Celo, Happiness, and Intentional Community
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Celo Community is a communal settlement in the Western mountains of North Carolina, located in Yancey County. It was founded in 1937 by Arthur Ernest Morgan. Arthur Morgan was the world's leading flood control engineer, former President of Antioch College, first chairman of the TVA, and author of twenty books on a variety of subjects.

The Celo Community Constitution states as its overriding purpose "to provide an opportunity for its members to enjoy a life that includes personal expression, neighborly friendship and cooperation, and appreciative care of the natural environment."

Celo is a land trust with its own rules of taxation and land tenure that runs its internal government by consensus. The community does not require its members to accept any religion or ideology, but is based on ideals of cooperation between residents and care for the natural environment. Today, Celo is at maximum capacity with 40 families living on its 1,200 acres.

Celo's members own these 1,200 acres of land collectively and have developed a deep familiarity with its topographical and ecological features. They have developed an elaborate plan for living on, utilizing and stewarding the land. In this plan, they have set aside 300 acres of permanent wilderness and wildlife corridors in order to protect ecologically significant portions of the land. Certain portions of the land are valued for the biodiversity they foster and some spots, such as the Wildflower Cove, are recognized as sacred. Celo's members obtain shared use rights to their small individual landholdings from the larger corporate community of which they are a part. Decisions regarding community business, membership and stewardship of collectively held land and individual smallholdings are made by a Quaker-inspired process of consensus at regularly scheduled community meetings.

In 1936, wealthy Chicago industrialist William Regnery was looking for a social project to fund. He asked a friend, Arthur Morgan, to suggest one. Morgan suggested he underwrite the founding of an intentional community. Regnery's beliefs seemed, at first glance, to clash with Morgan's vision for a communal settlement: he was a conservative, mild anti-semite, who opposed the New Deal and was an opponent of Franklin D. Roosevelt. However, his belief in the virtue of self-reliant rural farmers overrode all of these characteristics, and he agreed. With his philanthropy, Celo was on its way.

Morgan believed that the most fundamental task that confronted humans in modern industrialized societies was the reincorporation of small community life. He believed that there are three ways to approach revitalizing communities and bringing about social betterment. One is violent revolution. A second is

gradual reform of existing communities. The third approach, which he advocated most vigorously, is the creation of “intentional communities” where new and better patterns are experimented with . He believed that intentional communities had been unnecessarily dismissed by the general population and that the historical contributions of intentional communities to social progress had been obscured. Morgan believed that the revitalization of small community life could be fostered through the promulgation of intentional communities.

An **intentional community** is a planned residential community designed to have a much higher degree of teamwork than other communities. The members of an intentional community typically hold a common social, political, religious, or spiritual vision and often follow an alternative lifestyle. They typically also share responsibilities and resources. Intentional communities include collective households, cohousing communities, ecovillages, communes, survivalist retreats, kibbutzim, ashrams and some housing cooperatives. Typically, new members of an intentional community are selected by the community's existing membership, rather than by real-estate agents or land owners (if the land is not owned collectively by the community).

Within intentional communities the above terms have different meanings compared to the legal forms of real estate ownership that may have the same name.

The purposes of intentional communities vary. They may include sharing resources, creating family-oriented neighborhoods and living ecologically sustainable lifestyles (ecovillages). Many intentional communities focus on the importance of living and sharing life together, as opposed to the perceived trend of independence in Western culture.

Some communities are secular; others have a spiritual basis. One common practice, particularly in spiritual communities, is communal meals. Commonly there is a focus on egalitarian values. Other themes are voluntary simplicity, interpersonal growth, and self-sufficiency.

Some communities provide services to disadvantaged populations, for example, war refugees, the homeless, or people with developmental disabilities. Some communities operate learning or health centers. Other communities, such as Castanea of Nashville, TN, offer a safe neighborhood for those exiting rehab programs to live in. Some communities also act as a mixed-income neighborhood, so as to alleviate the damages of one demographic assigned to one area. Many intentional communities attempt to alleviate social injustices that are being practiced within the area of residence.

