And To No More Settle For Less Than Purity:
Reflections on the Kerista Commune
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In 1987-1988, the author spent about 18 months as a member of Kerista, a utopian commune in San Francisco. From its beginnings in the 1960s as a free love anarchistic hippie commune in New York, the Kerista commune had become a more structured, dynamic, and successful community. As time passed, however, the author discovered that the core psychological process in Kerista was anxiety-producing and ultimately destructive because it centered around the toxic value of purity, which made the commune a bad place to live. The failures of Kerista were not failures of process or procedure; they were failures of values. We must apply not only traditional political science, but also anthropology, sociology and psychology to understand the interactions of values and institutions on the quality of intentional communities.

Introduction

In the summer of 1987, I was a rather ordinary young man of almost 24 years living in San Francisco. I was still struggling to find my place in the world, and I was definitely looking for opportunities to improve my standard of living. On the other hand, I was as secure, happy, and confident as a young man can be. In this frame of mind, I stumbled across one of the many newspapers published by Kerista, a utopian commune in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury neighborhood. Gestalt-O-Rama. Communal Living. Polyfidelity: it sounded very unusual and very interesting. A few days later, I dropped into the Growth Co-op, Kerista's primary outreach tool for recruiting new members. There, I met a group of intelligent, articulate, and good-looking people, people who thought that I too was intelligent, articulate, and good-looking. They asked if I was non-monogamous, and would I like to join forces with them? After about a month of getting to know one another, I "jumped the broom" and became Tru (Trust Rationality Universally) Reason, a member of the Purple Submarine Best Friend Identity Cluster (BFIC). Thus began one of the most rewarding and challenging times of my life.

Scholars argue about what it means to call a utopian community a success or failure. Michael S. Cummings 1998 described some criteria in his review of Donald E. Pitzer's anthology, *America's Communal Utopias*. Kanter's 1972 criterion of simple longevity—a community is a success if it lasts at least 25 years—has fallen out of favor. Instead, Cummings (1998) explained an alternative theory of "developmental communalism," where communal

living is an intermediate step between a spiritual or political movement and reestablishment of private ownership and reintegration into mainstream society. According to Cummings (1998), communal living creates a double bind: a utopian community that relaxes its communalism is no longer properly a utopian community; those that retain their communalism become too rigid and stagnate and die. Thus, the criteria of success cannot be longevity; instead, one criterion is whether the community achieves some social goal. For example, although the Owenite communities never lasted much longer than a year, Cummings (1998) quoted Pitzer's enumeration of the socially beneficial Owenite experiments: "tax-supported public schools for both girls and boys, public libraries and museums, women's rights, birth control, liberalization of divorce laws and freedom for slaves" (195). In this view, the success of a utopian community is seen in its relationship to society as a whole.

In its final in incarnation, the Kerista commune lasted only about 20 years, just shy of Kanter's 25 year threshold. Evaluating Kerista by developmental criteria is more difficult; they were never much a part of a larger movement, and their introduction of polyfidelity and polyamory, their only surviving innovation, is at best minimal. But there is another more personal criterion by which utopian communities can be evaluated: is the community a good place to live for those who are by its explicit ideals suited to live there? Do individuals who really believe in the stated goals, methods, and "tone" of a community actually find happiness, satisfaction, and personal fulfillment? By this measure, the Kerista commune had already failed by the time I joined in 1987. On paper, I should have been the perfect Keristan. I was unsatisfied with life in the outside world. Polyfidelity worked perfectly for me, and in Kerista, unlike the outside world, I had no problems with jealousy or preferentiality. I was creative, motivated, and worked hard. I liked the idea of changing the world not by dreaming but by actually living the dream. Yet after only about 18 months, I was gone, because Kerista was not a good place to live. The commune had failed to institutionalize happiness-promoting values; indeed, it had institutionalized a toxic value, the value of purity, which was the cause of its failure and ultimate disbandment.

