

The Dangers of Homeschooling

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In Conversation with David L. Gray

Government Overreach *versus* the Principle of Subsidiarity: A Supplement.

The Principle of Subsidiarity respects the bottom up nature of natural institutions. The smallest form of society is the family. Aided by the sacramental graces of Holy Matrimony, a couple come together to make a family via the procreative 'marriage act', and to educate their offspring first and foremost. Parents are their children's primary educators, and remain so. Even when they employ teachers, the duty and responsibility to supervise that education can and should not be abrogated. If the society of the family need assistance, they may seek or be given support, in their tasks and to help them be what they should be. This right can only be lost in the most egregious of circumstances. Life, death, health, education, charity, economics, and politics, is in the natural sphere and responsibility of the lay vocation with grave responsibilities therein. These rights must not be ceded.

Quarantines and lockdowns have momentarily arrested the unchecked inertia of the often-unconscious rolling juggernaut of our post-industrial society. We have become painfully aware of how much of our self-sustaining autonomy we have surrendered in the name of luxury, fascination, and technological avarice. Within this pause in our historically unusually accelerating pace of life, the interdependent fruits of our social and economic atomization have been laid bare in all their vulnerabilities. It has provided us an occasion to ask what the Church has been asking of us for some time now: to discern what is permanently important, good, and true, vs ephemeral. Where were we going, and where are we going? When things start up again, what shall our trajectory be, and why?

Some have accepted this invitation, to stop to pray and reflect upon life, to acknowledge who and what is most meaningful and valuable. Thus, many families after having had a unique opportunity to spend time with their children, in a manner that differs qualitatively from "the vacation season", have considered educating their own offspring at home, as people have successfully done for millennia. One does not have to do tis from scratch there are plenty of pre-existing homeschool programs, and in fact one homeschool family informed me that because of its experience material from

institutions like Seton might help even Catholic schools with proven homeschooling materials and curricula during the health-crisis lockdown.

Science shows that the family (the smallest unit of society) is the natural cell of society. Moreover, for Catholics, family is also part of a *Fiat* and *Serviam* embrace of the richness of distributist subsidiarity in the domestic church, with its loving sacrifice, fruitful mission, sacramental grace, and divine vocation of holy matrimony. This is very different from the dispiriting, sterile, exploitative, and denatured social arrangements being sold to our vulnerable children in public schools today. The origins of all education are deeply connected to the foundational theology of a society, and thus is a barometer of who and what that society serves, consciously or not. Thus, it is not at all surprising, with all the political, economic, and ideological elements and forces involved in setting up, maintaining, and expanding a public education system, that some with a vested interest in that system, might see any learning or formation, mainly or wholly independent from its auspices, as problematic, if not heretical. Nevertheless, their fears are unwarranted, and their proposed methods of regulation are unhelpful at best. Why dictate to people instead of negotiating with them as is the spirit of freedom and democracy?

The data does not bear up their belief that homeschooling presents a disproportional risk for children and society. Families are not inherently hostile to children. Children are also far from immune to sexual abuse, bullying, and other forms of violence in public schools; in fact, it is often these types of incidents that cause a lot of parents to protect their progenies by homeschooling.

It does not have to be that way but, as for student learning, many public schools have not been noted typically as centers of brilliance, but more so of unionized hegemony for the lowest common denominator. They could profit from a little competition as an incentive for improvement. With notable exceptions, of course, education departments are not usually celebrated within the university of being a magnet of their brightest and best, which is odd because in the past that was indeed and especially the case. It could be once again. Teachers are (often unfairly) disparaged as those who cannot do, but only teach, when they were once touted as exemplary community leaders. Such a system as it exists today does not adequately reward and recognize the best teacher, but rather obscures many hard-working brilliant educators within its public edifices. These caring nurturing souls often thanklessly go unrecognized, and remained underpaid leading many to leave the profession in frustration or discouragement with its administrative red tape.

Both sides of the homeschooling argument can safely agree that children do indeed have a right to a meaningful education, nevertheless we need to define our disparate definitions of meaningfulness. Public schools do not have a monopoly on meaningful education, but many just might have one on meaninglessness, illiteracy, innumeracy, marginalization, and a cycle of poverty. Furthermore, new curricula teach vulnerable children that people have no purpose or end, but are an invasive unintended parasite corrupting our beautiful planet, while oxymoronically encouraging vapid self-esteem in lieu of the satisfaction of genuine accomplishment. The greater majority of homeschoolers children are raised to know that they are the apple of the eye of their parents, and more than merely fully belonging to their parents, they are as children of God eternal beings and ends in themselves. Hence, they must never regard themselves or others (friend, stranger, or foe) as things that can be used. Homeschooler, especially those fighting for their rights, are more likely to teach a form of civics, that public schools are woefully bereft of. In my experience homeschoolers' historical knowledge, love of the natural world and thoughtful awareness of current events exceeds many publicly schooled children

Even if you needed one, schools are not the only place to access a credentialled teacher or tutor. Many current or retired teachers, professors, librarians, creatives, and other topic specific professional experts are engaged to support home and community-based exercises.

