

Introduction



Here are in the minds of young children, certain powerful archetypes that urge fulfilment as pellucid concepts; even if they do not have an expansive understanding of these archetypes, they can turn them into a constellation of mental activity using their imagination. Children can place on a mental stage actors and actresses who express these concepts, through their personalities, habits, goals, and desires. Thus, the sublime takes shape and substance. In this deeper view of life, magnificent and majestic conceptual areas are now emerging into consciousness: Patronage, Education, Occupation, Emotional Satisfaction, Finances, and Community. As children become adults, these Fundamentals take on even greater force and relevance. Indeed, these areas, each forceful and complex in itself, echoes and re-echoes throughout the vast social spaces in the history in the Western world. More than just needs, they are edifices, that stand on their own. However, when integrated, they engender solid, enduring attitudes towards the healthy development of intellect and reason, and they spur life-enhancing activity that can fulfill cherished dreams and ambitions. Therefore, everyone seeks out in which domain are the lines are drawn that interconnect these edifices. From their observations of their parents, even young children are aware, on some level, that family life presents a confluence of the great Fundamentals.

Hence, the mix of issues in married life can be divided into two broad categories, *the material and the psychological*. It is self-evi-

dent that material issues are not the only considerations in the decision to marry, as psychological factors must figure in as well. However, even though people openly dealt, with great seriousness, the changing economic circumstances that they observed, they only indirectly addressed the individualistic issues of personality and temperament. This is not to say that they ignored these personal factors; indeed, they gave them substantial weight in their life 'equation'. But personal factors, as topics of conversations, were introduced and examined with delicacy and tact, and were not as candidly discussed as were the issues of money, work, possessions or taxes.

Although the material and psychological areas can be effectively separated—such as for political debate, social study, or media attention—these two areas often merge in an almost esoteric manner. One area affects the other, cross influences are present that are difficult to discern, and even more difficult to stop. Indeed, it is in the family of childhood that perhaps we can best observe this mystical union of the material and psychological in relation to intimate, companionate relationships.

One might ask: How have people throughout the course of civilisation, interrelated psychological and emotional demands, with economic and material conditions? Let us consider this question, and then we can turn to studying the specific types of psychological requirements, within the context of a modern society governed by an independence-orientated mentality.

Firstly, we should understand that unlike material factors, many mental aspects of human nature do not change very much over time. Basic needs do not change, but the manner in which they are satisfied is subject to alteration. Even though a particular idea as to how to satisfy one of the above Fundamentals might be perceived as 'modern', the desire itself might nevertheless be of ancient origin. But short of using a time machine, we have no way of knowing with any great certainty how the general public looked

at these issues in remote times. Today, we have far more information about individual attitudes, which gives us knowledge about the dynamics that influence people to marry. But, in the Western world, this detailed information is extant only the late 1800s. It is logical to assume that, if there is a period of time where the dynamics have not changed in three to five generations, for example from the late 1800s to the mid-1900s, then they are part of a longer trend, probably much longer. In regard to the manner in which people deal with the primary issues related to marriage, we can safely apply certain principles found in the 'modern' period in the Western nations, within reason, to the cultures of the more distant past, from whom we are ultimately descended, not only physically but culturally and morally. This historical depth should lead us to appreciate the singularity, the unusual nature, of a very recent metamorphosis in attitudes concerning companionship.

Drawing upon our own personal understanding of the universal need for 'fulfilment', that is, attaining all that one desires but lacks, we discover this need to be an unchanging, absolutely constant factor in human nature. Throughout the many centuries before the modern age, when life was otherwise tedious, bleak and threatening, one kept hope alive that one would eventually see the consummation of the material, intellectual and emotional; indeed, this prospect kept one from sliding into pessimism and cynicism.