A Brief History of the Kerista Commune

The Old Tribe. In 1956, 38 year-old former Air Force officer John Presmont had an epiphany (Kerista 1979). As Wilson (1965) recounted, a "Voice" spoke to Presmont, telling him he would be the founder of the next great religion. Eight years later, Presmont had become Jud the Prophet, the founder of a new religion called Kerista, with followers around the world and

Keristan communities in Passaic, New Jersey, Las Vegas, and New York. The New York community, where Jud lived, had about 26 middle-class dropouts with names like Dau, E. Z. Good, Tre, Onn, Fly, Dom, Joy, and Marquel living in ten apartments in the then run down, poverty-stricken eastern part of Greenwich Village. The community was not yet a full-fledged commune; while sharing everything—especially love and affection—the economic sharing was still ad hoc: "Whenever anyone is in danger of eviction, for example, the group raises the money for that month's rent on that apartment" (Wilson 1965). Usually about eight people in the New York community were working or receiving government benefits at any given time, with the remainder providing services—babysitting, shopping, laundry—for everyone else.

The central feature of 1965 Kerista was an anarchic individual freedom. The members admit to doing many different kinds of drugs, especially marijuana. Jud maintained that the only rule of sexual relationships is mutual consent (Wilson 1965). Most Keristans were bisexual. Two or three Keristans might be sexually active in one room while others had a conversation in the next. Wilson quotes Jud listing the some of the core positions he had written at the time of the interview:

> Legalize group marriage. Legalize indecent exposure. Legalize trial marriage. Legalize abortion. Legalize miscegenation. Legalize religious intermarriage. Legalize marijuana. Legalize narcotics. Legalize cunnilinctus (sic). Legalize transvestitism. Legalize pornography. Legalize obscene language. Legalize sexual intercourse. Legalize group sex. Legalize sodomy. Legalize fellatio. Legalize prostitution. Legalize incest. Legalize birth control. Legalize Lesbianism. Legalize polygamy. Legalize polyandry. Legalize polygyny. Legalize homosexuality. Legalize voluntary flagellation (1965).

Jud describes this list as common sense, and believes, "Almost all intelligent people are Keristans already, without knowing it" (quoted in Wilson 1965).

The Keristans promoted the process of "Buddho," a contraction of Buddha and judo, which one member, Dau, had invented (Wilson 1965). This process, the "art of no-defense" consisted of a person dropping all of his or her defenses of the social self to get in contact with the pure self. As Dau describes the process, "You get rid of bullshit. You stop defending yourself. Dig? You don't put up a front. You admit who you are. You don't play-act, you don't put people on" (Wilson 1965). Buddho was entirely voluntary, however. According to Wilson (1965), new Keristans could hold onto their hang-ups and defenses as long as they wished; only when new members were ready for personal growth would they participate in Buddho. With their personal freedom, their art of "no-defense," their plans and visions, the Keristans of 1965

believed they would change the world. Call it a religion, call it a social movement, as Kerista advisor Desmond Wilson did (Wilson 1965), the Keristans were trying to forge a new way of living that was hip, cool, and, unlike the straight world, sane and loving.

The New Tribe. The transition from the pre-1971 "old tribe" and the "new tribe," the one I joined, was rocky. According to "History of the Kerista Commune," Jud made "close to a dozen different experimental attempts" to build a working communal lifestyle. Each attempt failed due to internal problems, including "[c]oupling, promiscuous sex, pets, tightwadism, rivalry" (Kerista 1979). Except for Jud, all the members that Wilson (1965) interviewed had fallen away, and Jud had moved to the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco. In 1971, two young women, first Even Eve and then Bluejay Way, joined Jud (now Brother Jud). Around 1973, Geo Logical, a former psychiatric nurse, joined Kerista, and these four formed the core of the new tribe. By 1978 Kerista had grown to eighteen stable members, had a solid social contract, and became the Kerista Village. When I joined in 1987, there were close to thirty members and Kerista Village was a going concern.

