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Introduction

This talk is my personal view, and not that of the School of Economic Science. Nevertheless I am a member of said school, and much of this talk is the result of study and discussions inspired by and due to my membership. The school's charter as an educational charity is "To promote the study of natural laws governing the relations between men in society and all studies related thereto and to promote the study of the laws, customs and practices by which communities are governed and all studies related thereto".

Our attempt to understand natural law has involved the study of many sources from multiple disciplines, faiths, nationalities and eras. One of the principle sources is a series of conversations between the school leaders, Mr MacLaren and Mr Donald Lambie with successive Shankaracharias of the North in India, and I shall refer to these a number of times.

I personally have found that testing these teachings in practice has invariably had a positive outcome, though sometimes it has taken a while for the penny to drop, so the quotes and directions in this paper are included with faith and confidence.

Family

The term one parent family is frequently used now. But this sole parent may well have brothers and sisters, certainly has a mother and father, and in due course may well have grandchildren. The popular view of family has become very limited. The Shankaracharias view of family is "the family, which accounts for all individuals bound together with love, affection/devotion and sacrifice."

In this context I believe that the love referred to is far greater than the debased understanding that is generally current, and nearer to St Paul's "love is patient and kind it is not jealous or conceited or proud; love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up; and its faith, hope and patience never fail."(r1)

The leader of the school in Ireland, Shane Mulhall in the research for his lecture entitled "Philosophy and the Family"(r2) came to the conclusion that the biological family includes the 3 previous, the current and 3 generations to follow. Many traditions pay heed to the ancestors, and I have experienced this myself. When teaching my children maths and physics I realised that the modus operandi and very words used were those of my father speaking through me. With respect to subsequent generations many families make provision for their children and grandchildren, and extending this and considering the sort of world they will inherit would certainly help with sustainability.

Sacrifice is not a popular word now, but following the word back to its Sanskrit origin "Yajna" I found the following in Rama Krishnas Bhagawad Gita, "not necessarily a ritual. Any act that brings the maximum public good and cures the performer of selfishness." This can be as small as sharing the last of the breakfast cereal with a sibling, or giving one's life for other members of the family, or one who one considers

more worthy, as did Sydney Carton in the Tale of Two Cities “ I see the lives for which I lay down my life, peaceful, useful, prosperous and happy in that England which I shall see no more-----It is a far, far better thing that I do than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known “.

From Shane Mulhall again, the five principle functions of a family are economic self reliance, protection, both from external and internal threats and problems ,education, continuance of philosophical traditions and conferring status, which he explains as being more to do with reputation and family competences than pride in one’s position in the class system.

Pre-school education has a unique nature, as the child cannot be forced, thus it is necessary to provide instruction when the child is ready or its interest has been captured .This is more difficult for a childminder or creche supervisor with a number of children to look after than a devoted mother/parent, a theme attracting more and more attention and promoted by the movement ”Mothers at Home Matter”r3.

For a family to function well the parents need shared values and to apply intelligence and give time. Sadly in the USA at the moment the average child will speak directly with his/her father for 5 mins. a day ,with the Mother 20 mins., and watch 6 hours of TV. (r2) Who is bringing up the children?

The Shankaracharia continues ” Happiness of a family depends on the cultural, religious and philosophical traditions of the society. When cultural, religious and philosophical traditions become weak, disintegration of family begins”. Through most cultures and societies for recorded time families have been started with a ceremony to support a long term commitment –now known as marriage. The Shankaracharia gives some guidance on this topic “ The question of marriage according to the Vedic tradition is settled on one principle, that one accepts the other for life. Whatever life has to offer, it must be shared in union---.” The Shankaracharia observes that this is not always the case now, and provides five principles for successful partnerships: 1,compatibility of family backgrounds, tradition and culture; 2,the capacities, talents, or potentialities of the individuals, with education, training etc.; 3,the the nature of the individuals, which must be suitable for a harmonious union; 4; the age factor-he recommends that the boy should be older than the girl; 5,the worldly viability of the household. He also recommends that couples marry far earlier than is currently common in the democratised west, so that they have the opportunity to grow together rather than face trying to resolve the habits and preferences of two previously independent lives. This is described beautifully in Captain Correlli’s Mandolin by Dr Iannis, “Love itself is what is left over when being in love has burned away, and this is both art and a fortunate accident. Your mother and I had it, we had roots that grew towards each other underground ,and when all the pretty blossom had fallen from our branches we found that we were one tree and not two“. However, for this to be possible , for couples to be able to marry, set up home and raise a family earlier we need considerable changes to our economic arrangements, or a greater role for the extended family or perhaps government support.

