one hour per week, for one competent teacher and a few students to make such groups very successful. Small groups like that provide learning and great opportunities for students of different backgrounds and skill sets, to interact and connect. They are small communities where students may practice authentic, critical thinking without being graded. Such groups also create excellent opportunities for students and teachers to connect in very meaningful ways.

Within classrooms, when it comes time for tests or exams, it may be better for students' intellectual (and other) development if they are asked to answer complex questions in the form of essays, for example, rather than checking off one of four given answers. Writing essays may help develop both writing skills and creative thinking. All writing assignments that include moral issues may also help increase students' awareness of the many moral choices they make every day. It may also help them understand that even their decision not to choose is often an important moral choice. Writing assignments should, of course, always encourage students to think in all-centered ways, considering the ways different ideas, including political ideas, may affect not only them, but also other Americans and people all over the world.

When thinking about how to get organized so that more actual changes can be made, starting with public education, this is one case where our advanced technology can

be extremely helpful. The Internet, for example, allows people who may have fresh, original ideas, to share their thoughts, back and forth, at the same time all over the world. Such ideas may then be tried out and applied in small or local communities all over the world, and thereby help stimulate truly beneficial changes everywhere. The ability to work with ideas of others, creating networks all over the world, is a great benefit. Still, we must always be aware of the present and continuous need for the very potent, direct, personal interactions between teachers, students, parents and others within each local community, throughout this ongoing process of change.

When thus allowed and encouraged, original ideas may emerge “from the bottom up”, like seeds. And if a few such ideas (seeds) are applied, first within one local school or district, and outstanding results can be identified, such grass root successes can then be shared with other local schools and so on, in a spirit of cooperation rather than competition.

Considering our research findings suggesting that human or moral development and happiness may be intimately and powerfully linked to all aspects of a person’s way of being, it seems reasonable to propose that students within a new and improved public education should be provided with a lot more than technical information regarding “how to compete and win on the international market”. What is being suggested here is to simply *increase* time and energy spent on exposing the young to the humanities, and to create more ways in which students may be helped to start applying what they are learning within *all* areas of their lives, including being introduced to involvement within local religious and political organizations.

As we have discussed before, since masses of Americans have come to live the centralized way for several generations, the virtuous way of thinking and acting seems to have been forgotten by many parents, teachers and other leaders. Therefore, it seems that the institution of public education may indeed be the most appropriate avenue to help reawaken crucial aspects of the human potential, which may have been neglected for a long time. So many treasured parts of our inheritance, which should be handed from generation to generation, also through education and especially the humanities, have been left behind, waiting to be through studies and practice.

It is the hope of this writer that a reintroduction of a more creative or challenging use of the humanities and a more decentralized and “Socratic” approach to public education, as discussed above, may also reawaken the curiosity among masses of Americans regarding the uniquely human questions about what it means to be human and how one should live. There will always be new, moral challenges to which certain universal principles will have to be applied in different ways. As Aristotle knew so long ago; there is no moral rule that automatically fits all challenges or situation. It is our human responsibility to keep re-interpreting a few, self-evident, universal principles, so that they may be applied correctly, or excellently, to all unique individual and cultural circumstances. And, according to Aristotle’s theory and the theory of the more recent Robert Coles and others, which we have discussed, it seems to be the ongoing practice of attempting to apply what we have come to know as good (theoretical wisdom), which continues to shape the moral character (practical wisdom) of practicing individuals within each new generation.

If more of our young Americans, who will be future parents, teachers, neighbors and voters, are informed about the questions and issues involved in what it means to be human and how we should live, and more opportunities and encouragement are given for them to practice or apply such wisdom within all aspects of their lives, they may develop into unique and authentic persons, who will make choices that are good both for them, their families, their students and their neighbors. They may also tend to grow into, and/or vote for, morally mature or excellent political leaders and lawmakers, which may in turn help continue to change America's public education and all other institutions for the better.

Conclusion

What, if anything, has this exploration helped us learn about the proposed, possible cause and effect relationship between the recent, extreme forms of centralization of all America's institutions and a supposed decline in human or moral development and happiness? What may have come to light regarding the very rich and possibly crucial relationships between people's way of being within community, moral development, and happiness?

Although there are some exceptions, much of the information gathered from the theories of earlier and more recent philosophers, theologians, sociologists and psychologists seem to suggest that there are indeed important relationships between certain ways of being, which are encouraged by the structure of our institutions, and the degree of moral maturity and happiness human beings may enjoy.