The Kerista Commune in 1987

The Kerista commune was described by its members, only somewhat tongue-in-cheek, as a "Utopian Sex Cult." It was an intentional community built, at least in theory, on five principles: the "88 standards," Gestalt-O-Rama, participatory democracy, economic communalism, and polyfidelity. The 88 standards were a list of basic social standards. Some of them were uncontroversial, such as prohibitions against ageism, racism, sexism, and classism; others were vague and contradictory: "hold your own mud," (do not burden the scene with your petty complaints) versus "no storing" (don't let petty complaints build up until they're a real problem). Nothing in the 88 standards seemed particularly burdensome, and I could sincerely declare that I was, in Keristan jargon, aligned with the standards. Gestalt-O-Rama was described as the commune's pervasive (hence the "O-Rama") psychological process. Because I did not believe I had any substantial psychological issues, I didn't pay much attention to this aspect of the commune; from time to time, we would all, I supposed, sit around and talk about our feelings. There were, supposedly, no hierarchy and no authority in the commune. All decisions, from the trivial to the momentous, were made by one-person-one-vote participatory democracy. The two features that positively attracted me were economic communalism, whereby all the members shared income and expenses equally, and polyfidelity, a non-monogamous structure in which sexual and romantic relations were encouraged within a well-defined group of more than

two people.

Economics. Keristan economics were built on absolute income and expense sharing. Kerista ran several businesses, including housecleaning and gardening, the commune published two newspapers with paid advertising; and several members worked outside the commune. Two additional businesses, brokering printing and typesetting services, and a full-service Macintosh dealership, were very profitable. All income from the commune's various businesses, and all income earned by individual members working outside, were put into one common fund. Each member was required to have about $100 cash on hand, and every month, each member submitted an expense report and was reimbursed from the common fund. Group and larger individual expenses were decided democratically. Assets that member brought into the commune remained their own individual property, although useful assets such as cars were shared with the group. Kerista flatly prohibited the donation of substantial financial assets by individual members. The economies of scale of communal living substantially reduced expenses. Because of polyfidelity, Kerista needed only one bedroom for every two people, plus a few spares; allowing close to 30 people to live in fewer than 20 bedrooms saved substantially on rent. Similarly, because not everyone needed a car every day, Kerista could share about a dozen cars and a motorcycle, and there was always a car available when anyone needed it. By 1987, the members of Kerista were living a solid middle-class lifestyle.

Polyfidelity. The key feature of Kerista was polyfidelity, defined as sexual fidelity to more than one person. The commune was organized into several groups, called Best Friend Identity Clusters (BFICs), ranging from two people to a theoretical maximum of 24, 12 women and 12 men. A member of a group was best friends with all the members of the group, and sexually active with members of the opposite sex. When I first joined, all the members were heterosexual; later, one BFIC included two bisexual women. Sexually transmitted diseases were controlled by a screening process. New members had to survive "transitional celibacy [sic]," three months of no sexual activity, after which they would undergo a disease screening. For another three months, they had to use condoms for intercourse. After passing another screening, they would be permitted to use no disease prevention. Contraception was handled simply: all men had to get a vasectomy. If a man was more concerned with "passing on his nose" (as the Keristans deprecated the desire to biologically reproduce) than he was with building a utopian community, he was probably not a good fit for the commune.

The primary means of making sure each member spent time with all the opposite-sex

members was the sleeping schedule. The men and women were ordered by the date they last joined the BFIC; each member of one sex would sleep the night with the next opposite-sex member in order. For example, in a six person BFIC with three women and three men, the pairings for the first night would be F1-M1, F2-M2, and F3-M3. The next night, it would be F1-M3, F2-M1, and F3-M2. The sleeping schedule was not, strictly speaking, a sex schedule, but if a member was not sexually attracted to all the opposite-sex members of the BFIC, it was probably time to "divide and regroup," the Keristan term for a change in the composition of a BFIC.

Members were expected to be non-preferential toward the members of their BFIC, especially toward members of the opposite sex. The meaning of this term was never precisely pinned down. Every individual relationship is different; the whole point of polyfidelity was to afford a variety of relationships. Mostly, the expectation of non-preferentiality seemed to rule out picking out one or two "special" people, and considering the rest as secondary or less important. Additionally, members were expected to have, in Keristan jargon, feelings of "compersion" for members of the same sex in their BFIC; compersion was "[t]he positive emotion that comes from seeing one's partners enjoying themselves together, the antithesis of jealousy" (Even Eve 1985). Although there were a few couples who paired up and left the commune, polyfidelity seemed to work well at the time for most of the members.