Education

The Shankaracharya is very clear as to the main purpose of education, building good characters. From the Laws of Manu a good character is patient, forgiving, has self control (of all his actions), does not steal, is clean in body, mind and heart, has mastery of his senses (ie is not led by desires), uses his intellect well, pursues spiritual knowledge, follows truth and is not subject to anger.

Plato regards education as the acquisition of goods; Divine goods and Worldly goods. The Divine Goods are Wisdom (that knowledge which enables life to be lived truly and well), Courage (to act according to Wisdom, not always easy), Temperance (to act with the appropriate measure), and Justice (both the result of living according to the 1st three and “the constant will to render unto everyman his due” – Justinian). The Worldly goods are Health, Beauty, Strength and Material Goods, and he states that he who focuses on the Divine Goods receives the Worldly as a matter of course, but he who focuses on the Worldly loses all.

Sadly most consider education as a competition to secure the highest possible academic grades and fight to get children into schools with the best position in the grade league tables. The St James Schools were founded by the School to enable an understanding of the natural law relating to education and put it into practice. Starting with formulations from a previous era and guidance from the Shankaracharya St James has evolved over 35 years to provide an education for body, mind and spirit suitable for today, and other schools are starting to take notice. There are great difficulties to be faced particular to today, and I must refer you to the Headmistress's Lecture early in 2013 on the position facing Senior Girls (r4). Despite these issues pupils who take full advantage of the education on offer at St James are well educated in the fullest sense.

Many nowadays see education as purely academic, with perhaps some sport if there is time, and the sole responsibility of schools. However, pupils are at school for only 22% (approximately) of their waking lives, so like it or not other adults, mainly family, are going to take part. It is worth noting that children are far more influenced by how the adults in their life act than what is said. At St James and similar schools the “parent teacher partnership” is axiomatic and works well to the benefit of both pupils and society. To understand this relationship more fully I was privileged to have a long interview with an Assistant Head at a school that faces completely different challenges.

This school is situated in an area of council estates and all of its pupils are from these estates. The residents are “poor white”, many don't work and of those that do many work unsocial hours and/or have more than one job. There are very few families that consist of children and both biological parents. The following is a response to the question “what is the relationship between the family and educational attainment?”

The families can be divided into three broad categories.

About a fifth of the children have supportive parents who look after their children well and have norms and values similar to those of the school and teachers. No child in this category has done badly, and a few have matched the achievements of pupils at the top end schools.

About half of the parents are struggling, but feed and cloth their children, and consider themselves good parents, but their values are such that they have a limited use for

formal education, have a strong belief in their rights and little concept of duty. They have a very limited view of their children's potential in life, often treat them as friends when still young, and frequently take issue with the school, intervening in support of the child when eg. it receives a detention for not doing homework. Pupils in this group attempting to transcend their background often end up doing their homework and attending extra coursework sessions etc. after hours, at the weekends and in the holidays at school which makes very long hours for the teachers and often causes friction between the school and parents as the parents want them at home for company and domestic tasks. These families are hard work, but :-

A large number of pupils come from homes which have serious social, health, drug, alcohol and housing problems. These children are often not fed and clothed properly and mental health problems are rife amongst parents/carers and pupils alike. Ignorance is commonplace eg. One young single mother received a lot of vegetables in her pack from a charity supplying food and promptly binned them, and complained that she needed proper stuff like crisps and biscuits. Some 2% of these parents can neither read nor write so their children frequently miss out on free school meals, trips etc.. The most challenging of these parents see school as an extension of the feared and hated "authorities" and can be actively violent, and some are banned from school premises. Some of the pupils from these families are supremely difficult to teach as they have no understanding of normal behaviour and boundaries, and make it impossible for anyone else to learn. For them a separate, secure building has been constructed in the school grounds, an exclusion unit, and in here an attempt is made to help them with concepts and practices such as socialising, sharing, communication, self respect, respect for others, and acceptable boundaries, with a high adult/pupil ratio, counselling etc.. Unfortunately this building takes 20 pupils but is not large enough, so pupils on the waiting list continue to disrupt the education of others whilst gaining no education themselves. Many of these pupils in previous years would not have attended school, and even with the governments focus on attendance, and in spite of fines, pupils in this categories attendance is twice as poor as their peers.

