

Capitalism and Morality

“LOSING THE FAMILY IN THE 20TH CENTURY: WELFARE’S DISASTROUS EFFECT ON THE AMERICAN FAMILY”

Lauren Twigg

Lauren is a 2008 graduate of Wheeling Jesuit University

Introduction: The Metaphysical Role of the Family

Each human life is begun by a male and a female, parents, whose rightful position from the birth of their child onward is to guide the new life in the ways of the world. St. Thomas Aquinas believed that “The first form of society is the family,”¹ which arises from the idea that parents are a child’s first impression of what it is to be human, how to behave in and out of the company of others, and how a well-adjusted adult functions in society. Parents represent safety, comfort, and stability for their children. The tasks of the immediate family unit are crucial to the existence of a child. In its earliest stages, the child depends on its parents for the continuation of its very life. Food, shelter, and healthcare are primary, but a loving, comforting, trust relationship is nearly as vital. A human’s physical and psychological development is entirely dependent upon its earliest years, a period during which caregivers must be especially conscientious and knowledgeable.

St. Augustine explained that “The will is love . . . it is necessary to love in order to know,”² and it is within the family that we are unconditionally loved and thus learn to love. It is in the family that we begin to understand the world and so become independent individuals capable of learning, understanding, and communicating. The family unit has no substitutes; no replacement attempt can ever capture the qualities exclusive to the parent to child bonds. The family is a microcosm of society; as children, relationships with immediate and extended family create an understanding of people and a sense of decorum in interaction. A child becomes whom he will be as an adult member of society based on his experience as a member of the family unit. A society is thus reflective of the families that comprise it, proving that stable family units facilitate the growth of successful societies grounded in the values and ethics which provide for the good life.

In the United States, the traditional family is a rarity. Two-parent families seem less common than they once were, and relationships with extended family are often nonexistent due to the mobility that modern society has afforded us. Without the guidance and support of the immediate and extended family unit, hardships that afflict members of society are much more taxing. Throughout American history, welfare programs have been created by the government to ensure that citizens facing these hardships do not suffer too terribly. What was once the responsibility of the family, neighborhood, the local community, or city government has been acquired by the federal government, based on the assumption that big government knows best. These programs have a fundamental flaw: They attempt to do the work that is the natural job of families. The consequences of government attempts at parenting are highly visible with excessive dependence on welfare handouts, lack of self-worth in recipients, complacency, and generations of welfare-families. As these programs become more intrusive, the traditional family

¹ “Aquinas, Classic Philosophers: The Great Thinkers of Western Philosophy,” *The Radical Academy*, <http://www.radicalacademy.com/Aquinas3.htm#soul>.

² “Augustine, Classical Philosophers: The Great Thinkers of Western Philosophy,” *The Radical Academy*, <http://radicalacademy.com/philaugustine2.htm#politics>.

becomes less of a necessity and so the virtues exclusive to family life become less vital to survival. In order for members of civil society to seek the good life, they must grasp the virtues required for its attainment. If the family is made obsolete by the government, virtues of the good life will fade and society will lose its foundation and surely become divided, relativistic, and solipsistic.

The Family Prior to the Industrial Revolution

As long as humans have existed, families have existed. From the earliest nomadic societies to modern day, the family has endured and proven its place as a vital part of society: “Again and again, in spite of proposals for change and actual experiments, human societies have reaffirmed their dependence on the family as the basic unit of human living . . . Family is the oldest, most firmly grounded human institution.”³ History shows that the pre-Industrial Revolution family had irreplaceable bonds that extended far beyond the constraints of the typical family of latter years. The immediate family (parents and children) and the extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins) often lived closely amongst each other. The rest of the community consisted of familial arrangements such as these, creating a network of families, friends, and neighbors. Within these neighborhoods and communities, each family functioned interdependently, making its own way with its own means and choosing to help a fellow neighbor when necessary.

The scope of responsibility of the pre-Industrial family was much wider than it is today, though the most essential and natural roles of parents have remained. Pre-Industrial parents wore many hats, the first notable one being physical providers of food and shelter, like modern parents and parents all throughout history. A second, equally important parental role that has remained is that of psychological “trainer,” to put it in literal terms. As Jennifer Roback Morse elaborates, “The infant’s dependence on adults is more profound than his need to resolve his discomfort, for only an adult can teach the child to trust. A child cannot become trusting all by himself.”⁴ The parents’ role in a child’s psychological development is utterly crucial, as a child cannot thrive on the satisfaction of material needs alone. In order to become fully human, a child’s physical and psychological needs must be fulfilled; the only people capable of doing this completely are the child’s parents.