We can say confidently, that the most important aspect of the male-female relationship that has not been abandoned is the ideal of *total mutual affection*, since maximum contentment is gotten through an all-encompassing love with a person of the opposite sex. Indeed, in some men the ideal burns strongly. As in the past, these men may remain single past the average marriage age, because they have formed an ideal of the feminine in adolescence, but they never find the woman that fits this ideal, and so prefer to stay single rather than marry someone who does not meet their high standards.¹ There is nothing inherently wrong with this, and often-

times, such a man was praised as being virtuous due to the uncompromising nature of his character in such important areas. Preserving the ideal of affection becomes central to one's identity and existence, more so than gaining partial emotional fulfilment. Of course, men and women who marry at the average age or at an early age might have ideals as well, but they are not as lofty as the late or never-marrying.

Finding failure with ordinary women, the idealist draws energy from his concept of femininity, which exists as the imagination's 'perfect woman'. The ideal woman responds, as an antipode, to all the imperfect behaviour in the world, and a real wife would necessarily displace this Venus. Thus, people who marry late or never may have less interest in 'ordinary' marriage, precisely because they have very *high* standards. A fairly permanent standard is erected early in life, and efforts to dismantle it can lead to resistance, if not hostility. Most men, however, who ardently value these precepts formed in childhood will be sadly disappointed by the inability to make the ideal come to life. Individuals with high ideals about the role of love in marriage, but who achieve little in the way of bringing about this standard, are clearly more interested in retaining the ideal, rather than enjoying the benefits of marriage, although both areas are meaningful to them. Thinking of this kind often throws a spanner into the works of sociology, since it is not based on 'rational' considerations, easily measured factors such as income, status, education, but instead on soft 'irrational' notions. Yet, that this is an important facet of male-female relationships cannot be denied.

In the healthy idealistic scenario, the individual seeks the person, the romantic and virtuous 'beloved', *who would balance out their own weaknesses, both material and emotional, leading to psychological wholeness*. The psychological satisfaction derived from a passionate, romantic attachment between a man and women could be fulfilled by establishing an equilibrium, when both persons are ready to make sacrifices for the deepening the relationship. In this

way is the ideal truly brought to life. Hence, *complementarity*, the dovetailing of differences between people, has always been a critical factor in reaching the ideal of love. Yet, as time has gone on, the uncompromising nature has become more difficult to maintain, and concessions to 'realism' had to be made. In the 20th century, it became difficult to achieve this mutually enhancing differences in experiences and temperament. This was caused by more self-centeredness, greater intolerance of personality differences, and less necessity for complementarity due to changes in household function. Determining and handling similarity is easier than managing the complexities of dissimilarity, and so when similarity became the focus of the search for a marriage partner, the belief developed that a love match could be easily made. Naturally, dealing with personality and background differences are still as important as ever, but discussions about such issues have become sparse. Less time and effort were invested in ascertaining a person's acceptability as marriage partner. In addition, the 'popularisation' of the analytical, and increasing education of the population, an outgrowth of the same forces that created the possibility of more similitude in marriage (as duties were transferred from mother and father to companies and schools), rendered a certain foreignness to deep positive emotion. This, combined with shorter courtship period, led to many poor choices of marriage partners, with resulting problematic divorce rates. The necessity of maximising the interrelationship between human similarities and differences in reaching personal fulfilment is an important area of study, especially within the context of historical developments (for in-depth discussions about these issues, see Sporer 2010B).

We can legitimately conclude that men and women are still *captivated by the ideal*, and they seek to reach it, but due to particular, and peculiar, issues of modern existence, they fail. Perhaps this partially explains the paradox why the people of the current time, who supposedly strongly believe in a *romantic* notion of marriage,

are often unwilling to make the sacrifices necessary to achieve stable relationships; they are unwilling to marry early, and indeed often unwilling to marry at all. They wish to preserve this poorly conceived ideal, and so they seek, perhaps as in past times, the companion they imagine, but now the long road does not lead to triumph, but only to a sad comprehension about the contradictions and hypocrisies present in many relationships. From observations of modern life, key questions arise that revolve around the issues of autonomy and love. How can one proclaim to be looking for a Mr Right or Miss Right, but yet marry someone that was clearly never 'right' to begin with? How can one be both consciously seeking that single 'true love', but yet have numerous sex partners? How can couples advocate marriage as the only place where the warmth of true companionship can occur, yet doggedly pursue a career, when it even threatens to dismiss love and affection?