In schools such as these, 'turnarounds' when new senior teams are introduced after the school has been Ofsted (r5) labelled as failing, are greatly aided by the fact that new heads initially are able to permanently exclude a far larger number of pupils than was previously possible, and although the school looks better as a result of getting rid of such pupils, for these children their lifeline to any hope of an education is severed.

The effects of uncaring or unstable families show very early, eg. a charity that provides early years counselling, the "Place to Be" ,has found that 80% of children showing behavioural problems at 5 go on to develop more serious forms of anti-social behaviour later, and over 90% of young offenders had mental health problems as a child. The beneficial effects in terms of raw economics and well being of early correction in particular would be considerable.

Fulfilment

The Pope at Copacabana beach on July 28th advised millions "I am sure that you don't want to be duped by a false freedom, always at the beck and call of momentary fashions and fads. I know that you are aiming high, at long lasting decisions which will

make your lives meaningful. Jesus is capable of letting you do this: He is 'the way, and the truth, and the life'. The need to step beyond the limits of the material world to find fulfilment is becoming increasingly recognised and urgent.

The Shankaracharya uses the analogy of a potter throwing a pot for the upbringing of a child "the potter uses both hands, one inside and the other outside. The hand inside is the hand of love, which gives support for expansion; and the hand outside is the hand of discipline, which keeps a firm control on the expansion to keep it within the required form this will create a good character and a pleasant being".

In her lecture(r4), Laura Hyde puts it thus: "At the center of the human heart nature has placed a desire to care for the creation in which we are placed. There is, in each of us, a desire to work for the welfare of another and to give of our love. It is obvious that when this happens, everything prospers. In caring for the development of our young people, we need to speak to this desire which already dwells in their hearts. In this way, they find the will to work hard, overcoming obstacles with a power of fortitude which is always the fruit of a large vision or purpose. As they work, they grow in capacity; as they grow in capacity they grow in stature. Through this, self esteem naturally flourishes and happiness increases. This is the beauty of the human spirit whose happiness grows in proportion to the measure of love which is given. As we live in accordance with the law of our own nature, the human birthright is realised and we come to know what it is to live in harmony, fulfilment and freedom".

Conclusion

From the evidence above there are severe problems with the concept, functioning and happiness of many families round the world, and this is blighting a large number of children's education and opportunity to fulfil their potential. A solution may be found by applying the 4 Ps:

-P1, Problem; First analyse the problem clearly and accurately, and make sure that as many of the aspects and interactions as possible are understood. This is rarely possible at a distance. eg from the above it would seem that poor parenting is related to low incomes, but there are indications that this issue is far more widespread.

-P2, Principle; Attempt to understand which natural laws apply, however and whenever formulated, and understand them fully.

-P3, Policy: Formulate a policy based on natural law to deal with the problem in this day and age

-P4, Practice; Put the policy into practice on the ground; an initial trial is recommended, and it is very unlikely that exactly the same solution will apply in all regions and situations. e.g. when the UK government decided in an attempt to raise standards that all of the 5 subjects that would count towards the measure of success at GCSE level (generally taken at 16) must be academic, and barred vocational subjects from this measure, a large no. of pupils at the estate located school above became far more difficult to engage with education. Previously the allowed focus on vocational subjects had acted as a 'hook', and without that they disengaged increasingly until their "release" at 16 with poorer outcomes, including literacy and numeracy, than they would

have had previously. Interestingly, the government has shifted its position re this. A trial, rather than a whole scale rollout of this initial policy would have prevented this perverse result .

The knowledge of the make-up and the strength of good families has been largely lost in society as a whole. The effect this has on schools and education is being ignored. Our founder Mr MacLaren said that when knowledge is lost in society it needs to be deliberately taught. Thus there is a great need for a focus on how to generate and support competent, happy families, and to orient our society and economic arrangements to achieve this. When this is achieved the possibility of fulfilment in life will be available for many.

References

r1 1 Corinrhians 13

r2 Philosophy and the Family ; speaker Shane Mulhall, CD available from the SES bookshop ,11 Mandeville Place ,London, W1U 3AJ

r3 mothersathomematter.co.uk

r4 Headmistresses Lecture 2013 “Harmony: Reconnecting with the True Purpose of Education” Laura Hyde, 26th Feb. 2013

r5,Ofsted,