It seems as if today's centralized Americans, while they have come to enjoy great material progress in many important ways, may also (unwittingly) have come to give up several aspects of a certain, uniquely human way of being, which may be crucial for their uniquely human development and true happiness. In spite of America's reputation of still being the greatest nation on earth, this interdisciplinary examination of certain aspects of life in centralized America today seems to indicate that masses of Americans may be on a decline in often subtle, but possibly significant ways.

Having looked at America today through the lenses of thinkers from several fields of knowledge and from different times in history, whose ideas regarding relationships between human beings' different ways of being, moral development and happiness have

been documented, there seems to be enough evidence to suggest that our hypothesis may be a rational and possibly important one.

While America has enjoyed much progress lately in many important ways, there also seems to be data suggesting that more Americans today may indeed be less morally mature and happy than they used to be half a century ago, for example. Aspects of Robert Coles' research, for example, seem to illustrate that 50-60 years ago, in spite of multiple, severe social and political problems within America's not yet markedly centralized institutions, more Americans may have reached a higher degree of moral maturity and true happiness at that time than is the case today.

When Americans came to embrace continuously accelerating forms of centralization, with an enormous increase in centralized, business-like relationship and communities, their relationships and activities within important, local, moral communities, including family, schools and neighborhoods, were naturally grievously reduced. Within the smaller, imperfect communities of the not so distant past, masses of Americans still had to spend time trying to figure out how to solve the many moral and other problems that are always around. Jacques Ellul argued that such daily activities are the purpose or meaning of human lives. Aristotle added that such daily practices also are true happiness and will help persons move toward moral maturity.

Half a century ago, Americans still did not have a large central government and all kinds of centralized systems, which could take care of such daily challenges for them. Being compelled to ponder upon what would be the right thing to say and do, when faced with often enormous challenges, became an important part of their way of being, which may have helped many Americans develop practical wisdom and true happiness.

Enduring, respectful or moral relationships within community are fundamentally within moral communities are fundamentally different from business-like relationships and communities, which are based on material progress first.

We looked at the theory of Jacques Ellul, who wrote about the great problems he saw introduced to humanity when the Industrial Revolution, with its new emphasis on technique, had made it mandatory that all institutions in the western world eventually must be centralized. Ellul described the dramatic changes in world views among the western world's leaders as they came to embrace the new, revolutionary, materialistic idea or belief that all that is good for humanity may be created, pursued or purchased within the material world, outside the person.

Ellul called this new faith in technique a betrayal of humanity, with its compulsory centralization of all human institutions in order to single-mindedly facilitate economic progress. It was a betrayal, Ellul said, because the centralized systems eliminated the basic, uniquely human right to simply live as human, i.e. moral beings, which to him included plenty of opportunities for each person to live in small, moral communities, making important, moral choices on a continuous basis.

It was a surprise to this writer when the research revealed that Ellul, unlike Aristotle, did not believe that human beings were capable of moral development or that true happiness exists. Ellul believed human beings were often fooled into believing in illusions of happiness, and he therefore did not see "happiness" as a reliable guide to help individuals assess whether their choices, thoughts and actions were morally good or not.

Although he at some point had turned away from Calvinism, it seems as if Ellul may have held on to aspects of the belief of some Calvinists, who argue that human

beings are born and die depraved. However, and very importantly, we found that Ellul did believe in a uniquely human way of being, including an ongoing practice of meditating on what is morally right and wrong, making important moral choices as authentic, creative beings, all of which he believed must be allowed and encouraged by all our human institutions. Ellul wrote several books and travelled all over the world giving speeches about the devastation he saw developing all over the western world as the introduction to and application of technique and centralization (to support material progress) became the new number one concern for humanity.

Aristotle, who lived more than two thousand years ago, could not talk about the kind of centralization we have in America today. However, his theory regarding the possibly intimate connections between our way of being in the world within community (our institutions), moral development and happiness, seems to fully support the thesis of this dissertation. Aristotle spoke about the immense importance of our uniquely human practices, the fertile, direct interactions between individuals and between individuals and the world. He described certain structures of our institutions, which may or may not encourage good or favorable, formative interactions or practices among citizens. Aristotle thoroughly and eloquently described the significant roles of the institutions of family, public education and other, moral communities, like the ideal state, within which institutions or communities he asserted moral development *and* true happiness become possible.