Although some former members had emotional and social difficulties with polyfidelity, I found the arrangement very rewarding. I was a member of the Purple Submarine, the largest BFIC, which included Jud, Eve, Way, and Geo, the core of the "new tribe." I had a good personal and romantic relationship with each of the eight to ten (as members joined and left during my stay) women in my BFIC. Some might have difficulty understanding how a person can have romantic relationships with many lovers, but seen as affection, desire, closeness, trust, a sincere appreciation of our time together, (not to mention the occasional candlelit dinner), my relationships with the women in the commune were as romantic and intimate as my two marriages and my other non-marital long-term relationships. I never felt any cognitive dissonance between the ideal of non-preferentiality and the reality that all relationships are different. I never felt any feelings of jealousy towards the men in my BFIC. I do not know if I felt "compersion," the Keristan term for feelings of solidarity and camaraderie between members of the same sex in a BFIC, but I certainly felt as much friendship and respect for them as for any of the other male friends in my life. I fondly remember all the people I was with in the commune, inside and outside my own BFIC.

What Went Wrong

The Kerista commune was supposed to be a hip, fun, sexy, and personally fulfilling place to live. Yet after six months, I was starting to feel that something was wrong. A series of baffling and puzzling encounters had left me uncertain if I was really meant for commune life, but I could not pin down the exact reason why. A pattern emerged: everything would be fine for about three or four months, then I would get into an "encounter," where one of the members, usually, but not always, Jud, would find some fault with my behavior or attitude, a fault I could not figure out how to correct. Because of my inability to correct the fault, I would leave the commune, either sleeping in one of the unused bedrooms or moving to "Sparrow House," a home for almost- and ex-Keristans. After a week or two, some of the members would lobby for my readmission, all would be forgiven, and I would rejoin. After the third or fourth iteration of this pattern, now holding a full-time job outside the commune, I finally moved to my own apartment and made it clear I would not consider rejoining. Although I maintained good relations with the members of the commune, I had left Kerista for good.

Gestalt-O-Rama. The primary political/social/psychological process in Kerista was called "Gestalt-O-Rama," supposedly built on Fritz Perls' gestalt therapy. At all times, in theory, members were supposed to be working on improving their psychology by being open and non-defensive to input from other members about their psychology, social behavior, and the goals and direction for the commune as a whole. In practice, Gestalt-O-Rama was usually just the ordinary conversation and negotiation found in any group of people with a shared purpose.

Gestalt-O-Rama had little in common with gestalt therapy. Gary Yontef (1993) describes the core elements of gestalt therapy. The "Phenomenological Perspective" gives equal weight to subjective perceptions and objective events. The "Field Theory Perspective" focuses on events not in isolation but in the context of the whole situation surrounding the event. The "Existential Perspective," related to the Phenomenological Perspective, denies an "essential" self outside the person living, feeling, and experiencing the present. Finally, gestalt therapy focuses on dialog, which must be, among other things, inclusive, non-judgmental, and focused on bringing the patient to self-awareness. Nothing about Gestalt-O-Rama (except that it consisted of talking) used any of these elements of gestalt therapy.

Occasionally, Gestalt-O-Rama would turn into what was simply institutionalized bullying. I never saw even one of the big, hours-long, all-hands-on-deck gestalts used for personal psychological growth, to resolve a substantive difference, or even to correct an

individual's behavior. There were times when individuals, especially new members, really needed to change their behavior. One member, I recall, was spending about $300 per month on clothes. As I recall, the interaction was very quick and easy. One member brought up the spending as a concern, other members spoke up agreeing that the behavior was objectionable, and the original member agreed to moderate her spending. Most real problems were solved very simply, but when an encounter went over ten minutes, something extremely unpleasant was about to happen.

