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**SUSTAINING MARRIAGE
IN A POST-TRADITIONAL, POSTMODERN WORLD**

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**SUSTAINING MARRIAGE
IN A POST-TRADITIONAL, POSTMODERN WORLD**

by

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Sustaining Marriage in a Post-Traditional, Postmodern World

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Much contemporary research and theory on marriage focuses on observable patterns of interactions and tries to delineate sequential patterns of behavior that differentiate distressed from non-distressed couples. There is, however, a notable lack of theorizing about the data beyond “theories” that offer little more than empirical generalizations. In their latest *Sourcebook* (2004), The National Council on Family Relations recognizes the need to develop broader integrative frameworks to guide research in this field. This theoretical dissertation questions some of the dominant assumptions and theoretical orientations in the field of marriage research and explores how we might rethink how contemporary marriage and its goods are conceptualized as part of the search for more sustainable marriage and family policies and practices.

Questions about marriage are situated in a larger socio-cultural and historical perspective. Section One identifies ethical ideals and moral goods associated with a

number of the prominent traditional epochs in Western culture prior to the Enlightenment. Section Two explores the changes in marriage brought about by the transition from a traditional, hierarchical worldview to the modern outlook that prioritizes the inherent dignity and rights of individuals that frequently need to be defended against the tradition. Section Three develops a theoretical framework for dealing with a seemingly intractable dilemma. On one hand, many continue to feel that marriage and family life incorporate genuine goods that should be preserved, in some form, for their own sake and the larger good. On the other hand, traditional ideals appear riddled with elements of inequality and irrational authority that make them unacceptable in a modern liberal democracy. It is argued that many of the proposed ways for overcoming or coping with this dilemma are inadequate.

Finally, the dissertation argues that hermeneutic and dialogical approaches to understanding human action may offer resources for making some real headway in resolving these dilemmas. These approaches complement one another and suggest what might be a credible way “beyond objectivism and relativism” (Bernstein, 1983) that allows us to affirm certain substantive goods of marriage and family life that carry real weight but also might be found acceptable in a post-traditional, postmodern world.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
SECTION ONE: PREMODERN MARRIAGE	12
Chapter 1: The Origin and Emergence of Marriage in Western Culture	12
Prehistory	12
Mesopotamian and Canaanite Marriage	16
Hebrew Marriage	21
Chapter 2: The Greco-Roman Era	31
The Philosophical Critique	33
Early Christian Marriage.....	45
Chapter 3: The Construction of Marriage in the Middle Ages	58
New Foundations: Christianizing the Ancient World.....	58
Supernatural Marriage	60
Institutionalizing Marriage.....	65
Marital and Courtly Love in Conflict	69
SECTION TWO: MODERN MARRIAGE	80
Chapter 4: Making Marriage Ordinary Again	80
Contractual Marriage: Milton and Locke	82
Hume and Rousseau.....	89
Kant and the Enlightened Marriage	94
Chapter 5: The Search for New Foundations.....	99
Hegel and “The German Ideology”	99
Contra Hegel	102
Marriage in the United States	110
Chapter 6: Marriage in 20 th Century Social Science.....	116
Interdependence Theory.....	123
Disguised Ideology	132

Table of Contents (continued)

SECTION THREE: BEYOND TRADITIONAL AND MODERN MARRIAGE	141
Chapter 7: Modern Dilemmas and the Plight of Marriage	141
Clashing Ideologies.....	146
Uncritical Pro-Marriage Familism.....	146
Hyper-Liberal Inclusive Familism.....	158
Critical Progressive Familism.....	167
Chapter Eight: Hermeneutic and Dialogical Viewpoints	172
Beyond Objectivism and Relativism	174
Philosophical Hermeneutics.....	176
Weak and Strong Relationality	183
Virtue Ethics	186
Chapter 9: Sustainable Marriage for the 21 st Century	190
Relational Dialectical Theory	191
The Goods of Marriage in a Post-Traditional, Postmodern Culture	208
References.....	214

Introduction

When two individuals choose to get married, they usually intend to stay married for the rest of their lives. This extraordinary commitment is given and received, however, in a world that has little place or patience for such a long-term vow. Indeed, despite noble intent and heroic effort in many cases, almost half of all marriage commitments are broken (Wilcox, 2010, p. 71). Those who are able to sustain fairly satisfactory marriages do so from a combination of luck, virtue, stubbornness, fear of change, habit, and grace.

Up until the 1960's, divorce was the exception, not the rule. Those who found themselves in unsatisfying or even abusive marriage relationships usually accepted their fate and endured the relationship. Until no-fault divorce laws were passed in the late 1960's and early 1970's, the social and legal obstacles to securing divorce were difficult to overcome. Women especially suffered, given they had fewer resources or opportunities to flourish in society apart from the marriage relationship. For many today, marriage as an institution has become optional; in fact, for the first time in recorded history, the number of couples co-habiting outside of marriage has surpassed those who live together in marriage (Popenoe, 2009; Wilcox, 2010, p. 76).

These facts are well known, but that does not mean we have a clear understanding at all of how this situation has come to pass. How did marriage get to be the way it is in Western, especially American, culture? Why is it so very difficult to sustain a marriage in today's culture? In what ways might it have developed differently?

Over the course of Western civilization, there have been a number of dramatic cultural shifts concerning the nature of marriage. These changes, including changes in legal and social policies concerning marriage as an institution, accelerate as they approach our so-called postmodern era. Do these changes reflect progress, decline, or in some sense both? On

one account, marriage in our time is in crisis because of a greater, indeed general breakdown in moral values and the adoption of different cultural values (Bennett, 2001; Browning, 2003). In this view, the fast pace of modernity along with the forces of globalism is said to have weakened the core values of the Western tradition. This in turn has led to a general moral breakdown in the population on the whole, which in part helps explain high divorce rates, poverty, single parenting, and other maladies routinely found in modern industrial societies.

According to other prominent marriage theorists and cultural critics, marriage is not so much in crisis as in the midst of a transition to patterns of marriage and family life radically different from, and desirably so, the ways marriage has been traditionally constituted (Aulette & Root, 2007).

In *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Bellah and his colleagues (1985) identify two perspectives on married life that predominate in our modern society. One is an *authority-oriented* model of marriage, which strongly emphasizes that one's duty and loyalty to the marriage ought to trump one's personal feelings and needs about it. The other perspective is called a *therapeutic-contractual* model of marriage, which stresses the paramount importance of securing emotional rewards and satisfactions over commitment to any sort of external obligations (p. 85).

If Bellah et al. (1985) are right, our culture is deeply confused and conflicted about marriage. On the one hand, traditional, *authority-oriented* marriages uphold the importance of social ties and concern for some sort of common good, and yet they also seem bound to establish role-based relational patterns that seriously constrain the rights and opportunities and neglect the emotional needs of parties to the marriage, most especially women. To many, *authority-oriented* marriages appear to preserve a system of gross inequality between the genders. On the other

hand, *therapeutic-contractual* marriages that stress companionship and gender equality are typically more volatile and unstable (Fitzpatrick, 1988). The partners in these marriages tend to support each other's autonomy and self-actualization, and yet these goods are held in tension with the often tenuous capacity of individuals to satisfy the needs and desires of the other partner. The dissolution of traditional ideals and guidelines and the often fickle nature of human emotion and preferences have led to great unpredictability and instability. How could one person ever keep pace with a marriage partner's vagaries in their needs and desires over the course of a lifetime?

How might those who share some concern about the fate of modern marriage respond constructively to this enormous confusion about marriage and its prospects in today's world? Marriage law scholar Dan Cere (2002) writes: "Our social policy and theorists do not have an adequate language to speak of the thick complexity of marriage. ... We need a new vision, we need a new language." Such a new vision and language will be hard to come by. Is it possible at all to envision a credible conception of marriage beyond authority-oriented and therapeutic-contractual models?