Aristotle also showed the important, guiding relationships between moral development and true happiness, the validity of which this dissertation is also attempting to show. He carefully illustrated the many levels of happiness, which may be misleading,

and contended that only the highest level of happiness, eudaimonia, which is an intrinsic aspect of morally good, meaningful, virtuous activities, is true happiness. All other kinds of happiness, he indicated represent illusions of happiness. More recent authors, including Martin Seligman, whose more recent theory is also based on groundbreaking, scientific research, agree with Aristotle's findings, that human beings are born with morally good and bad characteristics or abilities, which will be developed through our way of being in the world within community. Both old and very recent research show that human beings start their moral development according to the way of being (thinking and acting), that is allowed or encouraged within their early institutions or communities. Later on adults may develop further by connecting, interacting and working within a variety of chosen moral communities, including religious and political groups.

In his speech *Reflections on Happiness* (1943) we found Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's detailed description of the intimate relationships between levels of happiness and corresponding levels of moral development, which also seems to support our proposal. De Chardin's theory seems to be in complete agreement with Aristotle. De Chardin also made the important observation that the complex relationships between one's way of being and happiness are not mysterious, but may be studied objectively by applying the scientific method.

Robert Coles' research showed that even children can reach high levels of moral development, if they are encouraged by their local institutions, like family, neighborhood schools, churches, for example, to interact directly and respectfully with others and the world, as was still the way many Americans lived 50-60 years ago, within their (very imperfect) small, moral communities.

The overall findings of this research seem to indicate that many centralized Americans, including their leaders, may have been seduced by the under-examined idea behind centralization, which seems to promise unprecedented levels of happiness for all. Many have come to accept the premises of this latest, life-changing idea, that continuous centralization of all our institutions for material or economic progress will lead to new levels of environmental perfection, and that such external changes is the only kind of happiness human beings want and need. Overlooked or ignored by many seems to be the possibility that the implementation of an ever-increasing centralization of our institutions for economic development might change our communities in ways that affect human (moral) development in devastating ways. This interdisciplinary study seems to indicate that recent, drastic changes in the ways many Americans have come to think and act within their large, centralized institutions (for material progress) may indeed have changed many important aspects of Americans' way of being in the world, which may have lead to moral immaturity and lack of true happiness, while Americans may be amusing themselves to death in myriads of ways, as Neil Postman suggested.

Because centralization or technique was not introduced in the form of a revolution, but has been allowed to evolve over several decades, it may have been very difficult for centralized Americans to recognize what has been going on. Like the frog (mentioned earlier) who was initially placed in a pan of lukewarm water, which was subsequently heated up very slowly, masses of Americans may not have noticed that their moral development and experience of true happiness were being affected in devastating ways--while they are being "cooked". Besides, as we also have discussed earlier, while many Americans may have become unhappy due to the centralized way of being, our

modern, medical and pharmaceutical institutions have come to interpret such unhappiness, for example, as diseases that are unrelated to the way Americans live. So, instead of looking at the ways we live, our pharmaceutical companies are constantly inventing new medications that work as band aids, covering up possibly enormous problems or challenges, which then may be ignored, rather than met.

A vicious cycle may have been created during the slowly expanding process of centralization. As our research suggests, when masses of Americans (unwittingly) handed over a multitude of uniquely human activities to their new, centralized institutions, to accelerate our economic development, they (also unwittingly) sacrificed important interactions or practices that may be crucial for their human development and true happiness. As the institutions have kept changing according to the progressive demands of centralization, more and more Americans have become increasingly *dependent* upon the centralized systems, which have come to do important, character-shaping activities for them. It seems that while the power of the centralized government and its systems keep increasing, many individual Americans are becoming powerless and dependent.

In an attempt to understand some aspects of what may have been happening to many centralized Americans over time, we compared the possibly very negative process of becoming dependent upon the centralized systems, and addicted to the many illusions of happiness that these systems provide--to the well known, devastating development of the sometimes drug related, addictive personality, described by Craig Nakken. Such unfortunate developments happen when persons become addicted to and dependent upon drugs, gambling or hoarding or really anything that does not require respectful interactions with others and the world. People who develop the addictive personality

become progressively more and more dependent upon whatever seems to provide them with illusions of happiness. Somehow they have been led to believe that they may find true happiness *outside* the uniquely human activities that connects them to others and to the world in truly meaningful ways. Aristotle and others have made it very clear that true happiness can never be part of the isolating, meaningless pursuit of happiness outside the virtuous life within community.

