


# Introduction

estern civilisation has experienced great changes in the modern age, but the area that is probably the most misunderstood is that of the family. Not only have living patterns changed, but ideas and concepts about family life have also been modified. Nevertheless, the turbulence in one period of history should not make us blind to the fact that certain basic psychological factors, and associations of factors, never change in human nature. It is clear that the family of the 21st century is, *prima facie*, not so different in structure and activities from the family of 150 years earlier. Yet, equally as clearly, a man or woman of the past could hardly conform to the life patterns of a household of the present. Since the family is, for the vast majority of the human race, the most influential group in a person's early life, it must have substantial implications for that person's mental development, particularly those components of the mind that relate to individuality. In particular, the structure of the family is most important, since the collective definition of 'family' will invariably impact the organisation and functioning of the members of the household. In other words, the character of the whole affects the interaction of the parts. It is therefore undeniable, that changes in the interaction of family members potentially have a seriously negative effect not only on

the residents of the household, but by extension, on larger society. For this reason we ask: What alterations have occurred to individual psychological functioning as a result of the shift in family structure from traditional to modern form?

Let us begin by stating a number of fundamentals. The family, in the most general context, consists of members connected by legal obligation and/or by genetics. This social unit might not hold any people who are married to each other, but might contain other persons related by varying degrees. Yet, in the narrowest sense, a family is ultimately based on the relationship between a husband and wife, as otherwise there could be no legal descendants from which to form these other types of blood relationships. For the marriage to be acceptable under customary precepts, the couple have a formal understanding or contract between them to undertake certain responsibilities for as long as the marriage exists. In European societies, this bond has further been sanctioned by the state laws pertaining to family, as the supervening communal authority recognises that a man and woman have entered a different 'mode' when they have made a public solemn promise of life-long mutual commitment and cooperation. Of course, men and women have other relationships which are not bound by any vow; these friendships can be formed or dissolved as either party pleases.

However, family is more than a simple grouping. In order for a person to become a viable marriage partner, he or she must possess a rich store of mental resources that should be contributed to the relationship for the benefit of both. Such traits cannot be derived from someone else, they must be obtained through independent development, an organic evolution of a personality. Thus, if a marriage is to function constructively, then both husband and wife

must have fully developed personalities, each having acquired experience, knowledge, and wisdom. Such positive qualities must be integrated and attached to properly operating mental mechanisms. All of this can only be achieved when a person meets the challenges of life on their own, and deals with them in a manner that uses observation, reflection, and logic, engaging appropriate assistance when personal resources might be inadequate. We should understand that the development of character does not stop when a love relationship begins; the development must continue, and so both the man and woman must maintain a certain level of independence within the marriage, balanced by cooperation and solicitude.

Marriage is a unique type of relationship is unique precisely because it is founded upon a *concept of companionship* that two people jointly, with a similar vision, want to bring into reality. Each desires to experience a transformation of life by having a partner who will show consideration and respect. This transformation cannot be achieved through any other type of friendship or relationship. Hence, the concept of family is really an outgrowth of this concept of companionship.

Yet, at those points in married life where material matters 'take centre stage', there is a challenge to the continuing belief in the unique aspects of marriage, namely exclusivity in commitment, priority in attention, and continuing positive mutual dependence. It is up to the individual to determine which factors are primary, and which ones are secondary in perpetuating the relationship. The burden of success falls squarely on the shoulders of the individual. We can see, therefore, that managing the complexity of balancing material concerns with emotional needs requires maturity, discipline, objectivity, and good planning.

Of course, attaining the *apotheosis*, the perfect example, of anything requires diligent effort, and one cannot attain the 'ultimate' in different areas without balancing their effects. The effort to achieve important goals in life is meaningless unless it is energised by *spiritual transcendent* ideals, and in this case, the search for companionship must be driven by an *ideal of love*. Indeed, the most critical factor in connection with the intimate relationship is how the individual develops the ideal of love, which assists in formulating appropriate rules that will provide gratification and affection within the structure of the family. This ideal's development must be viewed in its relation to the competing demands of other areas of life, and the mental and emotional aspects of the individual.

The 'just idealist' is that person who openly, fairly, assiduously seeks to bring to life what he envisions in his mind. For this individual, the marital relationship is an opportunity to become a better person, to move outside the mundane commonplace, to progress above and beyond the present circumstances. Human beings naturally want to be loved, but the mature person who is devoted to justice wants also to give love in return. This cannot be accomplished if there is weakness in character, ignorance, or incompetence. When we say that someone is dedicated to the ideal of love, this means that they desire affection and consideration from their intimate friendship, but they also want to give of themselves, so that the other person will equally benefit. In this way, the vision of a 'new self' can become a reality. Consequently, for a marriage to succeed as a viable medium for companionship, both partners must possess a strong, enthusiastic desire to continually experience the much sought-after qualities of respect, affection, admiration, and benevolence within the relationship.

