

The Creation of Conscious Culture Through Educational Innovation

Michael Strong

The one essential thing is that we strive to have light in ourselves. Our strivings will be recognized by others, and when people have light in themselves, it will shine out from them. Then we get to know each other as we walk together in the darkness, without needing to pass our hands over each other's faces, or to intrude into each other's hearts.

Albert Schweitzer,
from Rabbi Greenberg's *The Art of Living*

The purpose of this book is to show how:

1. With the right institutional framework, thousands of us can create new, more positive cultures for our young people.
2. The same institutional framework that will allow for greater happiness and well-being will also allow for the emergence of dramatically better academic performance and workplace skills.
3. That it is crucial to change the institutional framework, towards greater educational freedom, in order to allow this to happen.
4. In the absence of such changes, our world will inevitably become increasingly driven by shallow impulsiveness, a world in which "Children will learn . . . that the accumulation of things and the expression of one's own feelings are the meaning of life."¹

This book should be valuable to:

- Those who care about how the appetites, attitudes, and souls of young people are currently being formed;
- Those who are concerned about the increasing propensity of our society to be dominated by commercialism, sensationalism, materialism, and conspicuous consumption;
- Those who care about the invisible virtues, including justice, honor, love, awareness, kindness, empathy, curiosity, wonder, or wisdom.
- Those seek a world in which all young people can develop the skills they need to have satisfying, successful, professional lives in the highly

¹ Robert Bellah, from his 1989 Introduction to *Tokugawa Religion*, cited in Alasdair MacIntyre, "Individual and social morality in Japan and the United States: Rival Conceptions of the Self," *Philosophy East & West*. Volume: 40. Issue: 4. Publication Year: 1990. Page Number: 489.

competitive 21st century global economy.

- Those who care about creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship as a means of creating ever greater levels of human happiness and well-being.

Given the right institutional framework, many thousands of people could be creating better schools (and thereby better subcultures) than now exist. I can't predict exactly what kind of schools that they would create. But if they focused specifically on deliberately creating better, more positive school cultures – by focusing on the development of habits and norms, by allowing visionary leaders to staff the school with individuals who exemplified core virtues, and by consistently providing young people with compelling heroes, ideals, and aspirations that were achievable through specific communal practices – then possibilities exist that are quite beyond our current experience.²

This could be the start of a dynamic, experimental, innovative transformation of American education in which thousands of new practices are developed, thousands of new ways of structuring schools are created, thousands of new kinds of human relationships blossom, and thousands of new micro-cultures are founded, classroom by classroom, school by school. A flourishing society seeded with new, vibrant, school-based micro-cultures could then transform our macro-culture in new, surprising, and beneficial ways.

Right now most wonderful practices are virtually illegal in public schools. But we can change that. It doesn't need to be against the law to improve kids' lives.

A Practical Approach to an Idealistic New Social Vision

Aspirations and ideals are crucial to the psyche of Western civilization. Marxism exercised such an extraordinary influence over millions of minds because it promised a better world. Indeed, it boggles the mind that the need for aspirations and ideals was apparently so great that a movement that was more murderous than Nazism, whose murders were repeatedly documented over a 70 year period, nevertheless continued to serve as an ongoing focus for idealism throughout 70 years of mass murder. It seems that we crave a vision for a brighter future.

Since the collapse of communism there have been no widely recognized aspirations for society. The nightmare of communism should not prevent us from having humane aspirations.

Environmentalism, multiculturalism, and anti-globalization -- those movements in which the spirit of the Left lives on -- are wholly inadequate as visions for the fulfillment of human potential. Conservatives mostly fight against the social changes of the last 40 years, without offering much of a positive vision of their

² St. John's College, Plato and Aristotle, Werner Jaeger's *Paideia*, and Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, have all influenced my views offered here. See also Michael Strong, *The Habit of Thought: From Socratic Seminars to Socratic Practice* (New View, 1997), and ?? Hicks, *Norms and Nobility*.

own.

There is a large market for books and workshops on how to live a better life. The *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series and Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* series are but two well-known examples. They have each become small industries in their own right; during a period in the late 90s a list of the top-selling 100 books of the year contained several volumes from each series; more than half the books overall were either inspirational or self-help. M. Scott Peck's *The Road Less Travelled* has been on the *New York Times* bestseller list for longer than any other paperback. Apparently people crave guidance.

Many people, perhaps most people, would like to become more successful at "the art of living." Although individuals may receive inspiration from quotations, inspirational speeches, religious sermons, works of art, or nature, very few individuals are able to learn the art of living from any of them. They must be provided with experiences in which the inspiring approach to life is constantly supported and re-enforced. This is why many churches place on "fellowship." It is very difficult for us to create better lives for ourselves in isolation. We usually need peer communities to support our practice of the good, of wellness, of excellence, however we perceive such goals.

Beyond the genetic component, human beings become who they become based on the daily, moment-to-moment, manner in which they live. They learn, or fail to learn, the art of living from those around them. We have no institutions in which young people may learn better ways of living. Schools at present are mostly institutions in which young people learn worse ways of living.

There is a lacunae in our existing set of institutions. Although there are universities that study education and human development, and there are schools that follow government rules, and there are churches and secular organizations that promote spiritual ideals, there are no institutions that allow for the ongoing practical development and implementation of better ways of living. We need to allow for the growth of a new species of institution in which better ways of living may be developed and transmitted to our young.

Reformers have long recognized that "education" is the solution to our problems.³ What has not been generally recognized is the equivocal nature of the term "education." Exhortational billboards or worksheets on self-esteem do not change habits and appetites, norms and attitudes. Inspiring, healthy, adults, who build real mentoring relationships with the young people whom they supervise, and who work together as a team to impart the practices of a coherent culture to the young can make a significant difference. We need to create institutions in which the power of such adults is constantly concentrated, enhanced, and developed as they learn those practices needed to transmit a coherent culture. We do not have such institutions at present.

³ Kant, "On Education," is an excellent early source on this perspective; Rousseau's *Emile* a very different one. Ultimately, of course, these themes may be traced, in a different form, back to Plato.

In the absence of government schools and government teacher training (i.e. accredited schools of education), at this point our society would have evolved institutions devoted to the practical development, implementation, and continual improvement of better ways of living. "Teacher training" would have developed along a path that would have been quite different from what it is today. "Schools" would be unimaginably different from what they are today.

This book will begin to sketch how these different, more positive institutions might yet come into being. These sketches are based on my existing experiences in the classroom and creating new schools. I have many thousands of hours of experience in creating new classroom cultures along with capable colleagues, in training others to create such cultures, and in creating schools in which new student cultures thrive. I have wanted to create new and better teacher training centers so that I could staff new and better schools reliably. This goal is not possible at present.

My proximate goal as an educator was primarily to increase intellectual performance; I had cohorts of students who gained twice and three times the national average annual gains on the SAT, and developed a charter school at which, in only two years, we had the highest percentage of students taking AP courses of any public high school in New Mexico. But even to create superb intellectual gains, I realized that the ultimate answer lay in changing peer culture to be supportive of learning rather than hostile to learning. In order for a school to make a consistent, comprehensive push towards changing a peer culture, the school director needs the freedom to focus directly on those variables that determine patterns of peer interactions.

When I directed a charter school, I worked for the government. My employer, the government, judged my work strictly by whether or not I hired credentialed teachers; whether or not my students scored well on certain standardized exams; whether or not I followed the state procurement code (they actually specified the number of purchase orders allowed in each file folder); and other such trivia. The lawmakers who established these laws were not bad people. The state employees who enforce these laws are not bad people. The thousands of school administrators for whom compliance with the law is the primary focus are not bad people.