Unlike most parents today, pre-Industrial parents also assumed the role of educators and employers. According to author Edward L. Kain, “Many functions that we now associate with separate institutions, such as government, religion, education, and medicine, were within the family.”⁵ In addition to developing their child’s education, families often ran their own businesses throughout generations, exposing their children to the ins and outs of business economics. Often young males would grow up to take on the role of family business owner, while the female children would learn domestic responsibilities from the women of the family. The system of shared responsibility was necessary for survival. Through the process of engaging children in family responsibilities, children would come to understand, on a small scale, what was expected of them in society and why certain behaviors were desirable. According to Morse, this parent/child interaction “is relational. Parents build relationships with their children and in doing so, teach their children how to build relationships with others. Families can create attachment and teach cooperation well or poorly.”⁶

The relation-building skills that parents possess go even further than merely teaching the importance of cooperation amongst people. Through the aforementioned familial practices, parents teach their children virtues, or “character traits that are morally and socially valued,” such as “rationality, independence, integrity, justice, honesty, courage, trustworthiness, productiveness, benevolence, and pride.”⁷ These virtues encompass what is necessary to achieve individual happiness and what is required of people who comprise a society rooted in rational applications of morality.

³ Margaret Meade and Ken Heyman, *Family* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), 78 & 80.

⁴ Jennifer Roback Morse, *Love&Economics: Why the Laissez-Faire Family Doesn’t Work* (Dallas: Spence Publishing Company, 2001), 33.

⁵ Edward L. Kain, *The Myth of Family Decline*, (Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1990), 17.

⁶ Roback Morse, *Love&Economics: Why the Laissez-Faire Family Doesn’t Work*, 84.

⁷ Edward Younkins, *Capitalism and Commerce*, (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2002), 3 & 44.

Pre-industrial families often benefited from keeping in close contact with extended family, not only for economic and physical reasons, but for the “psychic benefits” that result from close ties with one’s roots. The oldest members of the family unit, grandparents and great aunts and uncles were once bastions of time-tested knowledge and survival skills. According to Meade, “From grandparents children learn about the whole life cycle . . . Through grandparents children also can learn how society keeps going, and what keeps it strong and steady generation after generation.”⁸ In addition to the deep connectedness a child can feel with the past, grandparents and other elders have served as sources of comfort and strength in times of crisis, as their age shows their ability to stand the test of time. Meade explains that “the grandparents’ knowledge was a guarantee of dependability and security. For the oldest people knew how the group survived disaster.”⁹

Post-Industrial Revolution

After the Industrial Revolution, the advent of technology in industry and daily American life caused families to extend spatial boundaries and expand their individual functions, causing some scholars to suggest that the Industrial Revolution may have been the first step towards losing the family. Mothers were no longer obligated to teach their daughters to excel in domestic pursuits, as the young girls could now work outside the home in factories. The risks and responsibilities of personal business ownership may have seemed burdensome compared to the ease of becoming an employee who earned a paycheck, causing generation-owned businesses to break apart. Kain explains that the progression of technology freed families from many of their pre-Industrial tasks: “As the technological level of societies increases, there is a gradual emergence of separate institutions, and the family becomes more specialized in its functions.”¹⁰

The family no longer needed to function interdependently. Each family member could lead his or her own successful life, independent of other family members, because other social structures lent themselves to the perpetuation of the good life. Though the mobility and diverse opportunities brought about by the advent of technology have had incredibly positive results, it is certain that the family unit has been irreversibly changed, but not necessarily to a fault. This technologically-driven change in social structures has made it easier for families to drift apart, requiring a great deal of work and attentiveness for families who desired that same closeness, which is not impossible to achieve. Data support Kain’s claim that “Change in important family variables such as fertility is clearly linked with a move from rural to urban settings. Rural families and households have higher marriage rates, a higher child-to-woman ratio, more children ever born and persons per household, and lower rates of divorce and female labor force participation than urban families.”¹¹ The move from rural to urban life created new stress on the family unit which ensured that those uninterested in perpetuating the relationship, for a multitude of reasons, could more easily sever the unique ties of family life.