Part of the problem in re-envisioning marriage is that the language and terms we habitually use to talk about it frequently distort and further confuse what is being described. That language is inescapably, in part, moral or evaluative in tone. But we often discuss the marriage relationship rather narrowly, using languages of psychological gratification and need fulfillment that preclude saying anything about what may or may not constitute an intrinsically *good* marriage in modern circumstances—the topic I want to address. Also, while many of us are unalterably opposed to the unequal and sometimes oppressive gender roles found in traditionalistic conceptions of marriage, the discourse of equality and inequality, by itself,

contains few resources for articulating an understanding of other goods like commitment, fidelity, or even sacrifice in longer-term, stable relationships.

Of course, in this dissertation, I can only begin to address some of these questions in any sort of fresh way. First and foremost, I think we need to put these questions about marriage in larger socio-cultural and historical perspective. We need to see what we have been in order to better understand what we presently are. And yet I intend to focus not so much on the sociological or anthropological details of this history, as many intellectual histories of marriage have already done, as on the development of the broader conceptions and ideas of marriage as they have emerged over the years. In giving voice to some of the different voices in this centuries-old conversation, I hope this more *hermeneutic* approach will shed light on certain marital goods in their context and on how some of these might be reinterpreted in creative new ways.

Since the beginning of recorded history, marriage has been deeply embedded in one socio-cultural configuration of meaning or another. According to philosopher and writer Eugene Webb (2009) these constellations of meaning that have emerged over time actually constitute broad, successive “worldviews.” A worldview, according to Webb, is a type of mental organization, a taken-for-granted vision of the world. For a worldview to become stable, it must be internalized, deeply ingrained, and widely shared. It provides security, meaning, and stability. It is equivalent to “reality” and becomes part of one’s personality. According to developmental psychologist Robert Kegan (1994), it may even be thought of as an “order of consciousness” (p. 44).

For Kegan (1994), an order of consciousness is a “total psychological structure” by which people come to perceive and make sense of their world in terms of what he calls broad categories

of meaning (i.e., orders of consciousness). Kegan thus proposes a theory of the psychological evolution of culturewide meaning-making systems that evolve into ever more complex levels of consciousness in response to “the mental demands of modern life” (p. 10). He posits five such orders. While he thinks these evolve over time into a hierarchy of consciousness, as it were, he tries not to privilege one order over another. Instead, he sees each of the primary orders of consciousness as different ways of knowing reality.

The first two orders derive from and relate to Piaget’s cognitive structures in early human development, the preoperational and concrete operational; these pertain to how human beings construct their worlds in terms of their perceptions of and logical operations on phenomena at hand. For our purposes, without getting too abstract or into too much detail, Kegan’s third, fourth, and fifth orders provide us with a framework for understanding marriage more precisely in terms of *traditional, modern, and postmodern* worldviews. As Kegan (1994) promises, “The discovery of the mental structures inherent in traditionalism, modernism, and postmodernism, and their evolutionary relationship, awaits those with an interest in the historical evolution of cultural mentality” (p. 11).

Kegan (1994) describes the “third-order” consciousness as the traditionalist meaning-making mental structure because in this mindset, like in traditional cultures, the opinions and expectations of others form the basis for how one comes to understand his or her own role and purpose within the larger social group to which one belongs. He thinks that that up to two-thirds of all adults continue to make meaning in this way. Kegan, however, argues that the complexity and demands of modern pluralist society often transforms adult third-order minds into “fourth-order” minds. He calls this the modernist consciousness because it has the capacity to judge and negotiate the multiple expectations of different others and can thus mediate among abstract

categories or concepts in terms of an individual's own thoughts and preferences. Kegan thinks that up to a half of all adults now construct reality in this way, a way he also calls "self-authoring" for how it seeks to establish one's own identity apart from the group (p. 168). Kegan finally claims that a "fifth-order" mind, i.e., postmodernist consciousness, emerges in response to the stress of modern ambiguities and dilemmas. At this level, one's sense of self becomes more fluid or decentered. One becomes aware that he or she is not bound to any particular identity or role. He suggests that a smaller percentage of adults move to this level, usually in mid-life and beyond, when they are able to integrate paradox and contradiction into their way of knowing. As they recognize the extent to which their lives are constituted by social, cultural, historical, and other forces, their way of knowing becomes more "dialectical" or fifth-order.

The relevance of Kegan's (1994) insight is that it provides an analytic tool to make better sense of marriage's goods from the level of historical consciousness in which marriage is or has been embedded. In this way, we can begin to differentiate its goods from between the perspective of one level, or worldview, to another. Each of these orders, for Kegan, functions as a "holding environment" for containing the configuration of ideas that give it meaning (p. 115). Each holding environment may be thought of as a "culture of embeddedness" (p. 116) in that the subjective experience of those embedded within it is that *this* or *that* worldview comes to constitute what is seen as "objective" reality.

As things change and evolve, however, new interpretations begin to differentiate between competing meanings and thus the "objectivity" of the collective order or predominate worldview is called into question. When these "radical" new meanings and ideas achieve critical mass, they create cultural crisis that begin to shake up the established order. In reaction or response, people

take sides based on their own subjective experience of what is happening, and in due course they defend, adapt, or transform.

The premodern consciousness enabled most people to take for granted the way things were in a fairly secure way because it was taken as *true*. While the people who shared this outlook may have suffered in many ways within such traditional culture, they rarely suffered the anxiety, *anomie*, and feelings of disorientation and emptiness that can be experienced when worldviews are shaken. Few today can avoid the anomie that crops up in our often “structurally pluralistic” postmodern world in which the awareness that others hold very different visions of life crashes in on individuals on a regular, indeed daily, basis (Webb, 2009).

One way of responding to the uncertainty of the age, what some might call a “fundamentalist” approach, is to try to silence, shut out, or purge one’s world of competing voices in order to fend off anomie and anxiety. The authority-oriented marriages that Bellah et al. (1985) describe endeavor to reproduce something of the certainty of a premodern outlook in this way. They hope to recapture a sense of stability and belonging that many find painfully missing in today’s rapidly changing world. Established rules and roles prescribe practices that give them at least a simulacrum of the sense of being part of a tradition larger than themselves. Yet for many reasons, the attempt to build islands of traditional culture in the turbulent seas of the modern/postmodern world does not seem like a realistic strategy to many people.

Another response to this uncertainty and contingency is to reassert the metaphysic of modern rationality, often by means of social scientific research and theory, to rationalize and promote the ideal of companionate marriage in a lonely world. Many contemporary marriage researchers and theorists seek data for the sake of generating strategies in marriage therapy or establishing courses in marriage education. This approach ventures to ground the companionate

ideal without taking full account of the historical vicissitudes that threaten marriage or coming to terms with its inherent fragility. Part of the problem is that they proceed with overconfidence in the researcher's ability to discuss any and all human affairs in a language that is "value neutral," giving them the illusion that they can discover timeless truths about marriage and family without struggling to make sense of them in their cultural and historical context. As a result, they view the practices of marriage and marriage therapy in heavily one-sided "instrumental" or starkly utilitarian terms (Fowers, 2000; Habermas, 1973; Richardson). They encourage us to look only at the effects and payoffs of different attitudes and behaviors of individuals and neglect to ponder and weigh the intrinsic value or moral worth of persons and practices.

Another response to these dilemmas recommends the virtual elimination of marriage contracts, vows, or lasting commitments in any size, shape, or form. This radical liberationist, emancipatory approach may be less original than it often claims, insofar as it but pushes familiar modern, individualist ideals to their extreme. In the process, such an approach may fall into a dogmatism of its own, partly by excluding or condemning any forms of association or community other than the ones it favors. Nevertheless, these voices need to be heard. They represent a valuable protest against injustices and inequalities that have by no means been fully overcome.