And yet the strictures with which the law forces us to comply are at best very partial and misguided. A busy administrator soon finds most, if not all, of his or her energy consumed by compliance with dictates that utterly fail to reflect human needs and reality. . It is not possible to raise young people well by means of general rules passed in the form of laws or bureaucratic decisions by far away legislatures and state boards of education. It is not possible to make the many thousands of adjustments, for particular individuals, particular circumstances, and in a world of pervasive change, while adhering to many strata of inconsistent laws and regulations.⁴

⁴ Brain researchers estimate that the number of potential synaptical connections in the human brain exceeds the number of molecules in the universe. The human brain is the most complex

By means of such well-intentioned compliance with well-intentioned enforcement of well-intentioned laws, over many decades of “public” education, we have reached a horribly inhuman situation in which young human life is systematically distorted and starved for meaning and inspiration. These distortions and starvations, in K-12 education, contribute to much of the dysfunction of our society. Compulsory mass public education, in the last 100 years or so, replaced individual human discernment of what the young human spirit needs with a bureaucratic system that has been utterly blind to the needs of the human spirit. We have pre-empted and then betrayed our deepest instincts, and we gradually need to re-discover how to raise our young so that they may be happy and well in the chaotic world of never-ending change in which we find ourselves.

Creativity and the freedom to use it have given more people better, healthier, and more fulfilled lives than any of us fully realizes. The great tragedy of modern times is that the most powerful system for developing and disseminating ever more sophisticated products and services, the free market, has not yet been applied to educating our young. The great tragedy of modern times is that those who believe that only a fraction of human potential, well-being, and happiness has yet been achieved mostly don't believe in the power of free markets, and most of those who do don't envision an unlimited expansion of human potential, well-being, and happiness.

I want to convince those who believe in human potential that educational freedom is the *sine qua non* for the realization of their dreams and to specify how to create those institutions that will allow for the realization of their dreams.

Many of those who believe in human potential believe that free markets are hostile to human potential and fundamentally undermine its development. What they don't realize is that their assessment is, at present, correct precisely because we have not allowed a market in education to form. Current connotations of the term “free market” imply commercialism and consumerism because our current schools are utterly incapable of training appetites. Young people are completely vulnerable to marketing; a course in “media awareness” does not change the fact that young people today crave the kinds of stimulation that existing markets provide for them. The only way to change the vulnerability of young people to marketing is to cultivate their preferences, to instill in them individually a more valuable set of preferences and to surround them by a peer culture that supports such alternative sets of preferences.

Initially perhaps few parents or students will choose schools that develop the human spirit. But if you believe, as do I, that there are marvelous aspects of life that are being lost to contemporary young people because of the avalanche of creative destruction that has been let loose upon our culture, then perhaps I can persuade you that educators such as myself, and better, will be able to market the foundations for deep wellness to both parents and young people. I'm

entity in the universe. We have thousands of different kinds of shoes; we should have thousands of different kinds of schools. It is simply not possible for legislation and regulation to create educational institutions that adequately reflect the extraordinary diversity of the human mind.

inclined to believe that the latent demand for education that satisfies the human spirit is enormous. In such a world, “sales” and “marketing” will have profoundly different connotations than they do at present. Instead of being inundated solely with marketing which appeals to our most shallow impulses, we will increasingly find ourselves in a world in which competing visions of well-being are put forward in tantalizing fashion.

The stage at which we now find ourselves is one in which the most important lesson which the young need to learn, at every age, is how to live. We need experts on life, integrity, wellness, humor, kindness, love, accepting grace, finding courage, and on being human. We need model human beings who can create new, better ways of living together. We need artists of life who can blend together the astonishingly different cultural patterns, old and new, to create teen cultures devoted to new forms of human adventure, beyond violence, manipulative and casual sex, bigotry, social cruelty, drugs, whining, self-righteousness, laziness, vanity, and self-indulgence.

We are now at a stage in which the work that is needed is not merely a matter of teaching algebra or grammar or historical facts. It is increasingly the case that the duller parts of all academic disciplines may largely be taught by means of computers. Increasingly human educators will need to specialize in uniquely human abilities, those skills, habits, attitudes, and norms that technology will never be able to transmit.

If people knew that they could do what they love, and share what they love with others, at a modest salary they would be crawling out of the woodwork to practice their artistry. We have entered the age of meaning. Now that most of us has had our basic needs for food, lodging, and security met, we long more than anything else to make a meaningful contribution to society.

Exercising our creative powers by means of sharing our individual uniqueness and brilliance with the young is far, far, more satisfying than is shopping or parties or gambling or doing most of the other wasteful things that so many people spend so much time doing. If we were allowed to create better learning communities, most “recreation” would come to seem boring.

More than anything, we need schools based on love. We need schools at which people passionately love what they are doing, love what they are teaching, love what they are learning, where teachers love their colleagues, students love their teachers, teachers love their students, parents love the school, where everyone is joined by a passionate vision of excellence and human flourishing. Such schools cannot be mandated or created by force. They must be freely chosen by all parties involved.

In a world of educational freedom, parents, students, and educators will choose those educational communities that they love, communities that are based on love. For more than 100 years we have cauterized the love that mothers and fathers feel for their children by coercive educational models.⁵ We must now

⁵From a petition to the King of the Netherlands begging for freedom from forced schooling when it was first begun in the early 19th century: “Sire, do not deny us any longer the tender interests of our children. We would rather see our goods consumed than our flesh and blood corrupted.” Cited in Charles Leslie Glenn, Jr., *The Myth of the Common School*, pg. 53.

begin to heal from this violation of the human spirit. As a consequence of allowing love into the world of K-12 education, on a grand scale, we will begin to introduce love into the adult world, very gradually, on an even grander scale.

The Challenges We Face

For much of the 20th century, social scientists tended to believe that human beings were creatures of culture. The Marxists believed that human selfishness could be eradicated in a post-communist utopia. Anthropologists studying exotic cultures discovered an astounding array of behaviors and concluded that human nature was almost entirely plastic. Feminists, in the battle for equality, argued that traditional male/female stereotypes were culturally-determined rather than based in nature.

More recently the field of sociobiology has renewed interest in the genetic aspects of human nature, that which is inherited rather than culturally-determined. Human beings have certain genetic predispositions, including appetites for sex and for status, that seem to be hard-wired into our DNA. One of our genetic predispositions, however, is to be influenced by our peers. The desire for acceptance, recognition, and respect from our peers and from our society is very powerful.

It is largely futile to try as individuals, or even as families, to form isolated bulwarks against the overwhelming force of pop culture. The fundamentalist Christians realize this, which is why they are so insistent on mobilizing en masse on political issues and why they are eager to home school or send their children to Christian schools. (It is also the reason why they have created Christian rock, Christian radio, Christian bookstores, Christian television stations, etc. They realize the importance of mounting a coherent, coordinated cultural campaign against pop culture.) Advocates of new culture, advocates of a more just, kind, and humane world, those who believe in human potential, all need to realize that their goals are also best realized by means of freeing education from government control.

Although a certain percentage of the high school population is working hard in order to get into competitive colleges (perhaps 20-30%), the vast majority of high school students are devoting only a small fraction of their intellectual and moral energies towards learning. For most middle and high school students, school is a social activity, a kind of game in which the goal is to obtain adequate grades while doing as little real learning as possible. The number of hours wasted, the number of dollars wasted, and the sum of human energy wasted, is colossal. No other sector of the economy has as great a potential for improvements in efficiency.