The world has changed immensely since the Industrial Revolution. Inventions and innovations which improve the quality of human life have far surpassed the wildest dreams of our great-great grandparents. Capitalism has shed light on the gift that is human freedom, as the many advances in the business sector have extended their advantages into private life. The human life span is longer in industrialized societies, the death of newborns and birthing mothers is rarely a concern, viruses and bacteria which caused major epidemics are no longer a source of distress thanks to vaccinations and antibiotics, and people “can spend less time on physical concerns thus giving them the time to turn to higher level pursuits of happiness such as education, love, creative and fulfilling work, character development, and community building”.¹²

The plethora of advantages of industrialization and capitalism necessarily comes with some negative side effects. As more opportunities became available, the family lost much of its interdependence, permitting each member to seek out her own happiness in her own way. In his article “The Family is in Decline,” David Popenoe articulates his explanations for the dissolution of the family. He first cites the decline in fertility. From 1960 to 1989,

⁸ Meade, *Family*, 122.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁰ Kain, *The Myth of Family Decline*, 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

¹² Younkins, *Capitalism and Commerce*, 3.

“fertility declined in the United States by almost 50% . . .”¹³ He then cites the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s as having dissolved the tie between sex and procreation. Premarital sex became more acceptable as American’s values shifted in favor of individual freedoms without the restraints of society’s rules. Next he cites mothers moving into the workforce as a cause for familial dissolution. He explains that “In 1960, only 19% of married women with children younger than 6 were in the labor force . . . by 1986, this figured had climbed to 54%.”¹⁴ These problems no doubt have had a visible effect on the family unit; however, it seems that the real issue began long before the 1960s. In an effort to help during a time of immense distress, the federal government of the 1930s began a long, disastrous offensive against the traditional family, the effects of which Americans are still feeling today.

The Beginnings of Government Interference

As the traditional family unit struggled under the pressure of technological breakthrough and subsequent urban sprawl in the early part of the 20th century, the instance of government interference in the private lives of citizens increased. The most obvious historical example of this occurred during the Great Depression in the early 1930s, which preceded a skyrocketing divorce rate and the rapid decline of the family as an independent unit. Dependence on the family unit, community, private organizations, and the local government waned in favor of the hand of big government, which possessed the money and the power to accomplish tasks presumably too difficult for smaller groups such as the family and the surrounding community. The Great Depression shed light on the government’s power and ability to help in ways others could or would not. This, along with other opportunities created by industrialization, led some to suggest that a traditional family was obsolete.

During the late 1920s to 1939, the government leaders of the U.S. experienced a wake up call in terms of American poverty. As author James T. Patterson reports, “No one had bothered to collect adequate statistics on poverty before the Depression, and government officials in the 1930s were slow to count even unemployment.”¹⁵ Clearly poverty and the care of the impoverished was not a pressing issue in the pre-Depression era. This may have stemmed from the fact that the poor had not yet become such a large population, counted in their own right simply as “the poor”, or perhaps because those who were poor were able to aid themselves by eliciting the help of their extended family (if they lived nearby) or the local community, the church, and the city government. One historical example of this can be traced back to the 1830s when “state governments began to require that cities and counties establish poorhouses.”¹⁶ Unfortunately, the number of the poor in America outgrew what local communities could accommodate. Patterson identifies four sources of poverty in that era that existed independently of the Depression: “One was the aging of the population . . . Another scourge was depletion of the soil . . . A third . . . the increase in the labor force . . . [and] Finally, there was residual unemployment even in the good years of the 1920s . . .”¹⁷

The Great Depression only deepened the distress of many impoverished American families and brought upon the members of the middle class problems they never thought they would face. Families were further separated as the distress of poverty shifted their focus to survival, rather than family unity. Church organizations, neighborhoods, and local governments understood the vastness of the problem facing people locally and around the nation and exhausted their relief efforts. The example of the government of Philadelphia, PA, is one of true magnanimity, efficiency, and forethought during the Great Depression. Patterson cites one historian as having called Philadelphia’s program the “most imaginative and effective’ municipal relief operation in the country . . . [The] city enlisted cooperation between private agencies and municipal resources to the tune of \$1 million per month in 1931.”¹⁸ Despite city-wide relief efforts, the success was short-lived because the money ran out: “By June 1932 there was no more local money for relief”.¹⁹ The efforts of families, neighborhoods, church organizations, and local

¹³ David Popenoe, “The Family is in Decline,” in *Family in America: Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. David L. Bender and Bruno Leone (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1992), 18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁵ James T. Patterson, *America’s Struggle Against Poverty in the 20th Century*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 40.