The first time I was in the "hot seat" was because I made ignorant mistake. It could have been easily corrected, but it was blown out of proportion. One of the attractions of Kerista was that when I was a prospect, they were supportive of my interest in physics, and said it was a legitimate personal goal that I could pursue in the commune. I was a young man at the time, poorly educated, and interested in a lot of pseudo-scientific mumbo jumbo. After my three months of transitional celibacy and an additional month or so on the sleeping schedule, I asked a question of the "message board" (a variant of the Ouija board which was a peculiar Keristan ritual) at one of the commune-wide meetings whether some pseudo-scientific experiment I had read about should be replicated. A simple "No, that's not a good use of the community's time and energy, and you might want to get enough education to tell the difference between science and pseudo-science," would have sufficed. Jud, however, took it upon himself to declare that the question proved that I had no idea what Kerista was all about, and maybe it was a gigantic mistake to admit me. For the next two hours, the people who had recruited me, given me friendship and warmth, and (half of whom) had slept with me proceeded to enumerate my shortcomings and personal flaws, a traumatic and not at all therapeutic experience. I apologized in every way I could (and resolved privately to shut up until I figured out how the commune *really* worked) and after everyone got tired of telling me what a schmuck I was, we all affirmed that it was a positive and growth-affirming activity, and maybe I could stay in the commune.

If a member was on the wrong side of a controversy, then it became an immediate issue of concern whether they were truly meant to be in the commune. One example stands out in my memory. One member, Loki, was under pressure from Jud for some debatable (and now forgotten) conduct or attitude. Another member, Psi, spoke up, saying he did not believe that Loki had done anything objectionable. As I had begun to learn how the process worked, I myself withheld judgment until I saw how the vote was going to go. When Loki finally decided under pressure to leave the commune, the very next topic of discussion was whether Psi himself

was fit to be a member, because he had defended Loki and might therefore be too preferential towards her. Perhaps he was—he quickly left the commune as well, and as best I recall, they were in a monogamous relationship thereafter—but the message was clear: choose your side carefully.

I am not the only one who felt like this. Another long-time member, Kipseeks (2003), writes that after six months in Kerista, "There was nowhere to hide, no one to trust. Everything you said, in any context, could be used against you, at any time. It was difficult to manage, and I was hitting a wall." After many years living in the commune, he still felt oppressed:

> The worst thing about Kerista was the endless nighttime gestalts, with someone… about something… We wouldn't rebel if we knew that ostracism was immediate and imminent. While there was a strong sense of belonging, there was never a strong sense of security. You belonged, but you could lose it at any minute for any reason. This kept us all in a state of nervous impression-management. (Kipseeks 2003).

Almost every Keristan, except perhaps Jud, felt this way:

> Every ex-Keristan I have talked with remembers numerous instances of going along with the prevailing group sentiment on an issue rather than take a contrary stand, or, worse still, without even bothering to really think the issue through independently. . . [Many uncomfortably remember the] times we gave some innocent person a hard time for thinking, saying, or doing something that didn't synch with current Keristan doctrine… or times we sat by and watched while some of the "heavies" in our tribe verbally abused someone else in the name of honesty, growth, the pursuit of "righteousness" or some other such rationalisation. (Furchgott 1993).

Gestalt-O-Rama had become nothing more than bullying. But the question is why it became so. Individually, everyone in the commune was an ordinarily nice, respectful, cheerful person. None, not even Jud, fit the pattern of inveterate bullies, who structure their lives to have and exert power over others.

<u>Brother Jud.</u> Many ex-Keristans, as well as outside observers, place the blame squarely on Jud. There was no doubt that Jud, like every other natural leader, was focused, motivated, and not above using psychological pressure to get his way. Cummings (1996) reports that many ex-Keristans considered Jud manipulative, using Gestalt-O-Rama as a control mechanism. Members were afraid to criticize him for fear of being "isolated, punished, or expelled." In 1987, and even more when the commune disbanded in 1991, Jud had become increasingly irrelevant. Kerista no longer needed much abstract communal theory: we had an actual working, prosperous, polyfidelitous, and communal village. Real leadership had passed to Bluejay Way,

also a natural leader, who almost single-handedly built the printing brokerage and the Macintosh dealership. The problem was no longer what we wanted to do, but how to stabilize and improve what we already had. Jud was no longer the center of attention, his attempts at theory become more and more abstract and meaningless, and he became increasingly agitated that the commune was moving away from an economically marginal group of people who would pay attention to his raps. Jud himself was definitely a negative force in Kerista.