Many communities have different types or levels of membership. Typically, intentional communities have a selection process which starts with someone interested in the community coming for a visit. Often prospective community members are interviewed by a selection committee of the community or in

some cases by everyone in the community. Many communities have a "provisional membership" period. After a visitor has been accepted, a new member is "provisional" until they have stayed for some period (often six months or a year) and then the community re-evaluates their membership. Generally, after the provisional member has been accepted, they become a full member. In many communities, the voting privileges and/or community benefits for provisional members are less than those for full members.

Christian intentional communities are usually composed of those wanting to emulate the practices of the earliest believers. Using the biblical book of Acts (and, often, the Sermon on the Mount) as a model, members of these communities strive for a practical outworking of their individual faith in an institutional context. These Christian intentional communities attempt to live out the teachings of the New Testament and practice lives of compassion and hospitality.

If American society holds a common image of intentional communities, it's the image of the "hippie commune" from the 1960s and early 1970s. The image is likely to be of a group of long-haired, tie-dye wearing youths lazily communing, sharing everything, including perhaps most prominently drugs and sex. (Those were the days, eh fellas?) At its most positive, the image might be associated with a bygone era of youthful experimentation and idealistic social activism. At its worst, the word commune might elicit an image of the compound of David Koresh and the Branch Davidians going up in flames in Waco, Texas in 1994 or the memory that Charles Manson led a cult-like commune in a spree of vicious murders in 1969. Thus, the idea of intentional community for many Americans has, at best, an uneasy or ambivalent connotation. Unfortunately, these common images are not accurate representations of the diverse kinds of people and social arrangements that characterize intentional communities or of the long history of intentional community building around the world that scholars of intentional community have documented. Nor do these images allow one to comprehend the sincerity, pragmatism, critical thinking and creativity that members of contemporary intentional communities bring to their community building endeavors, especially as they seek to find ways to live more sustainably. The image of the commune more often leads to easy dismissal of intentional communities than to serious consideration of their potential significance.

Back to Celo:

During the first few years, Celo experienced frequent turnover of residents and difficulty in recruitment of members as the community struggled to establish a clear identity and direction.

Among the community's stated goals were "to pay allegiance to our common humanity overshadowing religious, racial, economic or political differences." Members are expected to work "at a calling that will provide simple but adequate living…to raise some of their own food and in doing so to conserve rather than deplete the land." The community also stated as a central goal "to rear our children in a wholesome environment where they can become acquainted with nature and be stimulated by intellectual freedom."

Historically and today, cooperation has been at the forefront of the community's mission. Arthur Morgan explained the cooperative element of Celo by employing a metaphor, he coined which he named "human uranium." Morgan explained that although a cubic yard of granite contains enough uranium to blow up a mountain, the particles have no effect when separated. Only when brought together, in what is called a "critical mass," can they exercise power. Morgan saw people in the same way: when brought together with common goals and ideals they have great power.[

The community is based on a land trust system, by which members may own personal homes, but the land itself (including the land under those homes) is owned by the community.[6] Land is never sold to members, but is assigned for periods of time on the condition that members live harmoniously with the land and their neighbors. Money is occasionally lent to community members for the purpose of improving land. In the words of the Celo Community Constitution, this system is meant to "encourage personal enterprise among members by making land and money available" for productive use.[

The Community does not provide jobs for its residents. Members have worked on the community running a summer camp, organizing cottage industries, and working for the settlement itself. Members also work outside the community.

The Community accepts new members by consensus. A vote is held at regular meetings of the community. New admits must receive an affirmative vote with no more than fifteen percent of those present and voting dissenting. Members may also vote to dismiss members from the community.

In 2001, Celo was home to 73 adult members and 40 children. The community is at membership capacity and has a waiting list of families hoping to be admitted. Families who are unable to live at Celo due to maximum capacity have began settling on the community's periphery.

So, let us return to the 1930's. In the wake of the Great Depression, doubts about the viability of "the new economic era" were widespread in America . Unemployment was rampant and many people's livelihoods, built up on Wall Street, had come crashing down. In addition, more and more people, especially young people, were moving from their hometowns and small communities to industrial and urban centers seeking economic opportunity and cultural variety.

