

THE FATE OF THE FAMILY

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The family, like any other institution or a living organism, leads a double existence. It has an internal life. Its internal structure and functions must serve its own constituent elements. These elements, in turn, or the organization itself, play a role in relation to other elements, organizations, and institutions. The family has a life of interaction with them, a life observed as external.

If or when one dares to speak of the future of an institution, there is involved the entire social structure of which it is a part. Therefore, one's task would seem to be the assessment of the entire cultural structure and functions, as well as the cultural patterns involved.

The family is at once the creator, and is created by, the general cultural world of which it is a part. It has become common knowledge among sociologists that in the family are originated all of the essential elements of the personalities of its members, the basic elements of humanness. In Cooley's phrase, the family is "essential to the genesis" of human nature.

The truth of this basic conception has been amply demonstrated since it was first expressed in *Social Organization* in 1909. There is evidence of two varieties. First, personality disorganization cannot be explained or understood fully without realization of the inadequate functioning of the family group of which the disorganized personality is or has been a member. Second, the prediction of failure or success of a particular marriage, although the technique is still in its infancy, has gone far enough at the moment to demonstrate that cultural background factors of each of the persons marrying, form a cornerstone of prediction. The late Dr. Meroney demonstrated, for example, that there were three possible attitudes in the person coming from a home situation where tension was predominant in the relations of the members. First, there was the possibility that children growing up in such

a condition would refuse to marry; second, they might accept the condition of tension as a pattern of behavior so that in marriage there would be a repetition of the conditions in the original home; third, there might be special effort to avoid tension. A former student confided to the writer that when she married there were going to be special precautions taken against a repetition of the condition of tension which finally led to divorce in the family in which she had grown up.

The principal constituent element furnished by the family in the production of personality is intimacy. The term intimacy includes all relationships involving the entire family group. It is not limited to the physical and psychosocial intimacies of the sex act. The response function is a basic one. The family is the organization, the world over, which satisfies this desire. The form of the marriage over most of the earth's surface is monogamous. It seems to be the form of organization that is especially well adapted to produce the personalities which, in turn, are best adapted to function in a complex world. Most of the peoples of the world, the assumption is, are partisans of monogamy, and being thus partisan, we must observe with many misgivings the temporary and artificial arrangements made in some of the totalitarian countries. It may be, however, that when a young woman is persuaded that her function in life is to produce babies for Der Fuehrer and that this is "much nobler, much grander, than having a home and a husband," that better soldiers will be produced than we could with our type of family organizations.

Our conclusion must be drawn conditionally, therefore. If someone like Adolph Hitler does not succeed in organizing the world of the future, something like our form of the family will persist. Human nature will continue to be born in some sort of intimacy of relationship.

Indeed, one might go farther and ask if the family organization itself is not the principal reason why human beings will never find satisfaction in a totalitarian society. In intimate relationships there inevitably is an approach to equality. The universality of the demand for satisfaction of the wish for response leads one to wonder if there could be a long-range program based on totalitarianism. The experience which the Soviet Union has had in its experiment of complete freedom for members of the family would seem to be evidence on this point.

This leads us directly to the question of the relation of the family with other institutions. It would seem that the types of personality we produce in our families will tend to determine the nature of other institutions, particularly political and economic organizations. But these, in turn, will tend to determine the type of family organization.

What is the general outlook for the future, assuming that there is anywhere sufficient wisdom to make an intelligent guess? Pitirim Sorokin has spoken recently to the question in *The Crisis of our Age*. His argument has been reviewed both favorably and adversely.

It must not be assumed that Sorokin is entirely pessimistic with reference to the future of the family, for in one place he says, "Genuine contractual relationships—not fictitious ones—can and will

eventually be restored." In another place he expresses his faith that society will enter upon a "new, integrated, stable, orderly, and creative phase of its existence." In spite of the dark picture which this author paints of the transition through which society is passing, he believes that the conceptions set forth are among the most optimistic concerning "socio-cultural change."

Right or wrong in detail, we shall have to agree with Sorokin that there are forces operative over which even the dictators have little or no control. They themselves are to be explained as products rather than as originators.

If there should come about an idealistic or idealistic culture as Sorokin insists that he is optimistic enough to believe, then there will persist a family not greatly different from the type which we now have. It might even be that the evidences of family mal-functioning, such as our high divorce rate, would to some extent disappear. There will be predominant in such a culture values that Sorokin calls "absolute." One of these absolute values will be a recognition of the preponderant importance of human personality. If this is to be a value of the future and personalities find their genesis in the family, then the institution which, more than any other satisfies the need for intimacy of relations will continue to be of predominant importance.