Out of often agonizing struggle, many transition out of one order of consciousness and into another; accordingly, the manner in which they perceive and experience the world is transformed. Kegan (1994) argues that each cultural epoch transmits its values via some "curriculum" suited to the order of consciousness in which it happens to be embedded. With this metaphor, Kegan is then able to discuss how each order differentiates itself from the others by its own curriculum. In this way, Kegan identifies how our three major cultural orders of

consciousness (i.e., the traditional, the modern, and the postmodern) teach and learn their respective “curriculums” (p. 44).

The first three chapters making up section one situate conceptions of marriage within a traditional, i.e., premodern worldview. Peter Berger (1979) writes, “Sociologically speaking, pre-modern societies are marked by the fact that their institutions have a very taken-for-granted certainty” (p. 12). Individuals find themselves as links in the *Great Chain of Being*, a hierarchical order of everything that determines a priori each and every aspect of everything (Lovejoy and Stanlis, 2009). The premodern curriculum shapes individual and collective consciousness in its terms, helping to define what seems good to believe and do.

In traditional societies, marriage was an intrinsic part of the social order, which was structured along patriarchal lines, reflecting the hierarchical nature of their reality. Marriage was institutionalized in a way that gave public shape and form to human inclinations and needs that were thought to be natural and divine goods. Central to this, of course, was childbearing and childrearing for the good of the clan, tribe, or polis.

Section two explores the changes in marriage brought about by the transition from a traditional view of the world to the modern outlook. This entailed the breaking apart of the Great Chain of Being and caused a massive rethinking of what had long been considered the common good. Early and later modern thinkers such as Milton, Locke, Rousseau, and Kant began to “teach” a new curriculum for a new world that was breaking free from every form of oppression. They taught that individuals had inherent dignity and rights that needed to be defended against tradition. By the time of the Industrial Revolution, the division of labor, the relentless pursuit of work, and the accumulation of wealth appeared to replace every kind of traditional hierarchy.

Scholars in northern European countries thus began to think of marriage and family for the first time as *problems*—not accidentally at a time when industrialization and political revolution had begun to destabilize established economic and social orders, depriving the family of its heretofore essential economic functions and, if anything, further degrading the role of women in larger society (Casey, 1989). Marriage and family, it was felt, had to be redefined and justified. A number of critics in the Victorian era in the latter half of the 19th century thus sought to identify outmoded features of the institutions of marriage and family and devise more or less radically new patterns for them. Many of these thinkers framed their formulations in terms of Darwin’s evolutionary theory and assumed that either the post-industrial family had made exceptional progress from its primitive origins or that the family could in fact be socially re-engineered for the sake of greater individual benefit (Burgess and Locke, 1953; Parsons and Bales). Marriage’s goods came to be seen in a new light: At the very least, marriage and the family of which it was part came to be seen as a private haven for personal comforts in an often impersonal and heartless world (Lasch, 1995).

In section three, “Beyond Traditional and Modern Marriage,” we identify the dilemma that arises when marriage’s perennial purposes clash with competing discourses concerning the goods of marriage in postmodernity’s pluralistic culture. This intense rivalry between multiple marital goods and purposes has weakened marriage as an institutional order and confused the nature of its value as a taken-for-granted social and personal good.

Finally, the last two chapters of the book broadly sketch what might represent a genuine third alternative to so-called authority-oriented and therapeutic-contractual ideals. Drawing on philosophical hermeneutics and other dialogical views of human action and personality, this approach seeks to take account of the thoroughgoing contextual embeddedness of marriage

practices and ideals yet without embracing postmodern relativism. This approach enables us to discuss and preserve ethical and social goods of marriage that go beyond narrowly individual preferences or needs yet without appealing to fixed or dogmatic traditional forms—and in a way that respects the cultural diversity of ways in which these goods are expressed. Chapter eight outlines this hermeneutic-dialogical perspective on human affairs. Chapter nine introduces a particular application of this view and begins to draw out some of its implications for rethinking marriage and its goods and pondering its capacity to sustain loving human relationships in today's world.

Section One: Premodern Marriage

Chapter 1: The Origin and Emergence of Marriage in Western Culture

Prehistory

Marriage, unfortunately, fails to leave a fossil record, and virtually nothing can be said with certainty about marriage, or marriage-like relationships, before the era of recorded history. One can only speculate. Edvard Westermarck (1862-1939) suggests there was an origin of marriage presaging the monogamous nuclear family. Westermarck argued that pair bonding, an instinct common in many higher mammals, promoted a jealous concern on the part of both parents for their offspring, and that such pairs became, for the most part, lasting pairs (Westermarck, 1881).

Westermarck's contemporary, Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), reached a different conclusion: “The study of primitive history reveals conditions where the men live in polygamy and their wives in polyandry at the same time, and their common children are common to them all” (Engels, 1884, 1972, p. 32). For Engels, along with other 19th century socialists like Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-1881) and John F. McLennan (1827-1881), such group marriages constituted something of a golden era, a pre-historical prototype for all of humanity, especially for modern society—matriarchal, sexually promiscuous, egalitarian, and communal.

Social critic and contemporary family advocate David Blankenhorn (2007) considers Engels’ ideas regarding the origin of marriage misleading. While Blankenhorn agrees that the original primate condition included sexual promiscuity, casual to nonexistent pair-bonding, and no fatherhood per se, Blankenhorn does not see this phenomenon as something to valorize.

Blankenhorn views such group marriages as a primitive step on the evolutionary path for humanity on the whole and marriage in particular (pp. 26-29).

Blankenhorn (2007) concedes that group marriages, or some such phenomena, were very much the case, and that “pair-bonding,” which establishes a stable, long term relationship with a spouse, was relatively rare for humans, as such pair bonding is found in only 3% of all mammal species. Indeed, parenting usually means mothering in most mammals. Fatherhood as a social role was rare. But something remarkable happened in our evolutionary history: “Several million years ago, hominoid primates apparently began to demonstrate an unusual social behavior: females and males began to attach and stay together—to bundle sexual desire, the procreative impulse, and the needs for emotional closeness and practical cooperation into a new, quite complex, and (it turns out) very successful way of living” (p. 30).

Blankenhorn (2007) thus builds upon Westermarck’s view that men and women are evolutionarily adapted for monogamy to raise and civilize offspring for the sake of stabilizing society. Like Westermarck, Blankenhorn, a defender of that which would become traditional marriage, begins his case for marriage with the assumption that humans, unlike most other mammals, have a biological predisposition for pair bonding, something rooted in their instinctual drive to procreate. Nevertheless, Blankenhorn acknowledges, such pair bonding is an instinct that needed to be socialized, and that it could only be socialized over a considerable amount of time, the time it took, that is, for something resembling civil society itself to become operative (pp. 37-40).

Blankenhorn (2007) surmises that fatherhood—understood as a social role obligating the male to care for his offspring—simply did not exist for the longest time in human relations. It was only when humans developed matrimonial laws, institutionalizing marriage as a social good,

that fathers joined mothers in raising the children born to them. Blankenhorn agrees with Thomas Hobbes that matrimonial laws constituted a major turning point for the human species in its upward climb into civilization: brutish natural impulses were restrained by way of civilizing norms and socializing contracts (pp. 25-26).

Blankenhorn's (2007) account of marriage's prehistoric origins serves to support his belief that marriage is a hard-won social achievement. Blankenhorn's analysis of the foibles of marriage, or non-marriage, in the pre-historic world, a world in which humans were dominated by others with brutish desire, leads him to the conclusion that marriage needs to be preserved in the form of monogamy as long as possible. Marriage in a heterosexual, nuclear form for the sake of sustaining a stable society is, in Blankenhorn's view of society, the highest priority.