As someone who has brought numerous adult professionals into the classroom, I can say that most professional adults, who themselves worked reasonably hard in school and were reasonably polite (they were almost invariably among the 30% who actually worked in school), are shocked when they first teach contemporary students. The level of apathy and indifference to learning – the

disrespect for authority - is astounding. "Beavis and Butthead" is a joke very much based in reality. Anyone who doubts this should substitute teach in a local government high school for a week. Be sure to get a course schedule that includes a few non-honors courses; the view from the high end may be misleading.⁶

Adolescence in America is largely a disaster. Bill McKibben, the environmentalist writer and advocate of natural living, is as harsh as any fundamentalist parent: "If one had set out to create a culture purposefully damaging to children, you couldn't do much better than America at the end of the 20th century." Patricia Hersch, in a book titled *A Tribe Apart: A Journey into the Heart of American Adolescence*, states: "All parents feel an ominous sense – like distant rumbles of thunder moving closer and closer – that even their child could be caught in the deluge of adolescent dysfunction sweeping the nation." According to a USA Today poll, although 75% of American parents say they have taken steps to shield their children from outside influences deemed undesirable, 73% concede that limiting children's exposure to popular culture is "nearly impossible."⁷

"Professional wrestling" is the most popular television show among adolescent males. Mary Pipher's well-known book *Reviving Ophelia* makes the case that contemporary teen culture amounts to an assault on teen girls: "America today is a girl-destroying place." Students across America acknowledge that the viciousness of high school cliques and hierarchies could lead to another Columbine massacre anywhere.

The obvious power of teen culture to shape human lives has only recently been re-recognized. We were much wiser in the 19th century. Emerson summed up

⁶ In 1999 Phi Delta Kappa, one of the most respected educational organizations in the U.S., published an article "Give Us This Day Our Daily Dread: Manufacturing Crises in Education." The article makes the case that enemies of public education deliberately manufacture crises in order to undermine support for public education. The author recommends that, in response to many of the alleged failings of public education, we should apply the "So what?" test. One of his examples of a manufactured "alarmist" finding is the statistic that fewer than 10% of students are attentive in their high school science classes. He claims that this is a "So what?" finding that should be ignored. His rationale:

"no 'index of attentiveness' is provided, tempting readers who have not been in recent close contact with large groups of adolescents to infer that 10% is a low value."

Thus in a defense of public education in an article published by a leading organization of professional educators we are told to respond "So what?" to the fact that only 10% of students are attentive in their high school science classes - a fact which the author does not dispute, but instead implies that such a statistic is to be expected among those who have been "in recent close contact with large groups of adolescents."

The Indiana University High School Survey of Student Engagement reports that 55% of students spend less than three hours per week preparing for all of their classes combined; when one considers that many students who are working hard to get into competitive colleges spend three hours per night, the implication is that vast numbers of students do no homework at all: http://www.indiana.edu/~nsse/hssse/pdf/hssse_2004_overview.pdf.

⁷ The material in the foregoing paragraph is all taken from a *USA Today* article titled "A Culture Purposefully Damaging," 10/01/98.

the perspective well: "I pay the schoolmaster, but it is the schoolboys that educate my son." More recently, Judith Rich Harris, in *The Nurture Assumption*, has shown that the majority of evidence of psychological research suggests that peers have a greater influence over young people than do parents: "In the long run it isn't the home environment that makes the difference. It is the environment shared by children. It is the culture created by these children."

The pervasive power of peer influence is most problematic with respect to negative behaviors:

"Research has shown that the best predictor of whether a teenager will smoke is whether her friends smoke. This is a better predictor than whether her parents smoke. Teenagers who smoke are also more likely to engage in other kinds of "problem behavior": to drink, to use illegal drugs, to become sexually active at an early age, to cut classes or drop out of school, to break laws. They belong to peer groups in which such behaviors are considered normal."⁸

As a consequence, "Telling teenagers about the health risks of smoking . . . is useless." The only way to affect teen behavior is to change the nature of peer culture. The massive public health and education dollars being spent didactically are almost entirely wasted. An educational approach that intervened in peer culture, instead of futilely talking *at* kids, is the only approach that is worth being described as "an investment."

John Taylor Gatto, twice named New York State Teacher of the Year, describes conventional K-12 education as thirteen years' training in passivity and dependence, meaninglessness and incoherence.⁹ The method is the only real lesson learned by the students. Existing K-12 education largely consists of experiential indoctrination in the lesson that learning is boring, humiliating, and meaningless and that therefore the only rewards in life come from intense stimulations. Appetites for community, spirituality, art, and nature are systematically stunted in our young people in the first 18 years of their lives. As adult consumers, they then go on to create the society in which we live.

As traditional cultures erode in the face of the media mass cultures, and as addictive behaviors and substances degrade the lives of increasing millions, those of us who care about human well-being have an opportunity to create new cultures which are more humane while also being suitably adapted to 21st century global society. Innovative enculturating K-12 education is the only means of raising new generations with the coherence and structure of a culture in the face of the avalanche of commercial stimulation that has become inescapable and will become as addictive as any drug. As the United States debates, and gradually implements, school choice, we face a unique opportunity to transform our world for the better.

⁸ Judith Rich Harris, *The Nurture Assumption*, pg. ?

⁹ John Taylor Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*, "The Seven-Lesson School Teacher."

The influence of traditional cultures around the world is decreasing. Tribal cultures in Africa, Indonesia, and South America are vanishing. Ethnic sub-cultures in the urban U.S. are gradually disappearing. A few mass media monocultures are taking over the world: a Muslim mass culture, a Hispanic mass culture, a Chinese mass culture, and an Anglo mass culture. The traditional idiosyncrasies, practices, prejudices, and virtues of those cultures in which mankind evolved are rapidly vanishing. Insofar as traditional cultures are being replaced by new idiosyncratic cultures, for the most part the new cultures are being formed by electronic media rather than by human beings.

Around the world, life with human beings in a common culture is being replaced by daily experiences of flashy, stimulating, electronic sounds and images. Electronic stimulation is becoming increasingly potent and seductive. Technology will continue to develop ever more compelling television and video, computer and video games, musical stimulation, and virtual reality. As a teen I read a science fiction novel in which most people no longer wanted to live life; they prefer to “experience” their virtual realities, complete with electrodes to stimulate the brain so as to simulate physical experiences and mental states. “Life” would consist of the virtual experience of having sex with the most attractive partners, reliving the most transcendent religious experiences of saints and martyrs, or triumphantly fighting as a gladiator engaged in orgies of violence, all “achieved” while lying down in a lounge and not moving a muscle.

Each year advances in entertainment technology bring us closer to this world. Readers who are not immersed in this world have no comprehension of the amount of time and money young men spend on electronic games. The gaming world is now a bigger industry, by revenue, than the motion picture industry, and this enormous industry caters to a narrower demographic than does the motion picture industry – mostly young males. These massive revenue streams will result in ever-larger investments in ever-more sophisticated virtual experiences that will soon approximate the science fiction vision described above. Role playing games and virtual reality technologies are rapidly becoming more intensely stimulating and more intensely real. One of the best-selling computer games in recent years, *Grand Theft Auto*, includes an option whereby teenage boys can hire a prostitute, avail themselves of her services, and then murder her.¹⁰ Blowing up heads, splattering human beings, is a common gaming option. We should be concerned about the ever-increasing realism of such gaming experiences and the hours of saturation and the consequent tastes and appetites formed among numerous boys.

¹⁰ Of course, players also have the option to date rather than merely to hire a prostitute: “The main reason to date a girl in this game is to get stuff from her. . . The easiest way to make your relationship with a girl go down is to abuse her during a date. This means hitting her or shooting her with any weapons. If you hit her just once, the date might not immediately end. However, shooting the girl or beating her repeatedly will instantly end the date. All of the girls can take quite a few hits, including multiple head shots from various weapons. But they can die, and if you kill a girl, she will no longer be your girlfriend.” From “a guide to dating female characters in the video game *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*” published as “The Gamer’s Guide to Girls” in *Harper’s Magazine*, Oct. 2005, pg. 22.