¹⁶ Michael Tanner, *The End of Welfare: Fighting Poverty in the Civil Society*, (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 1996), 35.

¹⁷ Patterson, *America’s Struggle*, 40.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

governments could no longer hold a candle to the extremes of citizens' anguish. Records indicate that "13 million Americans, 24.9 percent of the labor force, were unemployed . . . Several cities went bankrupt . . . In New York City alone nearly 400 private charities went under between 1929 and 1932."²⁰

Despite the failings of many private charities, President Herbert Hoover, in office during the Depression's beginnings, believed the strife pass more quickly and efficiently if private efforts remained as strong as possible. Hoover was vocally opposed to federal aid. Having faith in the charitable spirit of America, he believed that private charities and local governments could withstand the trials and tribulations of American poverty. Citing other welfare-state related problems, Hoover held firm to his position: "I am opposed to any direct or indirect government dole. The breakdown and increased unemployment in Europe is due in part to such practices."²¹

Through a study of the beginnings of the welfare state, primarily FDR's New Deal programs, it is simple to see how the responsibility of the family was diminished. The citizens of the U.S. would not take "no" for an answer to the question of federal aid. Choosing to elect Franklin Delano Roosevelt as President, Americans paved the way for their very own welfare state. Within the first months of his presidency, FDR began an unprecedented welfare program, in which "for the first time, funds were directed, not narrowly to widows, orphans, or the disabled, but to 'all needy unemployed persons and/or their dependents.'"²² According to Thomas Woods, "If the state (at any level) takes on these tasks [those proper to the family] . . . it effectively subsidizes the breakup of these extended family units,"²³ which is exactly the pernicious trend begun by the New Deal programs.

The New Deal initially focused on relieving the plight of the poor as quickly as possible: "In early 1933 Congress appropriated \$500 million for direct relief . . ."²⁴ Under the Federal Emergency Relief Act, programs such as the Civil Works Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps were created to ensure employment during the winter of 1933-34, in addition to the general aid given to those who could not be employed. It quickly became clear, however, that federal aid had its deficiencies. One poignantly admitted defect came from one of F.D.R.'s economic advisors, Harry Hopkins. Regarding government relief he stated, "I don't think anyone can go on year after year . . . accepting relief without affecting his character in some way unfavorably . . . To dole out relief in this way is to administer a narcotic, a subtle destroyer of the human spirit."²⁵ One would have hoped that these words of clarity would have served as a warning against any further federal relief efforts of this proportion, or would have at least created a guiding principle on which different relief efforts could be administered. Sadly, history reveals that Hopkins' advice went unheeded, as poverty was "rediscovered" in the 1960s.

The Dissolution of the Family from Johnson to George W. Bush

In hindsight, not all of FDR's programs directly contributed to the breakdown of the family as patently as the welfare programs created during Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency. Many of FDR's programs involved temporary work relief so that people could maintain some sense of independence and work ethic, but Johnson took a different approach. Upon taking office after the assassination of President Kennedy, Johnson began a War on Poverty. After the release of Michael Harrington's book *The Other America* in 1962, poverty regained the spotlight. It became evident that "Poverty was not going to be eradicated by a Job Corps or a few loans to small businessmen. Sweeping changes in the income distribution system were needed. . ."²⁶

In response to the reinvigoration of poverty as a social issue, Johnson created programs such as Head Start and the Department of Housing and Urban Development and also expanded an already existing program, the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program, quite possibly the most well-known welfare program in America. His extension of the AFDC would allow aid to be offered to "two-parent families in which the father was

²⁰ Tanner, *The End of Welfare*, 45.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

²² *Ibid.*, 48.

²³ Thomas Woods, *The Church and the Market: A Catholic Defense of the Free Economy*, (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005), 148.