Although Jud definitely had a forceful personality, and was becoming increasingly negative, he was not the primary problem. Cummings (1996) is correct: the Keristans at the time really did have "too much on the ball as individuals to let a self-chosen leader control their choices." Whatever Jud did, he had the cooperation, or at least the tacit consent of the remaining members. Founder though he was, Jud could not simply arbitrarily decide something and use an office, title, or privilege to make it stick despite objections. Cummings (1996) presents a different picture: "We had heard [Jud] simply announce a policy change, and we got the impression that he expected his position to be rubber-stamped during the required voting process." But this view misses a subtlety. Jud was influential, and knew he was influential, but he still had no formal power. He expected that everyone would agree with him because people actually did agree with him, and if some member did disagree, not only Jud but the other members would have united to expel the dissenter. Had a majority ever actually voted against Jud, he would have lost. Furthermore, everyone had the real freedom to leave; not only was there never any psychological pressure to stay (the problem was the opposite, psychological pressure to leave), Kerista was generous to outgoing members, providing free transitional housing and economic support to members leaving the core commune. I never saw Jud do anything sneaky or covert; his sole tactic was to raise an issue in the group and not back down until everyone agreed. And everyone *did* agree, eventually. All he could accomplish was what the rest of the commune let him do: manage the utopian purity of the group.

The members of Kerista may have realized, perhaps unconsciously, that without Jud, the commune would not long survive. But intentionally tolerating Jud to preserve a society and culture they valued is very different from being manipulated and controlled by someone. The members of Kerista share as much blame as, or more blame than, Jud for letting Kerista become a bad place to live. And when they finally did realize that Kerista had become a bad place to live, the commune disbanded and reformed in Hawaii (Cummings 1996).

Democratic Procedure. Democratic procedure is important not only in a nation-state but also in

smaller organizations such as Kerista. As Cummings (1980) argues, many attempts at communal utopias, both fictional and real, suffer from worrying features of their political process. These features tend to privilege individuals and elites to "*mak[e] decisions about the rules and conditions under which all contributions will be made* [emphasis in original]" (Cummings 1980, 46-47). For example, Sunrise Ranch, a utopian community in Colorado, has an aristocratic leadership: "Final authority for major community decisions lies with leader Martin Cecil, manager James Wellemeyer, and an executive committee of a half dozen or so" (Cummings 1980, 45). Although this leadership has no formal authority and must maintain popular legitimacy, it is still an elite. Similarly, Twin Oaks in Virginia and Arcosanti in Arizona both have a self-perpetuating leadership. Cummings (1980) argues that in addition to other requirements, utopian communities must not just permit but also actively encourage dissent, even to the degree of institutionalizing civil disobedience. Having an elite, even an elite without formal authority, tends to stifle dissent.

Cummings' (1980) argument, however, fails to account for why Kerista was not a good place to live. Kerista was formally an egalitarian direct participatory democracy. Any member could raise any issue for discussion and voting. All decisions were made by majority vote. No member or elite, not even Jud, had any official or unofficial power or privilege to unilaterally affect the agenda or the outcome of any vote. Active participation in the decision-making in the commune was required. Votes were public, but votes themselves were a formality; the decision-making process was the discussion and debate before the vote. Because of their personalities, Jud, Way, and a few other members had considerable influence, but influencing other people's opinions is hardly undemocratic. Kerista was always small enough that it maintained direct participatory democracy without incurring excessive inefficiency; most of Dahl's 1956 analysis of managing competing factions with variable but not directly measurable intensities of preference are inapplicable. On purely procedural grounds, Kerista was a model democracy; if procedure alone could save a society, Kerista's procedure would have saved it. Procedure, however, did not save Kerista.

Purity. To some extent, the membership of an intentional community has to be carefully monitored. Many early intentional communities, notably the Owenite communities, failed because they failed to exclude free-riders and those lacking communal values, who can quickly destroy a community (Cummings 1998). Communal living is difficult, and polyfidelity is difficult. If someone is really not right for the community, they need to find somewhere where they will be a better match. Furthermore, people are often not conscious of their own psychological

hang-ups and neuroses. It takes time, energy, and effort to determine why someone seems unhappy or is compromising the harmony of the community. The smooth functioning of an intentional community requires a psychological and social process, over and above what we find in modern life.