This text proposes creating new forms of K-12 education based on ever-deepening human bonds and experiences so that real, lived life will be a more compelling direct experience for young people than it is at present. As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi points out in *Flow*, engaging in creative, challenging activity is an optimal experience. But in order to enable them so that they can take advantage of life's peak experiences we need to develop young people from a young age so that they have the capacity to engage in such activity and then provide them with constant opportunities to practice such activities – only then will they find real life more engaging than the ever more intensely-stimulating virtual realities coming soon to a neighborhood near you.

Transformative Cultures as a Solution to Public Health and Environmental Problems

The costs of a world in which short-term stimulations are more satisfying than long-term virtues is already immense, arguably on the order of \$1 trillion per year in the U.S. alone. The leading causes of death in the United States are heart disease, cancer, stroke, respiratory disease, and accidents. The rate of incidence of each of these is heavily influenced by lifestyle factors. If we could develop and transmit an improved “cultural technology” it would reduce death, disease, and the associated costs, at a much greater rate than is possible by means of improved medical technology. A culturally-reinforced habituation education will be more powerful than a public health campaign to eat less fat and sugar. The National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention claims that 75% percentage of our \$1.4 trillion in health care costs goes towards the treatment of chronic diseases, the incidence of all of which are largely preventable by means of lifestyle factors.¹¹ This figure does not include costs associated with accidents, which are also influenced by lifestyle factors. One estimate of automobile accidents alone for 1990 was \$362 billion.

In addition to chronic diseases and accidents, addictive behaviors are among our most prevalent and intractable social problems. The American Council on Science and Health puts the costs of social addictions to alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs at \$241 billion. People with healthy relationships and healthy habits, people who are surrounded by others who live healthier lives, people who are engaged in meaningful work in a meaningful community, are less likely to take up addictions. A public health campaign on billboards is a weak substitute for a culture which supports well-being. Expensive addiction treatment centers after the addiction has taken hold are a terrible substitute for a healthy culture. People who learn the art of living while young will harm society, and themselves,

¹¹ And as global wealth increases, these issues are rapidly becoming global issues. A recent article in *Scientific American* (September 2005, *Special Issue: Crossroads for Planet Earth*) by Barry Bloom, Dean of Harvard's School of Public Health, summarizing the state of global public health claims: “Globally, infectious disease is waning, but chronic disorders are taking an increasing toll. Many chronic ills are related to lifestyle and are unlikely to abate without action by regulatory and health agencies.” Of course, they are also unlikely to abate with action by regulatory and health agencies. I suspect it has never occurred to Dean Bloom to consider minimally-regulated school choice as a long-term solution to these problems.

significantly less over their lifetimes.

Our existing medical system is not effective at transmitting techniques for reducing stress, changing diet, and improving physical fitness. Indeed, there are financial and institutional incentives that will continue to result in an emphasis on a "drugs and surgery" approach for many decades rather than a transition to a more holistic wellness approach. Schools, where children's habits and attitudes may be developed for 13 years in a row, is the ideal environment in which to cultivate wellness. Yet existing schools are, for the most part, even worse than our existing medical system when it comes to cultivating wellness. Often well-raised young people learn bad habits through our existing schools.

At present there are differential insurance rates for smokers vs. non-smokers. I envision a world of competing brands of educational programs with competing approaches to learning and wellness (like the tiny, amateurish Montessori and Waldorf movements but with billions of investment capital and diverse types of extraordinary human talent committed to their development and implementation). If certain brands of schooling reliably graduated individuals with healthier habits, graduates of such programs might be eligible for lower insurance rates. With financial incentives combining with parental interest in their children's well-being, all guided by cutting-edge zealots for healthier ways of living, gradually one can imagine a society with significantly fewer health problems and much lower health costs. Preventative medicine could become a reality.

Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) provide a dramatic case study of the "public health" benefits resulting from involvement in a particular culture. The Mormons have created a distinctive culture with remarkable health and welfare benefits. Utah, where 70% of the population are Mormon, has the lowest, or near the lowest, rates of smoking, lung cancer, heart disease, alcohol consumption, abortions, out-of-wedlock births, work-days missed due to illness, and the lowest child poverty rate in the country. Utah ranks highest in the nation in number of AP tests taken, number of AP tests passed, scientists produced per capita, percentage of households with personal computers, and proportion of income given to charity.

Utah is often ranked among the best places to live and the best places to raise children. Provo, more than 90% Mormon, was ranked by *Self* magazine as the healthiest city for women in the country, because it had the lowest incidence of cancer, violence, depression, etc.¹²

Within Utah, it is clear that Mormons are disproportionately represented within these positive statistics, and Mormon populations outside Utah share similar phenomenally positive statistics. Indeed, although no academic researcher would dare to propose such a thing, one could conclude that a mass conversion

¹² *Self* Magazine is hardly a publication devoted to upholding patriarchy – a recent issue headed off its section on sexual health with an attractive woman flirtatiously ripping a condom open with her shiny, bright teeth.

to Mormonism would reduce social problems more effectively than all welfare spending, academic research, and public health initiatives in the last fifty years.

I don't believe that we have to convert to Mormonism in order to obtain these benefits. I think that, given a large, diverse, educational marketplace, secular humanists, new age spiritual educators, and traditional religious educators will all develop better ways of cultivating deep habits of wellness due to innovations in enculturation technology.

At present we spend approximately \$430 billion on a K-12 educational system that is not only ineffective with respect to academic content, it is also ineffective with respect to inculcating good habits. What if, deployed by means of educational vouchers, that \$430 billion saved our society between \$500 billion to \$1 trillion in health care, lost productivity, and accidental damage costs? These figures don't include the human costs associated with rape, child and spousal abuse, unwanted pregnancies, and other features of contemporary human life that might be reduced by healthy enculturating educations.

Many environmentalists are against "economic growth" because they perceive economic growth to be necessarily a matter of increased use of natural resources. But under the right circumstances human beings have a greater appetite for achieving their human potential than they do for endless material aggrandizement. "Economic growth" could just as well mean additional demand for art, music, spirituality, and community rather than for gambling, pornography, intoxicants, and status goods. We can create schools that dramatically shift preferences towards those things that we perceive as good, but we will need a lot more freedom in order to do so.¹³

As someone who has been exposed to many different means of expanding human potential, I perceive an unlimited realm of human development with respect to body, mind, and spirit. I could spend many lifetimes exploring various practices and disciplines without ever having any time to watch television or go to the mall. If schools provided meaningful, enculturating educations that provided young people with profound well-being, many of the concerns of environmentalists would be ameliorated more than they realize. This approach is certainly more effective than is preachy "environmental" education. As long as young people have the appetites that they do, enforced by the status hierarchies of existing peer culture, then all the environmentalist preaching in the world will remain impotent.

None of the current outcomes are necessary outcomes. Teens from all social classes can be polite, motivated, and well-educated. Teenage males can treat teenage females respectfully. Teens do not have to be racist. Teens do not have

¹³ A thought experiment: What if, instead of public schools and a mortgage interest deduction, we had had for the last fifty years public housing and a tuition tax deduction? Instead of massive, sprawling suburbs with huge houses (over-investment in housing due to government incentives) we would have tiny, dreadful, primitive apartments but a rich, diverse educational market with people devoting many more years to learning ever-more interesting and valuable ways of becoming more capably human.

to be cruel. Teens do not have to addle their minds with drugs and alcohol for recreation. Teens do not have to graduate from high school illiterate and lacking basic workplace skills. All teen pathologies are entirely preventable and unnecessary. A steadily increasing percentage of teens, and subsequently adults, could have the opportunity to be healthy, well, whole human beings.