²⁴ Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty*, 56).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

²⁶ Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy 1950-1980*, (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 28.

unemployed.”²⁷ It is no surprise, then, that the number of people on welfare in America increased: “By 1965 the number of people receiving AFDC had risen to 4.3 million . . . During the 1950s welfare rolls had increased by 17 percent. During the 1960s they increased by 107 percent” and much of the increase occurred “at a time of relative economic prosperity and low unemployment.”²⁸

The data prove that Johnson’s efforts drove the poor to make the most rational choice available: they chose to stay on welfare rather than work at a job that paid less than a monthly welfare check. Shortly after the War on Poverty was declared, statistical evidence showed negative effects from the AFDC. Patterson writes “that about 40 percent of AFDC families remained on the rolls for three to five years, and 25 percent for five years or more,”²⁹ evidencing that the original intent of the welfare system had backfired. The system could be used as a way of life, rather than a temporary crutch. Another circumstance that is prevalent even today is the appearance of welfare generations: “Between 30 and 40 percent of recipient families included a parent who had been on welfare as a child.”³⁰ Not only had welfare become a way of life for some individuals, but entire families were cyclical recipients of government aid. The virtues instilled by the traditional family in a traditional community such as hard work, enterprise, and charity became lost in the mire of handouts.

As the welfare state began to spiral out of control, American political leaders did little to curb the damages: “Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter all added new anti-poverty programs . . . Between 1965 and 1975 . . . spending for cash welfare programs such as the AFDC tripled.”³¹ After Carter, welfare spending ebbed and flowed, with minor spending reductions under Reagan and a large increase under Bush. When Clinton entered office in 1993, he promised to change the welfare system as Americans knew it. It was clear that the system adversely affected the family unit and required structural changes to achieve the original intent of welfare in America. After much debate, the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act was signed into law. The aim of the act was to “change the nation’s welfare system into one that requires work in exchange for time-limited assistance . . . strong work requirements, a performance bonus to reward states for moving welfare recipients into jobs, state maintenance of effort requirement, comprehensive child support enforcement, and supports for families moving from welfare to work.”³²

Since the 1996 reform, welfare has changed in hopes of strengthening the family and avoiding incentives to raise children singly with the help of the government rather than a spouse. President George W. Bush’s aim in his welfare policies has been to strengthen families and help them become independent, functioning without the government’s help. In 2002, he signed a bill that required forty hours of work a week from welfare recipients, hoping that it would increase the self-esteem and morale of those citizens: We “want more Americans to know the pride and success that come from hard work.”³³ After about five decades, American political leaders have come to realize the dangers of any policy that tends to divide families.

Social Repercussions, A Case Study: Sweden

Despite the improvements that have been made in the last fifty years, the lasting effects of major welfare handouts still exist. The American family has been in a precarious state for decades, as Hans-Hermann Hoppe explains: “[A]ll the indicators of family disintegration and malfunctioning, such as rates of divorce, illegitimacy, child abuse, parent abuse, spouse abuse, single parenting, singledom, alternative lifestyles, and abortion, have increased.”³⁴ Thomas Woods points out the most striking social repercussions of extensive welfare programs. A case study of Sweden shows the effects of social programs that attempt to replicate the natural functions of the family. In the 1840s,

²⁷ Tanner, *The End of Welfare*, 52.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁹ Patterson, *America’s Struggle Against Poverty in the 20th Century*, 104.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

³¹ Tanner, *The End of Welfare*, 54.

³² “1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act,” *SourceWatch*, <http://www.sourcewatch.org>

³³ “President’s Welfare Reform Package Strengthens Families,” *The Whitehouse*, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/print/20030114-6.html>.

³⁴ Woods, *The Church and the Market*, 150.

Sweden began a series of social welfare legislation that quickly changed the face of the traditional family. Laws that made school attendance compulsory and banned child labor changed the child's position in the family. Once financially valuable, productive members of the family, children became burdensome, as rearing them became dictated by the state. As the detriments of having children became clear, Sweden began to face a full-fledged population crisis:

With the family stripped, by state fiat, of all productive functions, of all insurance and welfare functions, and of most consumptive functions, it should cause little surprise that ever fewer Swedes chose to live in families. The marriage rate fell to a record low among modern nations, while the proportion of adults living alone soared. In central Stockholm, for example, fully two-thirds of the population lived in single-person households by the mid-1980s. With the costs and benefits of children fully socialized, and with the natural economic gains from marriage intentionally eliminated by law, the bearing of children was also severed from marriage: by 1990, well over half of Swedish births were outside of marriage.³⁵