In Kerista, however, the need for selectivity had grown into a fetish for purity. By the time I joined in 1987, the value of purity had become implicitly institutionalized in Kerista. All of the personal attacks and intimidation of Gestalt-O-Rama were fundamentally concerned with maintaining the purity of the commune. The last line of a Keristan song, composed by Loki, mentioned above, was, "And to no more settle for less than purity." There was a strong sense within the commune that all members needed to believe that Kerista was not just a great place to be, but the most important, most critical place they could possibly imagine being. Kerista expected a degree of uncompromising zealotry. Members were expected to not just comply with the 88 standards but to affirm that the standards were perfectly and intrinsically aligned with the members' own preferences. As Eve Furchgott (a.k.a. Even Eve, mentioned above) remarks, "We had a social contract with hundreds of points of agreement in it (some written, others not). We felt that a group could not hold together without a very unified outlook and approach to life" (1993). To compromise, to accept a standard of conduct that was not the ultimate expression of how one naturally wanted to live, was seen as selling out one's autonomy and dignity, and, more importantly, to compromise the pure "unified outlook." This ideology, however, meant that any dispute raised the issue that a member was not perfectly aligned with each and every goal, standard, ideal, practice, and custom of the commune, and should consider moving on. Everyone was worrying internally whether or not some chance comment, or chance silence, would reveal their impurity, causing them to lose their home, family, job, and friends. And, since failing to notice or bring up someone else's impurity was itself impure, everyone was on the lookout for others' impurity.

One encounter stands out in my mind as having been completely derailed by the value of purity. Several members, myself included, were at a customer's site doing contract computer work. Our team leader, Sun, and I got into a somewhat heated and awkward argument about how best to do the work. We resolved the issue, at least temporarily, and we completed the job. When we returned home, I simply did not mention the argument; Sun, having more experience in the commune, did mention it. Our argument could have been a perfect opportunity to use our social/psychological process for social cohesion and personal growth. Why did we get into the

argument? Was Sun being bossy? Was I being an ivory-tower expert? Encountering my failure to mention the issue could also have been a good growth process; I was definitely unconsciously adopting the conventional value of minimizing and "forgetting" conflict, instead of using conflict as an opportunity for mutual growth. Instead, I was immediately encountered to justify whether I was still a legitimate member of the commune in light of my egregious violation of Keristan standards: I had revealed an impurity. A strong social process can help overcome the psychological inertia of conventional norms: had the encounter been framed as an effort to help me become a better person, I might have overcome my defensiveness and really become a better negotiator and better Keristan. Instead, the discussion was framed as an attack on my inclusion in my family, job, and my life, my place in the world, on whether I really was a pure Keristan. I could not help but being defensive. The value of purity put everything on the line for even relatively small issues.

Kerista had become a bad place to live precisely because they had come to consider purity a core cultural value. What makes purity a toxic value is that it is impossible. Human beings are far too complex to be purely anything. The value of purity provides only an opportunity to intimidate and bully people. Jud was able to exert so much negative influence only because the Keristans had themselves privileged Jud as the standard of communal purity. By adopting the value of purity as a core value, the members of Kerista had doomed the community.

Whither Utopia?

Two Utopias. In "Democratic Procedure and Community in Utopia," Cummings (1980) discusses two fundamentally different categories of utopias. The first category of utopia, explored through fiction, consists of relatively large scale, pluralistic societies; Cummings (1980) examines Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia,* for example, which comprises millions of people in Washington, Oregon, and northern California. The second category, however, consists of relatively small scale, ideologically homogeneous societies; Sunrise Ranch, the largest group Cummings (1980) examines, had about 150 members. These kinds of utopias are fundamentally different; a large scale society cannot be casually exclusive; a small scale society must be exclusive. Cummings (1980) aptly criticizes these large-scale fictional utopias for giving short shrift to democratic process; the criticism is not, however, as directly applicable to very small scale societies embedded in a larger society, especially when the members of the small-scale societies see the larger society as dysfunctional.