The Power of Culture

Anthropologists have long been aware of the power of cultural differences: African tribesmen who could follow nearly invisible traces in the dust to track animals, Native Americans who could withstand great pain and suffering during rites of passage, Polynesian fishermen who could determine their location while at sea, far from land, by feeling ocean currents with their hands, Japanese samurai who voluntarily committed seppuku to avoid the shame of not fulfilling their duty, Buddhist monks who burned themselves to death in Viet Nam in the 1960s to protest the war. These are but a sampling of the extraordinary range of human capacities that are possible due to culture. During the first generations of anthropological discovery, often people from one culture were incredulous when the practices of human beings from another culture were first encountered. Surely human beings are not capable of such things!

Thomas Sowell has documented systematic differences world-wide in the types of work and achievement characteristic of individuals from different cultural backgrounds. For instance, Chinese and Lebanese peoples often own disproportionate large percentages of retail business establishments in diverse nations, despite differences in legal requirements, local cultures, local business practices, etc. Germans built pianos, Jews were prominent in the garment industry, Italians have been prominent as architects and as fishermen: all throughout a variety of different nations to which they had emigrated. Sowell shows conclusively that these cultural disparities are the norm rather than the exception.

Fareed Zakaria quotes Joel Kotkin's conclusion after studying cultural patterns in his book *Tribes*:

“If you want to succeed economically in the modern world, the key is simple – be Jewish, be Indian, but above all, be Chinese.”¹⁴

Although it is not politically correct to acknowledge facts so directly, cultural background obviously plays a crucial role with respect to the success of different populations in our current educational system. Asian and Jewish students are admitted disproportionately to elite colleges and score more highly on a range of tests than do students from other ethnic groups. African-American and Native American students score lower on such tests. This is not evidence of genetic inferiority, but rather of a cultural background that does not happen to provide students with the cultural prerequisites to succeed in our existing school system.

¹⁴ Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom*, pg. 53.

Why not create schools that provide all students with the cultural prerequisites to success?

There are precedents for deliberately changing the culture of student populations. Medieval students were a raucous bunch, even when they were ten or twelve; violence, drinking, begging, and whoring were common among students from all social classes. It took centuries of civilizing effort on behalf of the church authorities who ran schools to change these behaviors. A sample of earlier student life from Philippe Aries' *Centuries of Childhood*:

"At Aix the rector . . . after summoning there a great many boys of the fourth and fifth (classes) [whose tender years afforded them no protection against this contagion of violence], and there he pointed out to them the evil in duelling and forbade them to indulge in duelling under pain of severe penalties.' . . . This spirit of violence went with considerable license with regard to wine and women. . . . Montaigne tells us 'A hundred scholars have caught the pox before getting to their Aristotle lesson' And the boys read Aristotle young!"

Aries concludes:

"It needed the pressure of the pedagogues to separate the schoolboy from the bohemian adult, both of whom were heirs of a time when elegance of speech and dress was limited not even to the cleric, but to the courtly adult. A new moral concept was to distinguish the child, or at least the schoolboy, and set him apart: the concept of the well-bred child. It scarcely existed in the sixteenth century; it was formed in the seventeenth century. We know that it was the product of the reforming opinions of an elite of thinkers and moralists who occupied high positions in Church or State. The well-bred child would be preserved from the roughness and immorality which would become the special characteristics of the lower classes. . . . The old medieval unruliness was abandoned first of all by children, last of all by the lower classes: today it remains the mark of the hooligan, of the last heir of the old vagabonds, beggars, and outlaws."

Aries traces a long history of thoughtful commentary by this elite of thinkers and moralists (mostly Jesuit educators and priests) that led to specific changes in school policies and practices. Century by century, student behaviors which were once the norm among schoolboys (teen and younger), such as fighting, drinking, and whoring, became increasingly less common.

Of course such behaviors still occur, but not at the scale or with the level of acceptance that was once the case. Medieval books on manners explicitly instruct people not to urinate in the corners of the castle or to blow their noses on the tableclothes. Such instructions are generally unnecessary today. Culture has changed significantly in the intervening years.

Just as the Jesuits deliberately marginalized hooliganism, and just as the Mormons have deliberately created a more successful and healthy religious sub-culture, so too could other groups create more successful sub-cultures. Over time, they would learn much from each other, and a multitude of hybrids would be developed. The human race would learn a terrific amount about how to create well-being deliberately.

Skeptics may find the analogy between traditional or religious cultures, such as Jewish or Mormon cultures, and "classroom cultures" implausible. Given the current state of affairs, the analogy is implausible. My point, however, is that habits, attitudes, appetites and norms are important to education; that because of this a free market that allowed for the deliberate development of habits, attitudes, appetites, and norms would flourish due to parents' ongoing interest in improving their children's well being; and that in a free market, an innovation dynamic would develop that would eventually have highly beneficial results – eventually the results would be far more positive than what we can currently imagine just as the results of today's technology would astound our ancestors.

In 1930, almost all of the technology we use today would have seemed implausible. Since then many billions of dollars and many thousands of bright, creative, focused, practical individuals have created technological wonders – and this result is strictly due to the fact that most of the activity took place in a free market. We can't know what might have been the case if similar billions of dollars thousands of free individuals had been allowed to create new ways of life in a similarly free market. Silicon Valley was created from math, sand, and freedom. The Soviet Union had the best mathematicians, plenty of sand, but no freedom. And by the mid-1980s a decent U.S. university had more computing power than did the entire Soviet Union.

This may be regarded as a parable with profound implications for our educational system.

A premise of this book is that human beings in modern society are not what they could be, that none of us has lived up to our potential. An additional premise is that our current set of research institutions for improving human well-being, including those institutions staffed by academic psychologists, sociologists, and education professors, has overlooked a critical strategy for improving well-being. In addition, those public health officials who are trying to reduce obesity, heart disease, cancers, suicides, child and spousal abuse, family dysfunction, addiction, etc. have overlooked a critical strategy for improving well-being. And finally, those activists and idealists who seek to reduce racism, poverty, materialism, greed, and environmental insensitivity have overlooked a critical strategy for improving well-being. The entrepreneurial creation of coherent modern tribal structures (or virtue cultures), initially in the context of what is now known as K-12 education, provides a better means of solving all of the foregoing problems than has been or will be provided by the exertions of academic researchers and public policy experts.

A Market in Cultural Innovation in order to Help the Poor

The poor are particularly harmed by the lack of a market in education in a world characterized by cultural erosion. The upper classes can afford to either protect their children from cultural erosion by means of their choice of private school or public school in upscale neighborhoods, or they can more readily remedy the problems after the fact by means of therapies, detox centers, vacations, lessons, plastic surgery, retreats, spas, and a thousand other options available to those who can pay. The poor, however, are often simply the victims of cultural erosion, and a poor parent has little recourse when her child's well-being has been undermined.

Our existing educational system is designed to support education as training and/or curriculum coverage. It is not designed to support education as enculturation. Insofar as professional success in the 21st century depends on the development of critical thinking skills and intellectuality, the traits of innovation and entrepreneurial initiative, and mastery of upper-middle class social norms, enculturation is the crucial species of education for social mobility. Young people from households or cultures in which these cultural traits are not already developed will be systematically excluded from the professional classes as long as we continue our existing public school system. As an institution public school has evolved to serve most effectively the most "normal" children of upper-middle class families; it is most damaging in its effects to any student who is outside the norm or any student who lacks the cultural prerequisites implicitly presupposed by the system.