Small town, community life was disappearing and along with it, the small farm heritage. One of Morgan's biographers notes that "for [Morgan] ... the depression was clear evidence of the failure of a ruthless, competitive society and indication that the country needed another kind of foundation. The very survival of modern society seemed to him to require a new system".

Morgan's visions for an experimental intentional community that would provide solutions to the problems of the Great Depression and of modern industrial society in general did not immediately gain momentum. There were a series of fits and starts in Celo Community in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

By the end of 1939, all but one of the original participants had left the valley or withdrawn from membership in the community. This chain of events repeated itself again over the next several years; both local families and those that came from other areas did not appear to understand Morgan's aims and became dissatisfied with life in his experimental community. Community managers were brought in to directly oversee the affairs of the community and to provide direction, but there were conflicts over the nature of the community and over the managers' authority. Morgan and others, including the community managers, recruited people to join in the community, but most left either because of inability to get along as a community, or because it was unfeasible to make a comfortable living.

Later, just as World War II initiated a recovery in the economy, it also instigated a civil movement of conscientious objectors against involvement in the war and the 'war system'. Over 13,000 of these conscientious objectors were sent to Civilian Public Service camps where they exchanged their labor for their service in the American military. One of these camps was located at Buck Creek Gap in the Blue Ridge Mountains near Celo Community. Arthur Morgan visited this and several other such camps and engaged in long discussions about his ideas regarding community with the men he found there. He liked the character of these men and he invited several of them to participate in the activities at Celo Community when they had free time, and to come to the community when their service had been completed.

The pacifist stance of many of the conscientious objectors grew out of their Quaker heritage; peace and nonviolence were fundamental components of their spiritual beliefs. When their terms in the Civilian Public Service camps were up, some of these conscientious objectors arrived in Celo. Those that brought their Quaker heritage and values to Celo during this time provided a foundation that anchors the community to this day.

Although firmly rooted in Christianity, Quakerism has never had a fixed set of theological creeds. Friends have generally felt that it is the reality of a person's religious experience that matters, not the symbols with which she tries to describe this experience. Quakers believe a direct experience of God is open to anyone who is willing to sit quietly and search diligently for it. There are no prerequisites for this experience, neither the institution of the church, nor its sacraments, nor a trained clergy, nor even the wisdom of the Bible, unless read and illuminated by the Inner Light within.

Perhaps the most significant innovation that Quakers brought with them to the community was a tradition of democratic, consensus-based decision-making through which they govern their organizations. This tradition blends spirituality with business in that the process of making decisions that will affect all is felt to be spiritual in nature. The Quaker concept of consensus grows from their belief that the right course of action will be chosen through the process of discussion and debate in which everyone is involved. In this scenario, a minority of one may be justified in preventing a decision from being made because that one person may hold the right answer (although that person should feel very strongly that this is the case). Quakers do not vote; rather they reach consensus through an "attitude of openness toward other points of view, the patient search for unity beneath diversity, the avoidance of polarization – and the voting that leads to polarization of opposing views" (Bacon 1999:197

Most people in Celo Community, even if they do not attend the Friends' Meeting, adhere to Quaker values of simplicity, equality, social justice and democracy. Perhaps most significantly, a process of Quaker-inspired governance by consensus, of seeking unity and truth amongst a diversity of opinions, of encouraging all to participate in governing the community of which they are part, continues to serve as the model for conducting community business. This model stands in stark contrast to predominant political institutions that result in apathy, disenfranchisement and low voter turnout. It is a means of bringing people together in the process of utopian striving for a better world.

Coined by Sir Thomas More as the title to his critique of theocratic domination in England, the word utopia encapsulates the desire for an ideal society, the impossibility of realizing it and the tension thus generated .

In his 1969 dissertation and a subsequent book published posthumously in 2001, Experimental Americans: Celo and Utopian Community in the Twentieth Century George L. Hicks characterizes Celo as a utopian experiment that failed when the community chose to shift their focus from what he perceived as a

broad-based utopian vision to the sustainable stewardship of their 1,200 acre landholding.