The establishment feels that when an overarching system makes us all one in global concern and ideology, that we will have a utopian peace in a total harmony with nature and humanity. Thus, the "unregulated regime" of personal freedom to do what we ought will result in chaotic disharmony, so we must fear the market of ideas that comes from a mix of educational praxes and parties.

It is absurd to believe that all parents are idiots, who suddenly only become smart once they leave teacher's college. If social control is what one desires, education should not be a form of social management. I will explain why. Anyone can Google John Dewey, and John Taylor Gatto to discover the historically intentional denaturing and dumbing down of education in the name of training to a task as though we were all slaves in a machine, and a brief illustration shows its folly.

Once upon a time a grandfather was a landlord of vast acreages let to several dozen families who worked for him. The land had been passed down to him by many generations of ancestors, and those renting families had dwelt there for generations. Each family dealt with their land as they saw fit. They were all self-sustainingly subsistent with mixed crops and animals, with surpluses. Many had specialized trades, learned, and perfected over many generations, and this cooperation and competition

provided both security, continuity, and innovation to and for the whole community. Trade of goods and services were the means of exchange.

Grandfather, wanting to retire from his tasks, thus passed the managerial tasks on to his grandson. The grandson was not as keen to work as hard as his grandfather on this project, for the younger man had other interest that he wanted to exploit. In consequence, he wanted to be scientific in his administration of the property and desired to yield wealth from it that could be utilized for his other ends. He regarded the diversity of the different tenants to be unwieldy and unmanageable, he wanted something simple that he could control, extract wealth from, and have plenty of leisure left over for his own objectives.

To this purpose he called all the tenants and informed them that a new system was to be put in place. As this was his land by right, he should be able to dictate how it should be exploited. If any tenant did not like it, they could leave. Where they would or could grow was their affair. There would be an end to these mixed crops and farm animals, and sizable exchanges of good or services should happen without his mediation. From now on cash crops will be grown on the maximum proportion of land, tenants would all be placed on a small strip of unproductive land, for that is all they really needed, he opined. If they work these new crops, they should have plenty of cash to buy things in the adjacent town for their needs; they do not need to grow their own things as there would be greater variety in exchange for the cash they would receive. He mapped out a grid, destroyed the existent flora and fauna and planted the cash crops. As a result, the land became only fit to grow those new labor-intensive crops and nothing else, and like all such experiments it separated families for their domestic and community economies became fractured to the town. People's sense of belonging and ownership dissipated, and they knew that if the crop failed that they would starve. But it served the new property owner, who yielded equity from the people and land at the expense of real grassroots community. Consider if the grandson would have further taxed the tenants for the use of the land, even though their service now serves him more than their interests. What if the script that he paid them with could only purchase things in shops that he owns? What if he incentivized neighbor to spy and inform upon neighbor to give him intelligence? What if he hijacked their school house to train their offspring to work in his businesses? Would that be kidnapping? If this happened especially during the children's formative development, particularly during critical periods and delicate cognitive stages of their growth. Could this be considered brainwashing? If exposed to impurity, could that be considered grooming? What if he indoctrinated the youth to parental alienation making them virtual orphans in their own homes? Could he be reducing families to the role of mere breeding factories? Is this democracy or tyranny?

Who do you think is better fitted to democracy, those homeschoolers who get together to create a one-room school house, and then a parochial school, and later a college and university over time, or the new serfs cutting sugarcane for their master with noting that they have built for themselves. It seems to me that the cure is worse than the feared disease. I do not think that grassroots

entrepreneurial development keeps people from contributing positively to a democratic society, I think dependency does. As for creating citizens for society, one must ask which system is more prone to produce students with arrested development. How many public education children can barely look an adult in the eye and carry on a cogent conversation about serious issues? No, homeschoolers are not children of a lesser god than humanism, quite the opposite.

What is it that they, who are against home-based education, are pre-supposing? Do they think that the unilluminated will undo the purportedly scientifically-proven methods of teaching that only professional educators know about? People did get educated before these methods. There were also superb teachers. Also, this is a peculiar opinion to have especially in an age replete with the ubiquity of information at so many fingertips, if not in the home, or that of neighbors and friends, in local libraries, at museums, on-line, in community artistic, sportive and cultural centers, etc., but also within a national and international culture that has embraced the values of lifelong learning. One thing is clear, however; human beings did have excellently effective education long before the “scientific” factory-schooling systems existed. Education is nothing new; it is as old as the species