Effects on the American Family

The effects of welfare policies in America have become as severe as in Sweden; however, the family as known before the major welfare policies of the Johnson era is now rare. According to Michael Tanner, "Perhaps the gravest social challenge facing America today is the breakup of the American family . . . In 1960 more than 80 percent of children lived with their mothers and fathers . . . By 1990 only 57.7 percent of children lived with two biological parents."³⁶ The illegitimacy rate soared as well: "In 1960, approximately 224,000 children were born to single mothers. In 1980, the number had grown to 665, 747."³⁷ Statistics prove that "having a child out of wedlock often means a lifetime in poverty,"³⁸ leading many women to choose welfare because "they most commonly have little money, little education, no job, and no permanent partner to help make up for the financial and psychological deficits."³⁹ It is this demographic that most often becomes entangled in the welfare trap and spends the longest number of years supported by the government. Often these young women continue to have children out of wedlock and so must maintain their welfare-recipient status. Many of the children of these women grow up to have children out-of-wedlock and then become welfare recipients as well: "[W]hite women raised in single-parent households are 164 percent more likely to bear children out of wedlock . . ."⁴⁰

The welfare system has morphed into a social construct in which having children out of wedlock is no longer damaging to a young woman's life. As Woods points out, a young girl who sees that other girls who have had children out of wedlock "have suffered few visible consequences . . . she is less inclined to modify her own behavior to prevent pregnancy."⁴¹ It is no longer socially and economically imperative that a man and woman be bound by the constraints of marriage to start a family. Premarital sex is thus less risky as welfare programs act as a parachute for the jump into accidental parenthood. Once the child is born, the state can provide for its economic needs instead of the father. The state's willingness to care for illegitimate children has markedly changed the face of the American family. Mothers and children are separate from fathers because the responsibility to be a traditional family has disappeared. The consequences faced by children of single mothers have grave implications for our society's future.

Jennifer Roback Morse has completed extensive study on the effects of this familial structure. Children of the state-endorsed, single mother family, have a decidedly more difficult life to lead. The list of social and psychological maladies that are likely to plague a child of a single mother is alarming. Morse explains that "Children from mother-only families obtain fewer years of education and are more likely to drop out of high school; they have lower earnings in young adulthood and are more likely to be poor; they are more likely to marry and have children early, both in and out of wedlock; they are more likely to divorce . . . commit delinquent acts and to engage in drug

³⁵ Ibid., 151.

³⁶ Tanner, *The End of Welfare*, 69.

³⁷ Murray, *Losing Ground*, 127.

³⁸ Tanner, *The End of Welfare*, 72.

³⁹ Murray, *Losing Ground*, 128.

⁴⁰ Tanner, *The End of Welfare*, 75.

⁴¹ Woods, *The Church and the Market*, 154.

and alcohol use.”⁴² The list continues with even more unfortunate side effects, and many remain to be seen, as there has yet to be a resurgence of the traditional family structure. For Morse, the problem with single parenting boils down to one seemingly simplistic fact: “The job of child rearing is too big for an individual person to do.”⁴³ Not merely a matter of opinion, this truth is represented in statistical analysis: “If the question is, ‘Are families headed by a single mother disproportionately poor?’ the answer is yes . . . As of 1980, 65 percent of all poor blacks who were living in families were living in families headed by a single female. The parallel statistic for white was 34 percent.”⁴⁴

The State Fails as a Parent

The presence of a father is necessary to provide care of children holistically . Morse argues that the father serves as an irreplaceable disciplinarian and protector. A father’s strength magnifies a mother’s authority. When a child behaves poorly, he may be punished by the mother and additionally reprimanded by the father, or vice versa. The point is that the lesson the child learns is ingrained as the child is held to a standard of higher behavior deemed important by a united front: mother and father. Secondly, the protection of a father cannot be provided by anyone else. Morse cites that “Statistics show that young girls in fatherless families are at a greater risk for abuse by men outside the circle of their families and their mothers’ friends. Children without resident fathers are more vulnerable to predatory behavior, both sexual and physical . . .”⁴⁵ The importance of the father is recognized by all peoples of the world. According to Meade, “Even the most primitive peoples . . . insist that women must have husbands, so that children may have fathers. Every people believes that there must be at least one grown man who will care for the mother, provide shelter and food, guard and teach the child, and give it a stable place in the world.”⁴⁶ It is not that the family must function as a purely patriarchal structure; rather, it is that a mother and father together make up a natural balance of what a child needs to become a fully functioning adult. A man and woman must come together to create a child, but the necessity of the mother and father extends beyond anatomy and physiology. The qualities the father lacks are provided by the mother, and those lacking in the mother are provided by the father. In light of these facts, it is impossible for a welfare state to adequately replace a father. Though federal programs may be able to provide food and shelter, the all-important, uniquely human characteristics such as love, trust, and psychological stability can be offered exclusively by a father and a mother.