Family scholar and social historian Stephanie Coontz (2005) disagrees with the Westermarck-Blankenhorn position. Coontz challenges what Blankenhorn privileges as the social norm for western civilization. Coontz reads the story of the Paleolithic emergence of marriage in a way that appears more consonant with the 19th century socialist understanding of marriage as communal, interdependent, and matriarchal, not patriarchal. In light of the speculations on the part of Blankenhorn and others, Coontz does acknowledge that marriage was an early and vitally important human invention. Yet, Coontz does not see marriage, then or now, as a hedge against indiscriminate, self-serving lusts, but rather as primarily a means for "forging networks of cooperation beyond the immediate family group or local band" (p. 40).

Based upon her reading of extensive paleontological and anthropological evidence, Coontz (2005) rejects the once popular notion that Paleolithic societies were organized around the dominant, powerful male as the core of a dependent, even oppressed, family. Rather, Coontz concludes that total interdependence within and among clans of individuals and families was the

rule (pp. 37-40). In that world, there was indeed a division of labor between the sexes: for the most part men were involved in hunting and women had the obvious duty of nursing children. Yet, Coontz claims that women were not totally dependent on men but rather provided for themselves, and others, by engaging in activities that were just as essential as hunting, namely, in gathering foods that were more local, as it were, by processing plants and shellfish; by trapping small animals; and by manufacturing tools and clothing (p. 44).

Coontz (2005) argues that, circa 10,000 BCE, the time that humans began to make the transition from hunter-gatherers to agrarian subsistence farmers, certain basic social arrangements and roles developed to fit particular needs and circumstances. She allows that the history on this matter remains speculative but argues that there were probably three different kinds of human groups that, each in its own way, managed to keep humanity alive and prospering as much as they could.

There were, probably, matriarchal, female-centered groups that consisted mainly of mothers, sisters, and their young accompanied by temporary male companions. The male offspring would subsequently leave the protection of the group when they reached mating age. There were also most likely patriarchal groups based on male kin: fathers, brothers, and sons, along with their female mates, that stayed together as a group, with the females leaving at puberty to be mated with another group. And there were also polygamous groups organized around one male who mated with several females, and who traveled with those females and their offspring as much and as far as possible.

Coontz's (2005) central point is that, whatever social arrangements may have developed over time, nuclear families per se did not exist in the prehistoric world. She argues that it is not only incorrect to infer backwards, from the age of the nuclear family, that the nuclear family was

always the case. Coontz even claims that it should not be surprising that even in the modern world, especially a world inclining more and more toward socialism, that group families or group marriages might become the case again (p. 49).

Mesopotamian and Canaanite Marriage

As humans began to settle into more agrarian economies at the end of the Ice Age, around 10,000 BCE, large nomadic hunter-gatherer tribes began dispersing into smaller kinship groups or clans. As these newly settled clans acquired property and accumulated resources, greater economic differentiation arose between and among the various groupings which we might somewhat anachronistically call “families.” By the 5th millennium BCE, the first traces of a complex urban civilization began to emerge in the so-called “cradle of civilization”—the land between the Tigris and Euphrates; i.e., Mesopotamia, the “land between the rivers” (Leakey, 1995).

Within the function of rather complex Paleolithic religious systems, somewhat defined hierarchical social structures began to emerge—in part because of marriage itself. Social stratification became obvious in human history for the first time: royal families clearly differed from free and slave classes; and something like a fully formed institution of marriage emerged, even if only among the royal families and upper classes of free citizens (Leakey, 1995).

Coontz (2005) confirms that marriage as an institution during the period of the 5th century BCE was the legitimate and socially approved means to further the political and economic ambitions of the upper classes. According to Coontz, marriage was instituted as a means for economic transaction between powerful clan leaders and their sons, not contracted for the sake of love or familial affection. When the men, now more agrarian, did not have to forage so aggressively and so far away from the fire at home, women tended to lose their prior, superior,

or at least equal, role as provider for the family. Now the man, or his sons, could stay local and do the fishing and other forms of local gathering the woman once did. In the past, most likely, the local gathering performed by the female had probably provided as much food for the family as did that of the far-foraging male; but the more static the tribe became, the more the female lost her power. With the establishment of the marriage process, or something like it, women became goods in trade themselves, a medium of transfer, bargaining chips to be acquired through marriage and subsumed under the patriarchal authority of a new clan.

There developed a common practice of what was auspiciously called paying a “bride price,” a sum of money given to the bride’s family for “taking her” in marriage. The bride price should not be construed as an actual commodity purchase, but as part of a mutual exchange that included the wife’s dowry, which was intended to protect the bride’s well-being in case of the husband’s death or divorce (Simpson, 1998).

Marriage came to be tied closely to both religion and nature. Mesolithic and Neolithic societies emerged with a vision of the cosmos as a cyclical phenomenon. Each generation maintained continuity with the past, while generating offspring to sustain it into the future. The abstract concept of marriage itself—the procreative conjunction of opposing principles or entities—was therefore central to the cosmogony of these near eastern Mesolithic and Neolithic cultures that were sustained through the agricultural cycle and its creative production. During this period, according to historian Mircea Eliade (1978), sexual reproduction itself took on a religious character. To be sexual was to participate in the creative processes, a divine-like prerogative bound up with the mystery of creation and vegetation with its seasonal cycles involving “birth, death, and rebirth” (p. 40).

The earliest Sumerian texts from this milieu depict a cosmos that is birthed from out of a primordial sea—a chaotic, watery mass that came to be identified with the Mother Goddess *Nammu*. This original Mother then gave birth of herself to the first couple, the Earth (*An*) and Sky (*Ki*), which embody the female and male principles. According to Eliade (1978), “This first couple was united, to the point of merging, in the *hieros gamos*,” which was the wedding of the gods (p. 58). From the *hieros gamos* was born *En-lil*, the god of the atmosphere.

Such archetypal cosmic sexual unions underpinned cycles of natural fertility and seemed to sanction a similar human social order, starting with and represented by the marriage of the royal couple (Kramer, 1963). For example, the Sumerian myths of creation were ritually reenacted by the kings of Sumer, who incarnate the god *Dumuzi* as the groom in the *hieros gamos* with his bride, usually the goddess *Inanna* (Jacobsen, 1976). The cosmological drama of birth, death, and rebirth are played out in this annual ritual in which the king dies and descends to the underworld, only to reappear after a period of time. Life/death, fertility/sterility, rebirth/new life become parts of a single process. As Eliade (1978) summarizes, “This ‘mystery,’ perceived after the discovery of agriculture, becomes the principle of a unified explanation of the world, of life, and of human existence; it transcends the vegetable drama, since it also governs the cosmic rhythms, human destiny, and the relations with the gods” (p. 67).

Sexuality was indeed a powerful, sacred force that required regulation. According to Blankenhorn (2007), the marriage institution developed during this time as a means both to organize human sexuality and fecundity, and to affect social bonds between family members (p. 51).

Blankenhorn (2007) disagrees with Coontz's (2005) characterization of ancient marriage in the early ancient stage in history as little more than an economic exchange that exploited

women. To the contrary, Blankenhorn argues that marriage at that stage of history was as great of a social achievement for civilization as was the invention of writing or the invention of the wheel.