All utopian experiments and speculations are primarily about *values*. A utopian society rejects some values of the larger society, and establishes values not present in the larger society. Cummings (1996) compares Kerista with Sunrise Ranch. He faults Kerista not for its procedures but for its values: its conformity, its hypocrisy, and challenges to its ideology. Similarly, Cummings (1996) praises Sunrise Ranch not for its procedures, which he finds undefined, ad hoc, and varying from the mystical to the "no-nonsense 'The foreman decides,'" but for its "spirituality," which he unfortunately does not describe in detail. If we take "spirituality," at least the practical aspects of the term, as values (which presumably emerge from spirituality broadly defined), then values, not procedures, are the critical part of a small utopian community. As the group becomes larger, the variation of individuals' values requires managing conflicts with procedures.

Democracy itself is not just about procedure; a democratic society must rest on certain shared values. Dahl (1956) admits that substantial "'internal checks'—the conscience (super-ego), attitudes, and basic predispositions," (18) i.e. values, are an important component of a democratic society. Without democratic values, no amount of procedure will avoid tyranny: "To be sure, if the social prerequisites of polyarchy do not exist, then the election process cannot mitigate, avoid, or displace hierarchical government" (Dahl 1956, 125). If the values in a society are not democratic, no amount of procedure can make the society democratic.

If the theory of developmental communalism is true, communal living is not utopian in the sense that Kerista aspired to be. A utopia, in the Keristan sense, was a truly *better* way of living, perhaps not for all but definitely for some. As Cummings (1998) describes anthropologist Charles Erasmus's findings, communal living can thrive only under "special, temporary conditions" and "eventually fall prey to irresistible internal pressures and external forces" (205). Modern society is too large for the face-to-face social incentives that maintained the reciprocal altruism of hunter-gatherer communal societies. Maintaining communalism requires too much rigidity and inflexibility. All communal societies have either relaxed their communalism and survived, as the Mormons did, or maintained their communalism and stagnated, collapsed, or died out, as did the Shakers, as well as Kerista.

An effort to pioneer a new set of values, and the socialization of those values, cannot be fully democratic. Dahl (1956) identifies a critical element of a democracy: all citizens must be able to propose any alternative. As Dahl (1956) notes, when the alternatives are agree with the dictator or disagree and be deported to Siberia, that citizens prefer the former and will so vote

does not make the society democratic in any sense. I would add another criterion that Dahl does not mention: citizens must be allowed to lose votes in good faith; proposing an alternative that does not succeed should not be taken of evidence of lack of faith in the fundamental democratic principle that the majority decides. Similarly in Kerista, the alternatives were always assent to the criteria of purity or leave the commune; members were not free to propose the alternative of relaxing the standards of purity and staying even if they lost the vote. But this flaw is not just a matter of one specific value: an intentional community, at least initially, cannot be democratic about the fundamental intention of the community, the changes it wants to make to the values of the larger society. If a member disagrees with the intention, he or she is probably not in the right place.

As the community grows, however, it must necessarily lose many components of its original intention. The intentional, utopian communities that have survived, such as the Mormons, have successfully navigated the transition from a purely values-oriented intentional community to a more open community and culture where democratic (or undemocratic) procedure assumes an equal role with social values.

Suggestions for Future Research

Political science is understandably focused primarily on the legal, procedural, and institutional structures present in large-scale nation states. This focus, however, fails to capture the political dynamics very small intentional communities and subcultures. The role of values and the social and political structures that emerge from these values requires a blend of cultural anthropology, sociology, and group and individual psychology. How do values change over time in intentional communities? How do they become pervasive outside of institutions and formal procedures? How do they affect the nascent community institutions, and how do institutions then affect community values? I was not present for the transition. I do not know, for example, how the process of Buddho in the Old Tribe became Gestalt-O-Rama in the New, nor how the anarchic individualism of the Old Tribe became the rigid purity in the New. How do other intentional subcultures, especially those that adopt the value of democratic centralism, such as many radical and revolutionary political parties, resemble the experience in Kerista? We must use a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach to study these questions.

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