The Long Road to Losing the Family

As the U.S. morphed from a picture of vast farm communities to bustling urban neighborhoods, many wonderful conveniences have been made available in American life, but it is certain that the traditional family has been lost in the shuffle. It is important to realize, however, that the disintegration of the family is not a recent trend, but something that has been occurring for many, many decades. People often incorrectly cite the *Ozzie and Harriet* and *Leave it to Beave* families of the 1950s as the ideal pictures of the family that reemerged after World War II. But statistics have shown that the romanticized version of the 20th century family “has never really existed.”⁴⁷ Ironically, the highest divorce rate in American history was seen in 1945, just as World War II ended. The divorce rate increased from 1950 to 1980, but never again reached “the peak of 1945 until the mid-1970s.”⁴⁸ The one correlative historical fact that remains is that the divorce rate peaked little more than a decade after the Depression, a time, as shown, that saw the early beginnings of an Americanized “nanny state.” The effects of socialist policies in Sweden highlight the potential for such social legislation to gnaw at the fibers of the traditional family unit. It makes sense, then, that the crumbling of the family would begin shortly after the policies were enacted and would then continue as policies became more prevalent and more invasive. It would be false however to attribute the rising divorce rate solely to socialist policies. Author Edward L. Kain explains that many marriages dissolved in 1945 after hasty pre-

⁴² Roback Morse, *Love and Economics*, 90.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴⁴ Murray, *Losing Ground*, 132.

⁴⁵ Roback Morse, *Love and Economics*, 99.

⁴⁶ Meade, *Family*, 45.

⁴⁷ David L. Bender and Bruno Leone, *The Family in America: Opposing Viewpoints*, (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1992), 13.

⁴⁸ Kain, *The Myth of Family Decline*, 6.

war nuptials and post-war stress,⁴⁹ but given the statistical evidence, it is clear that the need to be married and stay married lost its economic and social urgency and practicality.

We Must Continue to Help

Though data show that social policies that comprise a “nanny state” are repugnant to the natural family, one must not jettison them without the logical realization that the impoverished of our country must be helped. It is clear that some of the recent political leaders in our country realized that both the family and the poor of our country must be salvaged, but most have done so with “welfare to work” policies with the goals of “Responsibility, Employment, and Reduction of Poverty.”⁵⁰ Though these are noble goals and ones that would certainly help others help themselves, the problem is even more primary: the federal government cannot be the savior of the poor. The federal government cannot provide for the positive rights of some of its citizens without unfairly expropriating the means to do so from others. In 1854, President Franklin Pierce laid down this same sentiment in a veto message: “I cannot find any authority in the Constitution for making the Federal Government the great almoner of public charity [it would] be contrary to the letter and spirit of the Constitution and subversive of the whole theory upon which the Union of these States is founded.”⁵¹ With these wise words in the annals of American history, it is hard to see how our government leaders have veered so far off the path of the reality of our written Constitution. Desperate times have always called for desperate measures, and large scale relief efforts driven by the federal government may have seemed like the right avenue to travel down at certain times. What has been forgotten now for many decades is the availability of help from immediate and extended family, neighbors and the local community, private charities, and the local government. It is with the help of these entities that the surest results will arise.

According to author Michael Tanner, “Americans are already the most generous people on earth, contributing more than \$120 billion per year to organized private charity.”⁵² He suggests that this charitable spirit stems from the lack of coercion in civil society, as opposed to that used in political society. To watch the suffering of another human is repulsive to humans; the natural compassion within human nature drives people to put a stop to that which we would not want to experience ourselves. In a traditional family, it often happens that members are more than willing to help one another. Whether it is through monetary loans or temporary shelter, members of a traditional family have generally accepted the virtue of reciprocal care. When the family alone cannot provide enough aid, offerings of private charity and acts of volunteerism from the local community and city government can suffice. Younkings asserts that private relief efforts are the most efficient ways of achieving results: “Voluntarism means doing away with coercion and relying on individual action, education, persuasion, and voluntary organizations based on generosity and neighborliness.”⁵³ It is when the state coerces charity that people become resentful and angry towards the poor. These emotions tend to limit willingness to give and further widen the chasm between the rich and the poor. The poor become “lazy deadbeats” who reap the benefits of the taxes paid by hardworking Americans, while those who have money vow to hold even more firmly onto that which cannot be seized through taxation.