Drawing upon the earliest cuneiform law codes and other significant literature of the era, Blankenhorn (2007) credits the ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations for having broken with an “entrenched pattern of early human societies in which marriage as a social institution was either weak or nonexistent” (p. 48). According to Blankenhorn, the Egyptians and Mesopotamians built a complex social institution—precisely, marriage—at least as early as the early Bronze Age. He cites, for example, one of the world’s first legal codes from around 1900 BCE, the *Laws of Lipit-Ishtar*. The Laws of Lipit-Ishtar decreed, among other things, a father’s obligation to support his children. Such laws, Blankenhorn thinks, break with most if not all of the earlier kinship cultures for which paternity was deemed unimportant or difficult to establish. Blankenhorn considers it quite significant that at least a third of the Laws of Lipit-Ishtar focus on marriage and issues that deal with relations between husbands, wives, harlots, and heirs (p. 58).

Blankenhorn (2007) argues that the cuneiform codes show a remarkably sophisticated concern with patterns and interactions of marriage and family life, as is evidenced in contracts between parties that included both “gifts” to the bride’s family as well as “gifts” from the bride’s family (e. g. dowries), and provisions for public displays of the union, and assurances of the union by testimonials of consummation. Marriage emerged as a primary instrument by which much of civil society, as civil, came to be and be sustained (p. 50).

The idea of marriage in Mesopotamia as something that participates in the cosmic procreative energies of life, at both the divine and human levels, was especially influential

among the Semitic civilizations that formed in the Levant in Palestine around 3000 BCE and the Semites, often called “Canaanites” in the Hebrew Scriptures.

For several centuries, up until the time the Hebrews also settled into the Canaanite territory, the Levant was a crossroad and melting pot for numerous and successive cultures. Continual exchanges with and attacks from neighboring kingdoms like the Hittites, Egyptians, and Mesopotamians, along with semi-nomadic warriors from the Syrian Desert, turned the region into a melting pot of diverse cultural and religious practices (Jacobsen, 1976).

By the time the Hebrews arrived, the Canaanites had integrated the fertility cults of the agrarian peoples along the Syro-Palestinian coast with the astral and celestial divinities of the desert nomads into a new religion. Besides the long-standing portrait of the pagan Canaanite religion described polemically in the Bible, there are differing portraits of the nature of that new religion of the time revealed in texts discovered relatively recently in the ancient city of Ugarit along the Syrian coast (Rendsburg, 1997).

Some of these recently discovered documents tell the story of *El*, the head of the Ugarit pantheon and a patriarchal god, and his wife *Asherah*, who became the “Mother of the Gods.” El often bears the epithet “bull,” symbolizing his virility. As Eliade (1978) tells this story, the god El came to lose his fertility when he was overtaken by one of his sons, *Baal* (whose name identifies him as the “master of the earth”). Baal is a dynamic young god associated with cosmic fertility and incest, for Baal's sister, the fierce and violent goddess Anath, was also his wife. Baal subdues *Yamm*, god of the sea, and eventually, inevitably, overcomes death itself by defeating *Mot*, the god of the underworld (p. 151). As the myth of Baal recapitulates the annual death and rebirth of vegetation, the Baal cycle is generally interpreted as the “mythological prototype of the normal agricultural and cultic year of the people of Ugarit” (deMoor, 1987). In the Baal temples,

blood sacrifice and sacred prostitution reenact the cosmic drama to ensure the perennial cycle of life, a cycle brought into being by the *hieros gamos*, the marriage of the gods. It is remarkable that the foundational myth of a religion largely centered on fertility and their close tie with the cycles of nature is, at its core, a myth based on marriage.

Hebrew Marriage

It is almost impossible to overestimate the Hebraic influence upon the institution of marriage. While marriage in the ancient near east was tied to the mythological outlook that was determined by the natural life cycle, the Hebrews who appeared in the Levant around 2000 BCE would alter the view of marriage for much of humanity for centuries to come.

For the Hebrews, their one and only God transcended nature. They believed that God, or *Yahweh*, called them into a covenant relationship to be determined not by the cycles of nature but by Torah, Yahweh's law. Marriage made manifest a cultural relationship with Yahweh, the transcendent God beyond nature, indeed, as they perceived, the Creator of nature.

The previously dominant ancient near eastern mythology that valued supremely nature's annual recurrences in the cycles of life, death, and reproduction was now challenged by the new Hebraic narrative. From a source beyond nature, the creative acts of Yahweh would call a particular people into being by the force of Yahweh's own initiatives. Yahweh was always ready to display his disdain for the folk religions of the Canaanites whom his Chosen People would encounter. Indeed, Yahweh drew his people away from even the most fertile regions of the Earth so as to remind his chosen that they are different from the Canaanite tribes infatuated with the fertility that only nature, it seems, could provide.

In the Hebrew book of *Genesis*, Abraham and Sarah, in response to a call from Yahweh, make a move that appears entirely irrational. They migrate out of and away from the region of the Fertile Crescent:

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Gen 12.1-3)

By answering this unexpected call, perceived as God's initiative, Abraham and Sarah soon realize they are in the Levant, where they struggle to establish themselves amidst pressures to assimilate with the Canaanites fertility cults. In a twist of irony, concocted it seems by Yahweh, Abraham, the would-be father of a great and large family, realizes he is married to an infertile woman, now long past the age of child bearing. It is not an overstatement to say that the major motifs of the Abraham and Sarah stories are the motifs of fertility, and of Yahweh's willingness and desire to show to the world his ability to create life even out of the most infertile places and children out of the most infertile of persons. Yahweh's Chosen are not to rely merely on nature or devotion to nature. Yahweh, through obedient persons living out his purposes in institutions designed by him, in this case marriage, would provide.

Abraham's story is prefaced by another; the mythological account of Creation, which is very much the story of the so-called first marriage, the story of Adam and Eve. Mainstream Biblical scholars believe that this preface, the story of Adam and Eve, sums up the themes that weave through the entire historical biblical narrative (Eissfeldt, 1965). The heart of this prime narrative is a relationship between Creator and Creation, a marriage and a sustained dialogue

between God, the Bridegroom, and God's people, the Bride. As this story is famously told in the first two chapters of *Genesis*, the creator creates humanity as both male and female. The male and female are to bond and to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1.29).

Initially, there is harmony and trust between creator and created in the Garden of Eden. Adam is the archetypal *humus*, a compost pile with pro-generative capacity, who appears unsatisfied as a being without a commensurable partner: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I shall make him a partner/helpmate" (Gen 2.18). So Yahweh draws from Adam's own being to form a partner suitable to his nature—namely his female counterpart, Eve.

In Adam's union with Eve we see the virtual prototype of that which would come to be the understanding of marriage for many to this day: The man "leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh." The two are in a supreme state as the primal couple who are "naked, without shame" (Gen 2.24-25). They coexist as trusting partners who constitute unity despite their very difference as individuals.

In this creation story, the male and female, Adam and Eve, are constituted as both biological pair and social partners. They are given the inherent authority to reproduce: a "blessing from God" that suggests that even their fertility is not tied merely to nature and the cycles of nature, the rationale of the ancient near eastern fertility cults, but rather to the commands and gifts of a god who is transcendent, beyond nature.

The procreation of offspring is not the only justification for the marriage union of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve reproduce, not as an act imitative of the cycles of reproductive nature, but in order to reproduce and grow in all manner of endeavor so long as they are true to their covenant with God. Adam and Eve's progeny are expected to "leave and cleave," that is, to leave and establish their own families but maintain the covenant relationship with Yahweh.

The Hebraic model gave marriage a new sense of dignity. While marriage in the cuneiform laws and mythical stories in the Mesopotamian river valleys show some concern for the “rights” of the wife in matters of divorce and adultery, and even indicate at times a measure of affection between spouses, nothing in that fertility cult sense of marriage approaches the kind of moral and personal union depicted in the ideal of Hebrew marriage, in which husband and wife come “to know” one another and become, in effect, one person. The Hebraic conception of conjugal love transforms the dominant preoccupation with sexuality in the ancient world from something primarily organic and natural into something originally creative and personal. A philosophy of the couple arises within the Hebrew canon that transforms sexuality from a merely biological imperative or cosmic life force into a more explicitly personal, covenantal relationship. The idea and practice of marriage as companionship and mutual recognition became a major key. As Timothy Sedgwick (2008) puts it, “Sex is personalized and becomes an expression of love and care,” at least in principle (p. 56).