The greatest benefits of educational innovation as I see it will be a system for distributing cultural wealth and well-being as effectively as the market has distributed technological wealth so far. Televisions and radios, refrigerators and washing machines, cell phones and pagers, have all become cheap and ubiquitous even among the poor. Why haven't we created a society in which thrift, industriousness, intellectual curiosity, academic focus, self-discipline, respect, and courtesy are equally cheap and ubiquitous? K-12 education ought to be the leading vector for transmitting good habits from one generation to the next, and for adapting new norms and habits to the times. Instead of creating amazing institutions for the transmission of the best cultural habits, our schools have suffered from cultural wars which have deracinated any set of common norms from "public" schools, resulting in K-12 education that teaches young people not to abide by any set of norms whatsoever: except those spontaneously developed by pop culture and peers.

Insofar as the goal of education is the transmission of culture, direct contact with humans who know how to live is crucial. Although innovations in educational technology may help teach the academic component of education, innovations in the human element of education are the only means by which we will be able to make a fundamental difference in the lives of the poor. I say this as someone

with solid roots in the working class, someone who has seen some members of my family flourish due to positive habits and attitudes and other members of my family experience misery due to negative habits and attitudes. Based on the dozens of members of my own extended family whose lives I've observed, as well as the hundreds of children of various social classes whom I've educated, day-to-day intellectual and emotional habits are the real key to social mobility. And, as an educator who specializes in the development of new intellectual and emotional habits by means of the creation of new classroom cultures, I know that all young people can have access to the habits needed for success.

The poor are among those who would benefit most from such a process of mutation, selection, and subsequent transmission of new classroom and peer cultures. The system of K-12 education that has been established in this country was a reasonably effective system for educating upper-middle class students one hundred years ago. If a student had been raised with the cultural norms of the upper-middle class, then training in biology, chemistry, grammar, history, etc. might have been an efficient use of time in order to prepare him for entrance into college at the time. Since then, generations of students have wasted time that might have more productively been spent in other activities. Instead of learning biology or grammar in a context in which initiative and intellectual independence was destroyed, they could have been learning initiative and intellectual independence first and foremost, or frugality and industriousness, or emotional awareness and teamwork, or some other combination of more valuable personal traits.

Anyone who saves and invests \$2 per day from the age of 15 years old to the age of 70 in an index fund will, at long-term average rates of equity return (9%), become a multi-millionaire. Is it utopian to imagine that, if there were schools that provided deep habituation in frugality and industriousness, in our economy today every impoverished student could create a multi-million dollar fortune? Unlike welfare or other stop-gap measures, such a transference of the technology of success to the poor could eliminate poverty permanently. Moreover, only a generation ago such norms of frugality and industriousness were common. They still are among many people from the developing world.

Because human beings are so varied, with different cultural backgrounds and different personal characteristics, in order to optimize future success for the underprivileged we need vastly more variety in education. Given enough freedom we will eventually develop forms of education that are remarkably different from what we see at present. Some need training in manners, some in "how to win friends and influence people," some in frugality and investment, some need education as emotional therapy, some need to find themselves, etc. In a market, these and other forms of education will be integrated seamlessly into formidably effective, holistic human development programs that will allow for far more social mobility than exists at present. The more K-12 education is forcibly restricted to the existing curriculum administered by the existing government institutions and certified personnel, the more the poor, in particular, will continue to suffer.

Success in our society is not simply a matter of academic achievement. It is well-known that the income distribution fits a log-normal distribution (highly-skewed, with few rich and many poor). This income distribution is almost certainly due largely to the fact that numerous independent variables – such as academic skills, presentation (speaking) skills, strategic intelligence, appropriate class manners, emotional intelligence, etc. - are necessary to succeed in the workplace.

A complex constellation of characteristics are required for success, most of which are not cultivated by existing schools. Although there are some students who fail because they do not learn academics, there are other students who do learn academics and yet who still do not succeed in life. Our present approach does not begin to provide every child with what he or she really needs to succeed in life. Insofar as it claims to do so, the system is telling a lie.

The Idea of Cultural Innovation

Cultural innovation is constantly taking place. Every new song, book, video, movie, game, communication device, software package, home design, bathtub, spatula, toothbrush, tattoo, zoo, museum, sex toy, car, vacation, map, corporation, spiritual practice, parenting practice, marital therapy, food, diet, exercise, sporting equipment, and so forth has some impact on culture. The notion that we should not seek to innovate culturally is absurd. It is happening all around us at an ever-increasing pace (remember Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock*?)

The only relevant question is “Do we allow cultural innovation to take place in every realm of life except education, or do also allow a world in which educators may consciously, deliberately learn how to provide better ways of life?”

The most potent cultural innovators are probably entertainment, broadly construed. There is nothing wrong with entertainment per se. But entertainment necessarily is geared towards satisfying short-term needs, values, and desires. Why should we accept a society in which cultural innovation is almost exclusively determined by means of short-term impulses?

Suppose, hypothetically, that there are human capacities or appetites that take 10 or more years to develop; that those aspects of human nature are best developed during the formative years of childhood and adolescence; and that in order to cultivate those aspects of human nature well it is necessary to have communities of talented, committed people working in concert over many years in order to best develop those aspects of human nature. If, hypothetically, any such aspects of human capacity existed we would be largely ignorant of them because the institutions described above do not exist.

With respect to some desirable traditional cultural traits, those who have tried to preserve them find that it has become very difficult to pass them on to their children in contemporary circumstances: In the West there are plausible claims that characteristics such as character and integrity, courage and honor are not

what they used to be.¹⁵ In Japan, which experienced a very rapid transition to modernity in the late 19th century, older Japanese observed the rapid decline in the Samurai Bushido ethos in a matter of decades. Alaska natives saw an even more rapid introduction to modernity in the mid-20th century, in which thousand-year old survival skills ranging from hunting knowledge to extraordinary physical toughness and prowess, vanished almost overnight. Cultural traits that may have evolved over many centuries disappear in a generation or even within a few years.

A skeptic may suggest: Fine and good, but we don't really need seal-hunting skills, arctic survival skills, Samurai self-discipline and shame, or perhaps even old-style honor and integrity. Regardless of what one thinks of the particular examples of skills, my point is that if there were any human characteristics whatsoever that required long tutelage by trained masters in a supportive culture they would be invisible to us at present. There may be amazing capabilities that might allow human beings to adapt to the 21st century but which do not exist, which cannot exist, because our society has prevented the development of those institutions that would bring forth such human capabilities.

Traditional cultures, having evolved through centuries of interaction with a relatively stable environment, are models of such integrated, coherent cultures. "Education" in such cultures was a natural, unconscious experience in which young people gradually learned the practices of their culture. With the exception of the rapidly disappearing vestigial remains of such cultures, human beings today are raised in a more or less incoherent cultural universe. In the absence of a coherent culture, humans are more likely to find themselves prey to impulsive and compulsive behaviors, variously directed towards material goods, status, sex, food, vanity, emotional attachments, gambling, electronic stimulation (television, video games, etc.), or drugs. We are very complex organisms; in order to live as healthy adults, we need to be raised well.

A century and more ago people talked about "formative education" or "the education of character" which was understood to be the deliberate effort to provide young people with the internal stability required to live well. The model that I have described is as true of traditional "formative" education as it is of "transformative" education. Indeed, formative education is the model for all my educational interests. I am very impressed by the formative education characteristic of military schools and traditional Catholic schools. Although my goals as an educator are very different from the goals of these schools, the cultural traditions of which these schools are an integrated component are rightly attentive to such currently neglected aspects of education such as heroes, ideals, music, manners, and attitudes.