One of the most logical principles upon which to base poverty-relief efforts is the principle of subsidiarity. Subsidiarity is “the view that problems are best solved by those people and institutions closest to them, and that outside interventions should take place only when necessary and only on a temporary basis.”⁵⁴ If, for example, a tragedy strikes a family in a particular community and they lose all of their belongings, the principle of subsidiarity would call for aid from neighbors, the community at large, and even the local government. Because neighbors and the community within which the tragedy occurred presumably know more about the family, they can better and more purposefully serve them than tax dollars from strangers. Pope John Paul II offers the principle of subsidiarity as the rule of thumb for serving others independently of the government. As quoted by Jeffrey A. Tucker of the Ludwig Von Mises Institute, Pope John Paul II explained that “the Social Assistance State leads to a loss of human

⁴⁹ Kain, *The Myth of Family Decline*, 6.

⁵⁰ Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development, *Welfare Reform and Beyond: Making Work Work*, (New York: Committee for Economic Development, 2000), 3.

⁵¹ Tanner, *The End of Welfare*, 33.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵³ Younkings, *Capitalism and Commerce*, 26.

⁵⁴ Jeffrey A. Tucker, “The Pope and the Cause of Freedom, *Ludwig Von Mises Institute*, <http://www.mises.org/story/809>.

energies and an inordinate increase of public agencies, which are dominated more by bureaucratic ways of thinking than by concern for serving their clients . . .”⁵⁵

Conclusion: Coming Back to the Family

The way to ensure that our nation’s poor and downtrodden are cared for begins at home. The family is the ultimate teacher of virtue, and it is by virtuous efforts that those in need can be served. The state cannot teach virtue to the single-parented children it supports any more than it can coerce citizens to be virtuous through appropriation of their hard-earned money. It is more than clear that after decades of welfare programs, the American family has been ravaged. Some may argue that the family began to crumble long before the egregious welfare policies of the Johnson presidency; others argue that the family began to fall apart after the policies took effect. Regardless of the exact historical moment the family lost its valued place in society, it is true that government interference in the social lives of citizens has had a deleterious effect on the traditional family unit.

In losing the family unit, we lose the virtues of hard work, justice, equity, temperance, integrity, fortitude, charity, rationality, perseverance, and hope. We lose sight of the importance of love, trust, compassion, community, friendship, character development, and true happiness. Without these attributes, we become drones. We lose what makes us human, that which separates us from other mammals, to make room for a government that provides for us, makes decision for us, and creates in us behaviors we once thought to be irrational and irresponsible. Each of us is born to a man and a woman and, if we are lucky, are reared by them until we become healthy, self-sufficient adults. There is no place for the state in family matters, which is why our democratic capitalist system, a system based on freedom of choice and the rationality of the human mind, is conducive to the traditional family. Unlike a socialist state in which welfare policies control every aspect of citizens’ lives, capitalism promotes the use of free will. Younkins confirms that “Capitalism is consistent with the fundamental moral principles of life itself and, compared to other economic systems, is the most conducive to the use of man’s free will, which makes moral behavior possible.”⁵⁶

If we are to save the family, state interference must be cut by an extreme margin. Americans must realize that it takes two to support a child who will one day become a stable, productive member of society. The instance of illegitimate births and subsequent single motherhood can only be diminished once the federal government removes the safety net that insures the irresponsible behavior under which these children are begotten. We must be reminded that the family’s place in society has a building nature: “The family is defined as that specific form of *philia* (love, friendship) that forms the basis of kinship (*suggenike*) rooted in parental love (*patrike*), which in turn rests upon the good will of spousal *philia*.”⁵⁷ Once marriage and the family again become the viable life choice, then will society be reinvigorated with the virtuous qualities fostered by the traditional family structure. If American society is to be one of integrity and dedication to the rational principles of ethical behavior, the government must stop parenting and make way for families and communities to fulfill their rightful position in civil society.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Younkins, *Capitalism and Commerce*, 2.

⁵⁷ Vernon L. Provencal, “The Family in Aristotle,” <http://www.mun.ca/animus/2001vol6/provencal6.htm>.