In the Hebrew love song, the biblical book, *The Song of Solomon*, personal and passionate intimacy between bride and groom reveal an idealized vision of such a relationship. The lover extols the beloved, “You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride, you have ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes.” The bride replies, “Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden that its fragrance may be wafted abroad. Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits” (Song of Solomon, 4:9-16). They then exchange their vow:

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death,
passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters

cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned. (Song of Solomon, 8:6-7)

In later Jewish and Christian tradition, the passionate love valorized in this love poem, supposedly between King Solomon and his bride, also came to idealize the kind of passion and love that was to characterize the relationship between Yahweh and his people, as well as between Christ and his Church or the individual soul.

In Hebrew marriage theology, the sexual dimension in the marriage relationship is elevated from the physical act to an element strengthening the couple's union not only with each other but also with their creator. The sanctity of marriage has healing and saving effects, especially important in light of the various painful rifts that occur in the *Genesis* story, beginning with and crowned by the *Fall of Adam and Eve*. In the Fall, i.e., the "falling away" from God's original purpose, man is separated from God; woman is separated from man; man and woman are further separated by shame and self-awareness of their fallen condition, and humanity is separated from its original home and primal parental figure, God.

In this view, marriage becomes, in part, the reconciliatory cure for all of these divisions (Sedgwick, 2008). In the Fall, the unity enjoyed by the partners is broken apart by their desire to have what God has: as the serpent says, "You will not die, for God knows that when you eat of [the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3.5). Envious of God, Adam and Eve fall into a state of resentment of God.

Confused and misled, the first couple comes to imagine that God is their rival and as such they desire to possess God's own power. This inordinate desire breaks their communion with the divine partner, who now seems to be alien and wholly other. In that instant, when their fallen state occurred to them, "their eyes were opened, and they knew they were naked" (Gen 3.7). This new self-consciousness makes Adam and Eve ashamed and afraid. They hide themselves from God. God, however, is shown looking for his lost companions in the garden, calling, "Where are you?" When confronted, Adam blames Eve and Eve blames the Serpent. In sum, as Gil Baillie (1995) interprets this scene,

The story is about how we humans fall into an alien and duplicitous relationship with God and one another because of an inability to be in the presence of the other—whether a human other or the divine Other—without succumbing to envy, resentment, guile, and dissembling. (p. 138)

Having been "made for each other" but now separated and alone, and cast out of the Garden, the first humans die. Consequently, as Frank Alvarez-Pereyre and Florence Heymann (1996) explain:

The quality of the reparation which human beings are henceforth compelled to make will depend on the nature of the union between the spouses, which will also determine the quality of the union between the lower and upper worlds, a condition of the bond between the Creator and his creation. (p. 158)

The fundamental importance of marriage can be seen in the Hebrew account of Creation in which the central cause of all that plagues humanity in its fallen state is, at heart, a wounded marriage broken by the spouses' pursuits of deformed desires. Those distorted pursuits tend to pit the otherwise supportive spouses against one another; the restoration of humankind to its

prelapsarian state must therefore involve the reformation of desire. The good marriage is a rejuvenation of the desire for the man and woman to be reconciled with each other and to serve one another in the greater endeavor of serving God.

Marriage becomes the focal point for the “desire to make reparation and so to achieve the reunion of the dispersed elements of creation” (Alvarez-Pereyre, 1996, p. 159). With just a little hyperbole, one could say that the rest of the Hebrew scripture tells the story of a marriage: how “the reunion of the dispersed elements of creation” is both a success and failure, and how the “marriage” between God and God’s people becomes emblematic of that project. This is a marked shift from the preoccupation with the natural cycle found within the Canaanite and Mesopotamian religion to a focus on rightly ordered personal relationships.

Consonant with the pre-modern outlook on the world, the sacred bond of man and woman was upheld and reinforced by Jewish law (adultery laws, sexuality laws in *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, and *Deuteronomy*), and yet these laws did not create a strong place and purpose for women in the public aspects of Jewish society. All women were absent in the temple and synagogue. Women experienced the religious aspects of Hebrew life vicariously, through husbands and male kin. Women were excluded from the reading of the Torah and other activities that would connect her with her covenanted faith. More and more Jewish marriage laws reinforced this separation of the woman from more immediate contact with the sacred—only a husband could demand a divorce and the penalties for adultery were much harsher for the wife than for the husband. The presence of the Divine itself seemed withheld from women, even in little occasions such as prayer at home. Prayers over meals were only mandatory when three or more men were gathered together.

There were also positives, however, for the woman in a Hebrew marriage. There was more than a tacit exaltation of female fecundity in Hebrew culture. It was understood that the woman to a degree shared the capacity and responsibility for realizing ethical and religious values in conformity with the requirements of the Law. There are many depictions of strong female figures in the wives of patriarchs and it is not accidental that there is glorification of the “wise woman” in Pr. 31.10-31.

Moreover, there are Hebraic tales of love in *Genesis* in which it is allowed that certain noble men realized a kind of equality between man and woman, even if there were no obvious social venues in which that equality could be demonstrated. Isaac, for example, feels a love for Rebekah which owes little or nothing to a surge of passion. Isaac's love for Rebekah is derived from his discovery of his wife's good and noble qualities, and from his realization that his wife and mother bear a profound moral resemblance. Isaac and Rebekah's son Jacob worked seven years to earn the right to marry Rachel, “and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her” (Gen.29.20). Isaac's and Jacob's love for their wives may not be the wild-eyed love of two equal “soul mates,” as we will see in other times and places, but it is far removed from the bigamy practiced by generations of humans in other societies in which one wife was good for procreation and another for sexual pleasure. Of course, there were conditions when bigamy was necessary, i.e., as the legalized consequence of sterility. Yet, on the whole, the Hebrew view of marriage promoted, or aimed to promote, monogamy and consistency of concern for one spouse.

Nevertheless, the woman on the whole had a distinctly lesser place in the hierarchy: she showed her obedience to the Law by way of her obedience to her husband. It would take a different time, place, and social horizon for humanity to view a woman as entirely a man's equal,

in terms of or apart from obedience to a transcendent God. No person in the Hebrew world should have been surprised to find themselves in an arranged marriage. The overriding function of marriage was the procreation of children and obedience to God through obedience to the Law. However, marriage as an institution included other social parameters. For example, there was a prohibition of homosexuality in Hebrew culture. Incest and adultery were also forbidden. Also, the law promulgated a prohibition of incest and adultery that leads to inevitable tensions in balancing endogamy and exogamy or marrying within or outside of a specific ethnic group, class, or social group, respectively.

There was a desire, certainly, to promote endogamy, to make marriage as local as possible, so as to maintain purity of the clan or tribe. Yet, in the “leave and cleave” understanding of Hebrew marriage, a certain expansion of relationships beyond the tribe, even by the vehicle of marriage, seemed inevitable. And while the hierarchical relationships established in the account of the Garden of Eden, of God to male, and male to female, would be universal for all of humanity, and would therefore theoretically be transferrable even if marriages became more and more exogamic, that transfer in more complicated societies became more and more difficult.