Most of contemporary academic education is remarkably neglectful of the importance of such details. The extraordinary human phenomena resulting from

¹⁵ A tough, grizzled old Colorado rancher, a seeming model of probity and integrity, humbly acknowledges that his generation doesn't even know what integrity is by comparison with that of his father and grandfather. No comment needed regarding the subsequent deterioration in more recent generations.

the development of Spartan discipline or Buddhist awareness would never have occurred as a consequence of a contemporary American education. I have gradually come to realize that although traditional education and traditional culture was deeply flawed, that the holistic cultural approaches used traditional cultures should not have been left behind by modernity. The same kinds of approaches that have been used in traditional cultures for centuries can be adapted and innovated for greater human well-being going forward into the future.

Gradually, the distinctive new cultures will develop reputations as a market develops in which parents need more information to understand which school model is best for each of their children. Just as *Car and Driver* and *PC User* magazines provide detailed, opinionated analysis of their respective products, so too will education magazines arise that will provide detailed analysis of distinctive educational cultures. New standards of quality will arise. Instead of test score performance (in the case of public schools) or elitist reputation (in the case of private schools) sufficing for measures of quality, gradually there will develop cadres of perceptive education critics, similar to critics found in the worlds of automobiles, computers, food, art, travel, etc.: experts in the realm of taste and judgment with respect to education. They will perceptively discern those schools that develop an especially wonderful sort of emotional intelligence, those schools that develop a distinctive mental originality, those schools in which lifelong healthy habits are reliably developed, those schools in which males characteristically treat females with remarkable grace and consideration, and a thousand other distinctive virtues.

Alasdair MacIntyre, in *After Virtue*, describes the pre-requisites for what he calls a "virtue culture." He intends for these pre-requisites to be abstract and general, to apply to any culture that wishes to develop any particular set of human virtues, be they integrity, politeness, courage, compassion, environmental concern, gender equality, etc. His pre-requisites are:

1. A communal understanding of each individual's life as a meaningful whole, a life in its entirety as a contribution to the community: people must see the value and meaning of their life as a lifelong contribution (or lack thereof) to society. If people interpret life simply as one impulsive entertainment after another, or one political commitment after another, or any set of disconnected events, it is impossible to develop a serious virtue culture.
2. A moral tradition: people, especially young people, must be raised in a morally coherent social universe. Who are the great heroes of the past? What are the great events that led to our present time? What ideals do we aspire to in the future? What actions (or even thoughts) are considered unforgivable transgressions? What leads to exclusion from the community?
3. A set of practices that allow the people to develop, practice, and perfect their virtues. If manners are important, then there will be social settings in which the best manners are modeled. If honor is important, then there will be social settings in which honor is recognized, acknowledged, exhibited. Whatever

the virtue, young people will be immersed in a culture in which the human actions that allow them to achieve excellence in that culture will be constantly exhibited. For manners, young people would be provided training in the small points of etiquette as well as the larger social principles behind the etiquette. Schools that developed frugality would provide constant opportunities for students to discover amazing values for very little money. If political participation is the required virtue, young people would be trained in political oratory, analysis, and dialogue. In each case, the training may be implicit rather than explicit; but it must be pervasive in the cultural immersion that constitutes their education.

These conditions are almost impossible to provide today. They certainly don't exist at most public schools.

MacIntyre is of the belief that all cultures prior to modern European culture were based on such a schema. Humans were raised understanding that they had a role and standing in society and that their entire life was a reflection of how well they fulfilled that role. Indeed, in many cultures, this reputational effect was multi-generational: if one violated a cultural norm, it damaged one's children, and children's children, and so forth.

Each culture had a vision of excellence in that society. This vision of excellence was transmitted by means of myth and heroic tales, it was transmitted by a multitude of comments, jokes, attitudes, manners, behavioral corrections, and so forth: the very texture of day-to-day life provided a consistent, coherent template that taught young people how they were to behave. From time to time, a member of the society was sanctioned or expelled in a manner that made it perfectly clear what types of behavior were not condoned by the community. And young people were brought up in a set of cultural practices that allowed them to practice the requisite virtues of that society so that they would naturally become respectable adult participants in such a society.

Of course, western civilization has been seeking liberation from these sorts of "intolerant" virtue cultures for some 500 years. The social rebellions known as the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment in their resistances to traditional authorities unwittingly provided the foundation for the more radical liberations of the 20th century. In the 1920s and the 1960s it appeared as if radical individual freedom was the final goal.

What none of the liberators seems to have realized is the truth of Goethe's insight that "Whatever liberates our spirit without a corresponding increase in self-control is pernicious." I continue to be committed to the liberation of the spirit; and I have gradually come to realize that as I liberate spirits, I have an absolute obligation to simultaneously provide training in self-control. Else I am responsible for disasters.

Traditional cultures did not seek to liberate the spirit: by and large, they sought to constrain the spirit within very well-defined cultural boundaries. As a consequence, they were often highly bigoted, shaming, and sometimes cruel:

Zorba the Greek contrasts Zorba's own liberated spirit with the cruel stoning of a young widow. Films continue to celebrate the liberation of the young from the constraints of traditional narrow-mindedness: See *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* and *Bend it Like Beckham* for recent sweet comedies based on the same theme. Few people who are truly knowledgeable about traditional cultures would want to return to their brutal stasis, conformity, constraints, and judgmentalism.¹⁶

And yet many people long for community, tradition, ritual, structure, and meaning in their lives. We (including most emphatically Socratic intellectuals such as myself) have ripped traditional societies and norms to shreds. We had to do it. There were gross injustices and bigotries. We must now re-build more humane, tolerant, decent replacements for those earlier meaning systems.

Again, I don't claim to have a particular solution. While I can offer profoundly better approaches to training intellectuality and independent thought, I have not solved the problems of sexuality and the meaning of life. I know other educators who are better than I am at creating respect and reverence, who are better at creating awareness and self-discipline, who are better at creating physical vitality and rugged toughness, and who are better at creating aesthetic delight and musical joy. We need to be able to blend these and other approaches to discover what works. Each of us needs to be able to choose our own combinations and educational partners.

The more deeply I've thought about how to create a comprehensive educational solution to this problem the more I've been daunted by the scale of the problem. But no one individual should or could solve it. If thousands of individual educators were allowed to work with others to create institutions that exemplified their own attempted solutions, our society would gradually begin to figure out these problems on a large scale. Many thousands of wonderful human beings would, bit-by-bit, here and there, begin to discover, create, evolve, and then disseminate and improve better ways of life.

A transformative education which cultivates the attitudes and appetites, the habits and customs, the fashions and fantasies, the virtues and ideals of future generations offers a virtually untapped resource for increasing human well-being. In addition, many of the chronic problems facing modernity, including such diverse phenomena as environmental degradation, cancer, immune system disorders, poverty, racism, addictive behaviors, crime, spousal and child abuse, may ultimately require for their solution deep cultural changes which can only be achieved by means of transformative educational techniques not yet imagined.

A Vision for the Future

¹⁶ Indeed this is the ultimate theme of Dinesh D'Souza's book *What's So Great About America?* A cultural conservative himself, D'Souza ultimately acknowledges that for all of the cultural depravity, American freedom makes it all worthwhile in the end; the value of escaping traditional cultural constraints is that great (D'Souza is an émigré from India).

This book proposes a radical reconstruction of our educational system and, consequently, of our society. Most readers will find it implausible; fifteen years ago I would not have believed my own conclusions. And yet every aspect of the tale I am about to tell is based on specific classroom or school experiences, albeit unusual classrooms and unusual schools.