In fact, like the two property owners, the grandfather and grandson, have very different ideas of what a person is and what is truly valuable for true wealth. Ideas become practices and they have consequences. If the grandfather were to come out of retirement, it would be very difficult to fix the myriad of problems, nigh impossible, that would have been incurred by the families into the future. It seems the dangers come from the improper imposition of an economy of scale where it should not be implemented. It comes with its own agenda and outcomes. Serving some and imprisoning others. That sounds oddly anti-democratic to me. The grandson sees the human condition differently from how a Catholic does, and thus he mistakenly feels that institutionalization is more safe, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate than natural families. He has missed the forest and the trees for the green leaves that line his pocket. For with his dual excess of greed capitalism and the blunt pruning of collectivism, he sees human beings and what they stand on as capital to be exploited, ignoring the natural institutions that arise from families and replacing them with the ersatz. Life has its uncertainties, but in which scenario would a reasonable person judge that the children would be most at risk? It is all too convenient in our risk averse culture to scare people into doing what you want versus instead of supporting them.

People are concerned about professional testing, and they have a right to be, but not for the reasons that they think. A discussion needs to be had about what a test is really testing and why;

its validity. I recall children in a private school stopping classes to discuss their distress, discomfort and concern with their teachers when they felt that a state exam on reading comprehension was forcing them to answer against their formed consciences to get the “right answer” jerry-rigged into the test into disrespecting their parents. As for content two history teacher could have different things emphasized and therefor it would be unfair to give their respective test to the other’s class. It does not mean that the kids did not learn anything. Only a fair test could establish that. And finally there are test which are really testing knowledge, but a instrument to force families to administer the same failed education that they are trying to surpass. Now even the SAT are being played with, yet we have to ask ourselves if a university education is really serving us these days, when we are lettered, and specialized, but not particularly useful and entrepreneurial. We need to drop our prejudice about trades. Not only is it sanctifiable work, but as education’s end is towards the transcendentals to know (truth), do (the good) and make (the beautiful), students trained to work with their hands and in teams in practical fields actually have a advantage over book learning students without the same practical and practicable life experience. This would be the beginning of rebuilding our universities that seem to be a poor return on investment for so many.

History judges that such factory schooling may make good followers, but lousy leaders. The very origin of our public system was built to oppose Irish catholic education, and to further create pliable and complacent workers in lieu of thinkers and leaders. The proposal is as anthropologically unsound as factory farming is to life of the ruffled grouse. Families are where children come from, and when had deliberately in prayer in a non-contraceptive, non-abortive, stable church and country-loving family, who are not trading lust for the sacrifices of love, it is where kids come from and come to know what real treasure is. Parents are the natural primary educators of their children. Impersonal villages do not raise children, but extended large families really do. It is the free familial choices of association and assembly that make natural and social institutions manifest. The principle of subsidiarity does not say that homeschooling is the best for all children, but it is from such as these that other cultural and educational institutions grow. To hijack them is a disservice to history and society. The natural economic activity of human beings (and we are much more than merely economic) is as unpredictable as the weather, so any five-year socialist administrative plan with be like Cinderella’s sister needed to cut their toes and heels to fit in a shoe that was not made for them. Yes, there is a place for public education, and I admire the hopefulness of looking at the future, but that is incomplete. The historical oratorical and rhetorical tradition has us plan by looking at best practices. in the past for a proper SWOTⁱ Analysis, but one would miss the first two letters letter of that analysis if we do not do an audience analysis on ourselves to determine, not only how we got here, and where we are to go, but what we are and have become. That

is the only prudent study of subsidiarity, to know how to heal us so we can move forward more healthily than the society that we have become, where Madison Avenue and Hollywood has a greater role in socializing your children than parents. Let us respect and admire parents, and the teachers who serve them *in loco parentis*, for the sake of the children that we take care of. Then we will have the deep mindful learners that we so desire. Recall the days when people of all races and creeds rushed to get their kids into a catholic school for the comprehensiveness of its formation; that renaissance can only be born in families who are the grand seminary of all vocations in our missionary church. As grace informs and perfects nature let us be better stewards of this human ecology that we may rejoice when this seed dies a natural versus and unnatural death. Providence and virtues must be our foundation in humility understanding original sin and grace, individual responsibility and freedom, instead of overarching and misplaced economies of scale based on Pelagian and Rousseauian myths of human self-perfection through a factory systems constructed by the most myopic class of casuistic kings.

ⁱ A SWOT Analysis: (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) is a prudential analysis of a course of conduct or the making of something with respect to internal condition (your strengths and weaknesses), and the externalities (the opportunities and threats). This stems historically from the very foundation of oratory and rhetoric in the West, where we study past events, and study future projects, but most importantly we also do an internal audience analyses to determine what is it about us that aid or hinder us reaching our goals and why. Know thyself. One must love two things to be a good teacher, know and your subject, and know and love your student, wishing the best from them despite the difficulties in helping reach the good of that goal.