The more the conditions changed in more and more exogamic marriages, the more a certain disregard for the hierarchy established in the scriptural account of the Garden of Eden seemed inevitable, even if there were many who would cling to the old religion. For example, in the 1st century CE, in *Against Apion*, Flavius Josephus offers reflections on the ancestral norms established in the Mosaic Law and in polemics against the sexual practices of the pagan world, especially those practices that made considerable room for homosexuality, adultery and divorce. Josephus reiterated from the Hebrew tradition and for any tradition that would follow that line,

by birth or choice, that only one legitimate form of union is to be recognized as “second nature” for man and woman, namely the marriage of one man and one woman finalized in the procreation of children. Moreover, according to that tradition, marriage should not be contracted out of greed for the dowry, or with violence or deceit. The male should have, as a culturally guiding principle from a young age, good and healthy motivations for marriage. He should respect the institution of marriage long before entering it, and should strive to acquire and receive a bride in a legitimate manner from the one who holds control over her, the father. In later or non-Hebraic societies, however, some of these terms of marriage simply would not resonate. For example: “The woman—according to what the Law says—is in everything inferior to the man. Therefore she ought to obey, not for her own humiliation but because she can be guided. For God in fact has given the power to the male.” (Josephus, 1961, p. 199).

Ideally, the peculiar power of “dominion” exercised by the husband over the wife in this tradition is to be defined in terms of *arche* (head, guide), not of *hybris* (arrogance), the coercive and violent aspect of taking a wife was muffled, with the emphasis placed on protection of a person, the female, constitutionally recognized as inferior and incapable of managing her own affairs independently.

The Hebrew creation myth remains the metaphor through which marriage is understood and discussed throughout the medieval period, and it has echoes in our modern dialogue, sometimes a central tenet of society’s concept of marriage and sometimes a shibboleth to be consciously dissected and discarded. The break with the Hebrew view of marriage in particular and humanity’s relationship to the divine more specifically will be most striking in the age of “Enlightenment,” wherein the God of revealed religion is no longer recognized as the original law-giver.

Chapter 2: The Greco-Roman Era

Marriage as actually exercised by couples in Greco-Roman times was surely as difficult and as complex as in any other historical time or place, especially in light of the fact that any notion of marriage was quite subordinate to networks of extended families that were under the authority of a central male, or *paterfamilias* (Smith & Anthon, 1843).

We might distill and clarify the nature of Greco-Roman marriage by way of contrast on two fronts. Marriage as understood by the polytheistic Greek and Roman can usefully be contrasted with at least two different predominant views of marriage in that era, that of the Jew guided by revealed Law and love and marriage developed by monotheistic (i.e., non-polytheistic) philosophers like Plato and Aristotle (Jenkins, 1986).

The typical Greco-Roman did not have a long-standing tradition of marriage like the Jews. The Jew had developed a legalistic form of marriage based on the template of the marriage of Adam and Eve, and expanded and enriched by Jewish tradition. By contrast, the polytheistic Greco-Roman had a view of marriage that was based on a notion of Natural Law, mingled with stories and exemplars from their mythology, such as the first couple Zeus and Hera. Still, those bases for marriage were subject to modification and re-interpretation to fit with the strong patriarchal bent and emphasis on the authority of the pater that pervaded Greco-Roman society (Joshel & Murnaghan, 1998). Plato and Aristotle took on the reform of this internally inconsistent, often arbitrary mixture of customs and ideals, a hodge-podge that led to unstable and confusing conceptions of love, marriage, and family.

The complexity of marriage as a lived phenomenon in this context is reflected precisely in the difficulty of defining the term “family” in that era. The idea of marriage was almost marginal, as a “family” was defined primarily by authority, not consanguinity or marriage. In

early Roman law, the father's authority, the *patria potestas*, was absolute, including even the *ius necis*, the right to put to death members of his family (Joshel & Murnaghan, 1998). Even an unmarried male could be a *paterfamilias*. Strictly speaking, a family comprised any and several persons who by nature or by law were placed under the authority of a single person. Those persons could include slaves, the wife and children (natural or adopted), and any clients or retainers with whom the *pater* might engage in regular business transactions. Accordingly, the family could attain a remarkable size and social reach (Rawson, 2011). It is no wonder that the *pater* of such a complex Greek or Roman family could not easily maintain order. The classic Greek story of the family of Pericles in Athens illustrates this complicated and nearly unmanageable social grouping, which was laced with distrust and competition for power leading to the defection of Alcibiades and a violent, brutal war within the family itself.

To give a Roman example, a *pater* exercised considerable authority and yet did so in the absence of clear and binding or revealed law. That authority could be relatively easily usurped. Thus, Caligula in the 1st century CE is said to have imposed a special oath on his soldiers and functionaries in an effort shore up his own security and influence. Those taking the oath swore not to hold themselves and their children dearer than Caligula and his sisters (Rawson, 2011).

Given the size and reach of such Greco-Roman families, when writers refer to the function of love in such families, they almost always do so with a certain air of weary desperation. In such families, it was never clear where genuine affection or obligation began and ended. Cicero alludes to a special *love* that seemed to join parents and their biological children, or at least nephews and nieces, a love relative to blood relationships which would usually not be destroyed except by heinous crime. Yet other members of the "family" might deserve the penalty of death for lesser offenses (Everitt, 2003).

The Philosophical Critique

With Aristotle we find the most influential, if brief, account of the basics of a marriage in the Greco-Roman world. However, I would suggest it is with Plato that we find the most profound account of the perfection of affection that might enliven a marriage relationship, despite the fact that Plato took a somewhat negative view towards marriage as an institution. I recommend that we first re-think the nature of love, or de facto marriage, as it were, as described in Plato's *Phaedrus* (Jowett, 1994; Plato, 2009).

Plato never developed a codification of marriage or gave it any well-defined place in his philosophical system at large or in his elaborate myth of the ideal human society in *The Republic*. Nevertheless, he gave a certain conception of profound human love and affection a central place in his account of the human self or soul (Plato & Reeve, 2006). Centrally, in his view, there are three basic desires, or loves, in each and every human soul: the love of wisdom, which, in the best soul, supersedes the love of honor, which, in the best soul, supersedes the love of money (and, by extension, everything money can buy, from things to social status).

In the exceedingly complicated dialogue, *Phaedrus*, where Plato is dealing with real human beings, with real histories, affections, and problems in living, Plato offers, among many other things, a study of erotic pathology. On Phaedrus' behalf, Socrates tries to make Phaedrus realize that Phaedrus is either unaware of this hierarchy of the loves in the soul and/or that he is confusing one or all of those types of love with one another. The issue at question in *Phaedrus* is not marriage as such. Yet in the dialog, Phaedrus—a bisexual who once married his female cousin, apparently for financial reasons—is now enthralled with his new, socially influential, lover Lysias. Socrates suggests to the infatuated Phaedrus that Lysias does not really love Phaedrus because Lysias does not base his affection for Phaedrus on a love of wisdom but merely on a love of honor, or worse, love of money.

In *Phaedrus*, Plato makes a concerted effort to re-think erotic pathology on two fronts. On the one hand, he seeks to supersede the polytheistic assumptions that made love and marriage in the Greco-Roman world so problematic. On the other hand, he repudiates the reductionist, crudely humanistic demythologizing of the likes of Phaedrus who would reduce affection to the opinions of the smaller world of his closed male-homosexual, *Typhonic* society.

The Greco-Roman view of love and marriage was based in large part on the Zeus-Hera relationship. In *Phaedrus*, Plato sought to rethink the traditional views of Zeus and rehabilitate Zeus as a model for human conduct. As James Hans notes (2006), much of Plato's work is devoted to the rehabilitation of the gods as they are erroneously and harmfully presented in the popular theology of the city.