Thus, in association with marriage and family, we have uncovered certain powerful ideas, which have been circulated and discussed in Western society for centuries. But these principles are not found in the conventions of our day. It is beyond debate that the concept of family at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not the same as it was at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most people of the present-day do not see their own marriage as a unique relationship where ultimate contentment is to be found. In an individual's life, changes in psychology occur over years, with various aspects of character undergoing modification, but other aspects remaining the same. A similar pattern is found in collective psychology, although the changes are more likely to take decades or generations. We must therefore investigate which forces have been responsible for these changes in family life, and what attributes about marriage have remained essentially unaltered.

Sporer (2010C) reviews the history of marriage in the modern age, and the evidence shows that in the period after 1800 there was a gradual *retreat* from marriage, although the ideal remained untouched. Negative portrayals of marriage began to reach the average person, from books, magazines, newspapers, rumours, and gossip. As a result, many people developed a fear of married life, because they believed that the ideal of love would be damaged by the loss of affection from a husband or wife due to material concerns, business matters, or adultery. In order to reduce the likelihood of marrying the wrong person, the initial reaction was to *restrict* the circle of people that could be considered for marriage. By focussing on people within one's extended family as potential marriage partners, including close relations such as cousins, the vagaries of marrying a 'stranger' could be avoided. Although this

brought a sense of security, it reduced opportunities that could only come by contact with people in larger society. It also put people into a more circumscribed world where challenges were reduced, and so character-building became stunted. Because people were limiting the individuation process, even marrying someone known well to the family, who had an attachment to moral and ethical principles, could not guarantee happiness in marriage and a resistance to temptations.

Women especially have used during the modern age of instability various devices to remove themselves from consideration for marriage; others found ways to delay marriage, at least until they felt mature enough to endure the problems that they feared would arise. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, society began to provide a means of establishing control in the household. Women became more confident about marriage when they realised that they could expand their independence by reducing fertility in order both to increase their free time, and to give more time to each child.

What we see in these patterns is that, in general, when there is an enlargement of concerns about an area of life, people ultimately narrow their focus, and fall back on plain materialism, in other words, *pragmatism*—a word that can carry both positive or negative connotations. The area of family is no exception. The ‘just idealist’ attempts to find, in everyday life, a balance between his own goals and desires and that of his spouse. We can see that the intelligent, resourceful individual seeks the greatest returns from an intimate relationship (companionship, affection, cooperation, reliance), as well as from social status (knowledge, autonomy, confidence, facility). However, if we agree that the integration of love with independence is superior to possessing only social status, then

we must use the term pragmatism in the negative sense, which entails a *modification or rejection of ideals*; in our world, the focus currently is on methods that primarily preserve one's *independence*, not on methods that lead to genuine companionship. There are many external factors, with which the individual must contend, that seriously affect the desire for love and affection, and so, perhaps apprehensively, people learn to have their love ideal co-exist with their material aims. Then they learn to adjust, if possible, their relationships so that they will conform to the demands of a modern 'independent' lifestyle.

Thus, as it became difficult to objectively gauge gratification in the emotional sphere, psychological factors were over time subordinated to material issues, and numbers and figures—whether income, children, social level—arose as the tangible indicators of 'satisfaction' and 'success'. In the modern period, this pragmatism translates to a 'lifestyle' where the average man or woman lives in a family where the option exists for both husband and wife to work, where children are born at the time desired, the number of children are limited to a desired number, and the option exists to end the marriage if emotional satisfaction is not achieved. Nonetheless, what works in theory, 'on paper' so to speak, often does not work out in reality, if the theory is based on incorrect assumptions.

However, as researchers discovered in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, external indicators of happiness are not necessarily in accord with true emotional fulfilment. A person might appear 'happy' by society's criteria, but he might in fact be quite the opposite, a situation that few people can appreciate if they reflexively use material factors in their evaluations. How then does a person achieve happiness and contentment in relationships, if society cannot help him to see what

is really important in life? The modern person must develop the capacity to know his internal needs, assess his own emotions and reactions clearly, to know his limitations and strengths. He must be able to put a mirror to his soul, to gain critical knowledge about the changes being made to his psyche by the social 'atmosphere'.

From observation, it is apparent that people regularly and frequently take into account their personal needs, which are to an extent modified by exogenous factors. Self-awareness, meaning having special, certain knowledge and cognisance of one's own personality and individuality, is a critical aspect in evaluation, as no person can find contentment unless they know their own desires. But we should not confuse this with selfishness. Indeed, self-awareness entails having the courage to move beyond subjectivity, so that distinctions between self-interest and other-interest can be operationalised. Nevertheless, it is not easy for even the most competent person to completely eliminate subjective perceptions. Humans, because they covet self-realisation, recognition, appreciation, and equal treatment, predicate their attraction to the opposite sex on, at the very least, a desire for security, material progress, and success in society. Self-interest can often be veiled by thoughts and expressions of love, and the result is that the desire for companionship is developed solely within the confines of the present social environment, with no attempt to move beyond the *status quo*. A person in such a situation must perforce have an extremely limited conception of love, since the refined and cultivated ideas about the subject contained in history and fiction, as found in stories, anecdotes, legends, and books, are not utilised to provide a broader vision. This inability to see life in its proper perspective inevitably produces false evaluations.