Hicks acknowledges that Arthur Morgan was not in favor of the utopian label for a number of specific reasons: He writes:

Morgan explicitly rejected utopian to describe Celo Community. The word meant to him, as he told me in 1965, "rigid, excessively visionary and planned to the last detail. It ignores the necessity for change as the people involved grow in experience and wisdom." He carefully avoided prescribing detailed goals for Celo; he and the directors "had no formal ideology in mind" for the project. It was to be open-ended, experimental. Criteria for membership and descriptions of potential recruits also lacked specific detail. A broad range of interpretation of these general statements resulted.

Hicks goes on to note that there are inherent problems with invoking the concept of utopia in the service of sustainability. He says that on the one hand, utopianism is viewed as hopelessly romantic and in this view, utopians are dreamers and visionaries. They imagine schemes for social perfection, but their utopian visions lack appropriate methods for analyzing current problems and practical means of moving forward. On the other hand, utopian visions are seen as dangerous because they are employed in the promulgation of totalitarian projects. Visions of utopia have too often been used to justify oppression, domination and even genocide. Utopianism, in the form of totalizing visions, has been used to perpetrate the worst of evils.

It seems to me that Hicks' conclusion that Celo Community fell short of Morgan's dream of creating new models of society and culture that might be emulated seems as arbitrary and inappropriate as his insistence on judging the community a failed utopia. It's doubtful that Arthur Morgan would be disappointed with the fact that Celo Community survives today as a community characterized by unique forms of land tenure and decision-making that they use to steward their commonly held land. Rather, he would likely be pleased to know that Celo, 70 -plus years later, still functions using the unique institutions created by early community members and that it serves as a model which many contemporary intentional communities are aspiring to and building upon.

Let's return to the Celo history:

The 1960s was a slow decade, but one major event that occurred was the opening of the Arthur Morgan School in 1962 as a boarding school for grades seven through nine. Some staff came to the school in the 1960s as conscientious objectors to fulfill their selective service agreement. Some of

them decided to stay in the community, thus filling some of the gaps left those who had departed during the previous decade. Then, major advancements started to take place around 1970 when the back-to-the land movement arrived at Celo's doorstep.

The following comments are from an interview by Joshua Lockyer, who did his PhD dissertation on Celo (at to whom much is owed for the historical background in this paper) from a resident who joined the community in the early '70's:

"We wanted to be living amongst like-minded people in the country. ... We wanted people that shared our values – simple living and caring for the land, people that shared our ideals about stewardship of the land and not abusing the land, not speculating on the land. Celo really enabled us to be able to start living out our dream, which was to build a little house in the country ... and to have a garden and raise a family. That's what we wanted and that's what we've done".

While the community is organized more around land stewardship than commonly-held economic interests, the support of the community has helped members to start a number of enterprises. A few examples:

- Camp Celo, a Farm-Home Camp for boys and girls ages 7-10 began in 1948 under the leadership of Community members Doug and Ruby Moody. Bob and Dot Barrus succeeded them as owners of the camp, which is now run by their son and daughter-in-law Gib and Annie Barrus, (who are, respectively,my brother-in-law, and sister) and their daughter Barbara Perrin. Called a "Farm-Home" camp, its campers care for a variety of small animals as well as engage in a full camp program of activities. Camp leadership stresses cooperation rather than competition among the campers.

- The Celo Inn, a charming bed-and-breakfast inn on the South Toe River, also provides an intimate setting for occasional musical and theatrical performances. It was begun by community members Charles and Suzannah Jones and is now carried on by Nancy and Randy Raskin.
- Under the wing of Celo Community and the Celo Friends Meeting, the Rural Southern Voice for Peace (RSVP) was initiated in 1981 by Herb and Marnie Walters. RSVP provides training and a networking journal Voices for grassroots efforts for justice, peace, and environmental protection in rural areas of the southeast.