In light of these competing factors and disappointments, it might be thought that the importance of marriage is dwindling, with a parallel rise in the *satisfaction of being unmarried*. In fact, this is *not* the case. More than ever, people want to marry, although they may not be fully conscious of this desire. We find that the differences in well-being between married and unmarried are *increasing*, not decreasing. Differences in happiness appear greatest in the most *modern* European cultures, whereas almost none exist in the traditional ones. Married persons are becoming more dependent on spouses, not less; overall happiness in life has become intimately tied with satisfaction in marriage. Not surprisingly, between 1950 and 1980 suicide rates rose far more for the unmarried than the married.² All of this points to the increasing isolation of marriage as providing gratification to the *exclusion* of other relationships and institutions, a critical fact we should not ignore.

The truth is that it is still possible to obtain satisfaction with ordinary friendships, yet overcoming the superficial aspects of non-marital relationships is becoming increasingly difficult. In the past,

when people could get emotional satisfaction from a job, hobby, or close relationships with a small circle of relatives and friends, there was no significant correlation between the number of one's friends and marital tendency. Today, *quantity* of friendship is a key factor, more so than quality, and it is thought, albeit incorrectly, that a social situation containing many 'friends' can substitute for marriage and bring fulfilment. Perhaps if one has many more than the average number of friends, one can permanently delay marriage. However, in the past, in the absence of friends, people might *not* have married more quickly. Why have people obtained relatively little emotional fulfilment from non-marital relationships in our day, and why have people, paradoxically, become more dependent on such relationships? The reasons are varied: Relationships are less stable and less homogeneous, due to people coming from more diverse backgrounds and different geographical areas; there is a preoccupation with materialism, instead of character, intellect and spirituality; diversions in the form of mass entertainment make it less necessary to cultivate friendships.

Thus, many people become dissatisfied with their friendships, and desire a deeper, long-lasting, intimate relationship, that has clear boundaries and obligations. We can say that, anytime there is a great desire for something, *without a viable plan*, an unsafe situation is created. The male-female intimate friendship is ostensibly critical to one's success in life, but many paradoxically spend little time working to achieve such a relationship. Moreover, in spite of attaining some security in one's life, the average individual too often relies on one person, who clearly does not bring the emotional satisfaction that is wanted. It is irrefutable that such a 'partner' was chosen rashly and heedlessly, the result of a quick pragmatic search, but where older traditional courtship principles were ignored. In a specific, and fairly rigidly defined, cultural context such as marriage, the contemporary 'match' often brings not peace but friction, especially when the relationship itself is

based on physical factors, not spiritual or psychological ones. The streets of modern life are filled with often troubled and struggling characters, not the joyous, secure people envisioned by our parents and grandparents. The yearning for love is still so great, yet the men and women who try to satisfy this yearning often end up dejected and lonely.

As relationship ideals are intensely personal, only the individual can bear the ultimate responsibility in choosing the correct method to reach these ideals. However, assistance in the construction of plans and methods should always be welcome. In this regard, *traditions* have laid out clear paths that will assist the individual in attaining psychological wholeness and fulfilment. What is important to note, is that these *traditional principles always clearly consider both the psychological and material aspects to relationships*; they are not simply idle ‘pie in the sky’ musings, nor are they cold, authoritarian dictates.

Traditional society understood that the ideal of love is not realised by merely ‘reaching a place’, but is found in continuing success in jointly overcoming material obstacles in life, and in enjoying life’s most profound spiritual, intellectual, and artistic offerings. The recommended actions along the path prepare the individual financially, mentally and emotionally. Some might worry, however, that too much freedom might be lost by following this course, freedom which could be used to develop schooling, career and personality. Nonetheless, there does not appear to be any recurring conflict between educational experiences, educational attainment and acting out the positive traditional role in the family.³ Each step in the process, when taken with deliberation and accepted on its own terms, does not necessarily negatively affect any other step.

The modern Western world has retained certain aspects of the traditional; the usual or typical route is for a man or woman to finish their education, then begin a full-time career, then marry, then have children. After this point, the sexes have somewhat