The good news is that it is possible to create fundamentally new peer cultures in our schools, cultures that are more supportive of learning, achievement, politeness, respect, and wellness. The challenge is that it will not be possible to create and disseminate high quality versions of these new peer cultures on a large scale until we have dramatically more educational freedom than we do at present.

For me, the most urgent political issue in the United States today is to gradually transform our existing K-12 educational institutions by means of universal school choice, through vouchers or tax credits, with minimal constraints concerning curriculum, staffing, or structure of schooling. There are three reasons why I regard this issue as the most urgent of all:

1. Because of the relentless pressures of global competition, those in our society who are not currently receiving a great education will find life in the 21st job market harsh and unforgiving.
2. Because of the collapse of common norms of culture, including those norms that prevent addiction, constrain sexuality, support industriousness and thrift, and provide a foundation for long-term meaning and purpose, many in our population already find life harsh and unforgiving.
3. Because people at all levels of our society crave greater meaning, purpose, and community in their lives, and yet they find themselves immersed in a society which lacks structures for providing new models of meaning, purpose, and community and yet in which gambling, pornography, addictive substances, sensational entertainments, consumer culture, and other types of short-term satisfactions are cheap and ubiquitous.

By administering K-12 education through government, a clunky, lumbering, impersonal agent, we have created a society in which it is easier for entrepreneurs to innovate and market short-term stimulations such as gambling and pornography than it is for entrepreneurs to innovate and market sources of long-term well-being such as wisdom and compassion. This book will make a passionate plea to legalize markets in happiness and well-being by means of legislation authorizing K-12 educational freedom.

Government control of education – through public schools or through excessive regulation of charter or private schools - amounts to granting control over the young human soul to all those who produce short term stimulations. Either real human beings, with distinctive intentions and ways of life, are allowed to create cultures with integrity – by means of minimally regulated school choice - or

bureaucratic rules prevent the formation of appetites in the young, and marketeers of all sorts thereby prey on the unformed souls of the young. This is the situation that we find ourselves in today. Educational freedom, rather than government control, is the sine qua non for the creation of happiness and well-being for all.

The argument of this book may be summarized by means of twenty propositions on education and wellness:

1. Culture, habits, and attitudes are the most important prerequisites to education.
2. Historically traditional cultures have varied widely; human variability due to culture is extraordinary. That variability is currently being lost through the force of those technology-based monocultures that are sweeping the world.
3. Over the course of 13 years of formal education, the average high school graduate is exposed to 14,000 hours of K-12 schooling. It is possible to have a considerable impact on the habits, attitudes, ideals, aesthetics, aspirations, and culture of the students over that time if that were to become the primary focus of educational institutions.
4. Habituation in new cultural norms may be successfully cultivated in the young only when they are educated by adults who consistently, moment-by-moment, support and enforce the new forms of habituation and personally exemplify the new virtues. In order to do this, the adults themselves must exhibit a consistent form of habituation. New cultures can not be created by innovations in textbooks or software.
5. Except for those few educational approaches that have distinctive teacher training programs (Montessori, Waldorf, and some religious school systems) combined with schools that actively support those pedagogies, existing teacher training does not even begin to ensure consistent habituation. The most consistent habituation faced by K-12 students in government schools today is habituation in passivity and dependence.
6. Cumulatively, deliberately inculcated habits and attitudes may provide a foundation for new cultures. The Jesuits deliberately created a more disciplined and intellectual European culture out of the chaos of medieval education. Montessori and Waldorf education are nascent examples of new cultures being formed today.
7. The existing government-controlled education system acts as a monopolistic standard with a market share far greater than that held by Microsoft's Windows standard. Unlike the Microsoft dominant standard, the government schooling standard is enforced legislatively and financed coercively.
8. Only when this dominant standard collapses will great educational innovations begin to be launched.

9. Freedom has been necessary for innovation in the world of ideas, the world of technology, and the world of entrepreneurship. If Galileo had more effectively been censored, Newton and modern physics might not exist. If government had regulated the invention of electrical devices in the 19th century, Thomas Edison's "invention of invention" would never have come into being. If tech entrepreneurs had needed government licenses to do their work, Silicon Valley, the microcomputer and the internet, would be a pale ghost of their present selves, if they existed at all. Likewise, educational freedom will be necessary for educational innovation.

10. Only visionary organizations, designed and built by a commitment to a distinctive vision, can consistently create distinctive cultures that are powerful enough to compete with the teen culture defined by the media. A distinctive, long-term vision can only be implemented institutionally in a voluntaristic institution. Visionary leaders must be able to hire, fire, and promote faculty based strictly on their own perception of quality.¹⁷

11. Markets will supply those goods desired by consumers.

12. Parents want their children to be healthy, well, productive, and happy.

13. Therefore in a free educational market there will be a demand for schools that can supply a healthier culture.

14. Innovative educators employed by private, visionary organizations will gradually develop increasingly healthier and more positive versions of teen culture.

15. Peer culture is a more powerful influence on teens than are parents. Currently teen culture is the biggest obstacle to parental ability to raise their children well. Conversely, a positive teen culture could compensate for many of the weaknesses of poor parenting.¹⁸

16. Culture by its very nature produces "neighborhood effects," or externalities; once we have created more sources of positive teen culture it will spread to those who don't originally pay for it or even choose it.

17. Many of us develop critical habits as teens; a healthier teen culture will result in a healthier adult culture.

18. "Healthier" may be construed widely; the foregoing analysis applies to any positive cultural characteristic.

19. Cumulatively, the long-term effects of an innovative, competitive market for adolescent well-being may produce cultural consequences as profound as, or

¹⁷ cf. Collins' and Porras' book, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*.

¹⁸ Again, Judith Rich Harris' *The Nurture Assumption* abundantly documents this thesis.

more profound than, the long-term effects of technological innovation.

20. Cumulatively then, just as technological innovation has had a dramatic impact on the economic standard of well-being, so too cultural innovation will have a dramatic positive impact on our social, emotional, and moral standard of well-being.

It has been said that the greatest invention of the 19th century was the invention of the invention. While there had certainly been inventions prior to the 19th century, only gradually did tinkerers and experimentalists begin to become conscious and deliberate about the act of invention. A magnificent turning point was Thomas Edison's creation of a laboratory specifically for the sake of creating inventions.

The worlds of martial arts and eastern spiritual practices contain innumerable lineages, each with a revered founder. The founders of new branches of lineages are rarely described using the rhetoric of innovation, yet that is precisely what they are. They are individuals who have achieved a new advance on a particular discipline or practice, resulting in new techniques that are then passed on to subsequent practitioners of the lineage. Similarly, the founders of monastic orders, such as St. Francis, St. Benedict, etc., are not usually perceived as "cultural innovators," despite the fact that they launched new cultural institutions that have survived for centuries.

In western education, individual educators are recognized as leaving a legacy from time to time. Thomas Arnold is renowned for creating a distinctive culture at Rugby School in England in the 19th century. Maria Montessori is well known for founding Montessori education, as is Rudolf Steiner for founding Waldorf education. Older alumni to this day feel a powerful attachment to the "Hutchins' College," the program at the University of Chicago during the tenure of Robert M. Hutchins as college president, 1930-1950. As with the saints, gurus, and martial artists, with the exceptions of Montessori and Steiner these educators are not usually conceptualized as "innovators."

The haphazard cultural inventions that have taken place hitherto, in eastern and western cultures, are analogous to the occasional inventions that characterized western society prior to the 19th century. By means of radical school choice combined with a conscious recognition of the power and importance of creating new school cultures, the greatest invention of the 21st century may be the invention of new cultural models that continually allow human beings to adapt ever more effectively to a world of ongoing creative destruction while allowing for ever deeper levels of happiness and well-being for people of all races, cultures, classes, and abilities.