- Cabin Fever University is a three month long series of events that occurs

every winter and involves a good mix of Celo Community members and those from the wider community. Announced by the publication of a calendar every December that lists all of the events, Cabin Fever University is an opportunity for an individual or group to invite people to participate in an event of their design. These events may be educational, political, culinary, social, entertaining or any combination thereof. Cabin Fever University events often include plays, dinner events, political discussions, slide shows and how-to sessions through which participants can share their skills, opinions, experiences and expertise. The participation of the wider community in Cabin Fever University reflects Celo's porous boundaries and its influence beyond its political and geographical borders.

- Probably because of the nearness of Penland School of Crafts, some of whose students and teachers settled in Celo, a number of craftsmen have joined the community. As a result, the largest single economic activity in Celo Community is the work of craftsmen such as potters, glass blowers, etc. To help merchandise their products they got together and opened a cooperative shop on Route 80 where their items are displayed. A majority of the craftsmen taking part in this activity are from outside the community.

Perhaps most importantly, the way Celo Community governs their collectively held resources explicitly forbids individual profit as a primary motivator for decisions, but rather emphasizes processes of group understanding and shared values of ecological integrity. Taken together, common ownership and stewardship through consensus decision-making represent fundamental breaks with dominant contemporary American (and industrial capitalist) models for the relationships between and among people and between people and productive resources, models that have contributed greatly to growing environmental degradation. Celo has held to and prospered with their alternative models for over 60 years in the midst of exponential increases in profit seeking speculation on land and resources. From this perspective, it appears that Celo Community's long lasting ability to thrive as an intentional community (especially relative to the life span of most intentional communities) does represent the successful "experimentation" with "new cultural and social forms as examples for the world." Whether or not Celo's endurance is a success or failure when judged by the utopian yardstick depends upon the sense in which one employs the concept of utopianism.

Happiness is a mental state of well-being characterized by positive or pleasant emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy. A variety of biological, psychological, religious, and philosophical approaches have striven to define happiness and identify its sources.

Various research groups, including Positive psychology, endeavor to apply the scientific method to answer questions about what "happiness" is, and how we might attain it.

Philosophers and religious thinkers often define happiness in terms of living a good life, or flourishing, rather than simply as an emotion.

Happiness economics suggests that measures of public happiness should be used to supplement more traditional economic measures when evaluating the success of public policy.

Happiness is a fuzzy concept and can mean many things to many people. Part of the challenge of a science of happiness is to identify different concepts of happiness, and where applicable, split them into their components.

According to a review in Boston.com on August 23, 2009, money doesn't buy much happiness unless it's used in certain ways. "Beyond the point at which people have enough to comfortably feed, clothe, and house themselves, having more money – even a lot more money – makes them only a little bit happier." However we can sometimes get more happiness bang for our buck by spending it in prosocial ways. A Harvard Business School study found that "spending money on others actually makes us happier than spending it on ourselves".

There are various factors that have been correlated with happiness, but no validated method has been found to substantially improve long-term happiness in a meaningful way for most people.

Psychologist Martin Seligman provides the acronym PERMA to summarize Positive Psychology's correlational findings: humans seem happiest when they have:

1. Pleasure (tasty foods, warm baths, etc.),
2. Engagement (or flow, the absorption of an enjoyed yet challenging activity),
3. Relationships (social ties have turned out to be extremely reliable indicator of happiness),
4. Meaning (a perceived quest or belonging to something bigger), and
5. Accomplishments (having realized tangible goals).

There have also been some studies of how religion relates to happiness. Causal relationships remain unclear, but more religion is seen in happier people. This correlation may be the result of community membership and not necessarily

belief in religion itself. Another component may have to do with ritual, according to a 2009 article in Frontiers in Evolutionary Neuroscience.

I see, and I hope now you can see, that a number of the elements that are present in the construct that is Celo Community are present in the fundamental elements of happiness as I've just outlined them. The impetus for this paper was the sense of joyful and engaged community that I've had the pleasure of witnessing in my sister's life in Celo, and which now engages and entices my wife and I, given our proximity in a family cottage that is right across the South Toe river from Celo.

Some years ago I read the Geography of Bliss

Cite my indebtedness to Josh Lockyer's doctoral thesis, george hick's, the writings of Ernest Morgan.