As with centralization, drug addicts are not forced to use drugs or become addicts. They are first invited to try out a new, under-examined idea, which they are being told will lead to great happiness or solve their problems, their challenges. And there have always been and will always be problems or challenges associated with being human. Such problems tend to cause temporary, but necessary feelings of discomfort or unhappiness, as we have discussed. Such feelings of discomfort are natural aspects of the crucial process that all human beings must go through in order to grow up from the kind of self-centeredness that is natural only for the very young and become morally mature and reasonably happy individuals.

Some attribute the human problems we all struggle with to what they call sin. Others call it self-centeredness. As we have just discussed, while self-centeredness is natural for the very young, it becomes a problem when people are not encouraged by their moral communities to practice the kind of behaviors that tend to lead the potentially isolated, self-centered person toward all-centeredness, moral maturity and true happiness; all within community with others, as Aristotle and other writers talked about. People who remain immature will tend to remain isolated and unhappy. And because they are immature they will tend to make unwise or immature choices, which lead to more

unhappiness that must be treated with more illusions of happiness, and so on (a vicious cycle).

We have discussed some of the difficulties involved in attempting to assess whether centralized Americans today are more or less morally mature and happy than they were 50-60 years ago. For example, we have talked about the recent, phenomenal increase in the use of antidepressants and anti-anxiety medications, which could indicate that Americans are indeed less happy today than they used to be. However, some may argue that the increased use of pharmaceuticals means that today's Americans are simply more aware of their unhappiness, which has always been there. And now, the centralized Americans have invented a "cure".

Many of today's psychiatrists and patients tend to view unhappiness, for example, as a random, psychiatric illness that simply strike some persons' lives, and must be numbed--rather than looking at it as an opportunity to examine our thoughts and actions, which may indeed lead to unhappiness. If such an episode of unhappiness is explored, rather than killed, such experiences may lead to change and great moral or human flourishing. Most of the theorists that we have included in this discussion seem to suggest that Americans may indeed be more depressed, anxious and unhappy today than they were half a century ago.

Charles Barber, for example, suggests that America's pharmaceutical industry is to blame for the dramatic surge of new psychotropic drugs in America. He argues that a new need for drugs has been created by the new idea, which may have started with Sigmund Freud, who viewed difficult emotions and moral conflicts, which are normal and necessary aspects of human development, as symptoms of mental illnesses, to be

cured. Barber suggests that the pharmaceutical companies are also enjoying great economic progress by keeping Americans “comfortably numb”.

After having considered the theories of philosophers, theologians, sociologist, psychologists and others, this exploration seems to indicate that the initial, *intended* purpose behind centralization of all America’s institutions and increasing the role of the central government may have been quite benign. However, many *unintended* consequences of the most recent forms of centralization have been discerned and described by several theorists we have included; unintended outcomes that may have been detrimental to masses of Americans and therefore also to America.

There seems to be overwhelming evidence within this exploration to support the belief that one of the most important functions of our human institutions, starting with the family, is, or should be, to help promote a virtuous way of being, thinking and acting, which also facilitates excellent human or moral development. Human beings are the only beings we know who can come up with and apply complex new ideas, which may have enormous consequences for everyone and everything in the world. Therefore human beings are both more gifted and dangerous than other beings that simply follow their natural instincts. This research seems to suggest that one of our most recent ideas, including the choice to change all our human institutions single-mindedly facilitate economic development, has come to make our institutions increasingly unfit for human or moral development and true happiness.

As we have discussed suggestions for change, starting within the field of public education, we have also found that teachers and many other thinkers have already started

to work on ways we may be able to decentralize education, which eventually may affect Americans within all their institutions in very positive ways.

It may be appropriate to say it again, that in spite of many negative developments that have been discussed as consequences of that the recent forms of centralization, centralization has obviously also helped bring about a multitude of material and other benefits for Americans. However, much of the literature we have reviewed seems to indicate that Americans may also be paying an enormous price for such material advantages. We must also keep in mind that even if America's idea of unlimited forms of centralization may be a very serious mistake, it is not the first time or the last that disastrous errors have been made by individuals, groups of individuals and nations throughout history. Our mistakes are not ends. Instead such errors, even if they cause great harm, may still inspire new beginnings and new institutional changes for the better.

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