Once Socrates has straightened out the gods, he has achieved his primary goal. The rest is window dressing, but it is important enough for Socrates to go to some lengths so we can see what follows from his earlier arguments. Most pertinently, if the gods have been simplified and corrected, it follows that humans must likewise adhere to a new standard. They have been created in the gods' image, which was a problem when the gods were evil, protean, and dissolute, but now that the gods are only good and only one thing, humans can brush up their own image. So Socrates sets out to mend us as well. (p. 160)

According to Plato's three-fold psychology (found or assumed in almost all of his dialogues) and according to his rehabilitation of Zeus in *Phaedrus*, the person truly motivated by the love of wisdom, as distinct from the person preoccupied with a mere love of honor or love of money, exercises Socratic/Zeus-inspired love. The Socratic/Zeus-inspired lover treats his beloved "as if he [the beloved] were a god" (Plato, 2009, p. 39). In this state of perfect affection, which anticipates key elements of the later Christian view of affection and marital love, the lover

is willing to sacrifice for the beloved, and to suffer for the beloved, as their love is supposed to be one of mutual service, and therefore mutual suffering.

When a person operates on the premise that the beloved is, in this sense, divine, the bond of affection becomes essentially *reverential*. This Socratic love, rooted in deep respect and reverence, does not demand nor expect a sexual relationship. It is a bond that transcends differences of age or inconveniences of gender. In that sense, Socratic or Zeus-inspired love is the type of love that serves as an ideal for marriage in other ideologies and cultural contexts.

Socrates also identifies a certain type of deformed love, given the name Typhonic. Typhonic love is explicitly anti-Zeus, as Zeus and Typhon were deadly enemies. Typhonic love is not based on the love of wisdom. It is an honor-love based *eros*, and is openly preached by Phaedrus starting with Plato's earlier dialog, *Symposium*. For Phaedrus, in both the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, Typhonic love is a virtual religion, one reserved for male-homosexual lovers only. According to Phaedrus and others in his Typhonic circle, the most famous member of which was Alcibiades, only men have the inclination and energy to compete with one another so as to engender physical, social, and financial excellence, indeed perfection, in other men. Marshall Bradley has coined a phrase that aptly and succinctly captures the nature of Typhonic love as “*Schadenverbesserung eros*” or “shame-improvement” love (Bradley, 2008).

Typhonic love is, for Socrates, not at all proper love, as it is not based in a love of wisdom. In *Schadenverbesserung eros*, the two partners push and compete with one another day by day, hour by hour if need be, in the effort to see that both parties attain, as far as possible, intellectual, financial, physical, and sexual perfection. Typhonic lovers are exceedingly, almost cruelly ambitious, and are so with a nearly religious zeal. Indeed, in his speech in the *Symposium*, Phaedrus argues that male homosexual, competition-based love is the only form of

love worthwhile and should be promoted by the city because of the many benefits it brings to the city (Plato & Reeve, 2006). Typhonic love would infect the city with a competitive strain that moves others in the city to be likewise ambitious. In *Symposium*, Phaedrus bases his Typhonic view of *eros* on ideals represented in Hesiod's *Works and Days*. For example, "A man looks at his neighbor, who is rich: then he too wants work; for the rich man presses on with his ploughing and planting and ordering of his estate. So the neighbour envies the neighbour who presses on toward wealth. Such strife is a good friend to mortals" (Sandywell, 1996, p. 361).

Socrates sees limited virtue in such *Schadenverbesserung* or "shame-improvement" love. The fundamental problem with it is that the Typhonic lover is not willing to suffer the beloved or to suffer for the beloved. The competition-based lover, in fact, is ready to leave his lover behind at any moment the beloved does not meet his test of perfection. While Plato's treatment of Typhonic love in *Phaedrus* does not refer to marriage as found in Greco-Roman culture, or in any culture, I would suggest that it has real value as an interpretive tool for investigating the dynamics of marriage in most any time or place. In our time, for example, the traditional assumption that the marriage vow was given for life, unconditionally, is no longer widely assumed. The Socratic, Zeus-inspired love, love that is based in a love of wisdom, is something of a precursor to the ideal of lifelong Christian marriage that soon will appear on the historical scene. In the modern era, instances of something like Typhonic love now compete with the traditional view of marriage. This fact is perhaps evidenced by the number of divorces that come about because the man leaves his wife who cannot "compete" with a younger, better-looking woman. The rise in forms of Typhonic love in the modern world might also be evidenced in the contemporary turn towards pre-nuptial agreements. Such agreements seem to contain many

clauses that serve to cover instances in which the other party may no longer be able to “cut it,” cannot “live up,” or cannot “compete.”

Aside from noble, Socratic, Zeus-inspired love and problematic Typhonic love, there is a third form of love operative in Plato's *Phaedrus*, namely pederasty. A detailed discussion of pederasty lies outside the purview of this study here, but it ought to be mentioned by way of appreciation of the scope and depth of Plato's examination of erotic pathology in *Phaedrus* and other dialogs.

In pederasty, the older male, the *erastes*, partially “adopts” the *pais*, the boy on the verge of manhood. The *erastes* furnished the *pais* with a stipend, goods, and introduction into social circles in return for which the *pais* supplies the *erastes* with sexual favors. In the circumstances in *Phaedrus*, Phaedrus, the man, was in very complicated circumstances. Phaedrus had returned to Athens from years in exile and was socially isolated and destitute accordingly. Out of desperation, he became the lover of the famous and wealthy Lysias. As Bradley's (2008) analysis of the dialogue shows in detail, part of Phaedrus' erotic pathology that Socrates felt obligated to cure lay with Phaedrus' ignorance of the sad truth of Phaedrus' own situation. Phaedrus thought he was in a Typhonic, competition-based relationship with his lover, Lysias. Yet, Phaedrus, who was likely the same age as Lysias, or maybe even older, was being treated by Lysias as a mere “boy” or *pais* in a pederasty relationship in which all of the shame, in essence, the bulk of the suffering, fell to only one party. It seems that features of Phaedrus' rather sad circumstances and erotic pathology recur in different forms in marriages across the years. In modern times, many marriages appear to have failed or been tortuous to endure because one party in the marriage is forced to suffer far more than the other.

Aristotle is obviously more practically minded than Plato and deigns to discuss marriage as actually practiced or as it should be practiced. In Aristotle's world-view, there is little to nothing like the sweeping sense of family that one generally finds in Roman and Greek society. The Aristotelian husband, to be sure, still very much ruled the roost in the domestic domain. However, the Aristotelian husband shared many of his views of his family with the later Judeo-Christian husband. The Aristotelian husband was to be mainly concerned with the welfare of his spouse, his children, and close relatives, but especially his spouse. Yet, the Aristotelian household did not exist merely for its own sake. The reason for marriage was procreation and the primary function of the family, or the husband, was the education of the young to be good citizens in the larger community (Price, 1990).

The Aristotelian husband was, in a sense, wedded as much to the state as to his wife, and therefore bore a dual responsibility to both private and public domains. A wife, then, could reasonably expect her husband to have a considerable degree of self-mastery and moral virtue. More precisely, as set forth in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, the husband and father were expected to demonstrate a habitual mastery of his own passions or emotions in service of larger goods (Aristotle, Ross, Ackrill, & Urmson, 1998). The Aristotelian marriage counselor, were there such a thing, might run down a list of virtues for the wife to consider in helping her determine if her present or future husband had a predominance of such habits.

In Aristotle's *Economics* we see the first general rules that are to govern the household, and the first relationship in the household, that of husband and wife, which is pivotal: We begin then with the rules that should govern a man's treatment of his wife. And the first of these forbids him to do her wrong; for if he observes this, he is not likely himself to suffer wrong at her hands. As the Pythagoreans declare, even the common rule or

custom of mankind thus ordains, forbidding all wrong to a wife as stringently as though she were a suppliant whom one has raised from the hearthstone. And a man does wrong to his wife when he associates with other women. (Aristotle, 1935, p. 333)

According to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, even though there were few places to which she might make appeal, she might reasonably expect the husband to be moderate in most or all things. While Aristotle championed the traditional virtue of moderation (famously a mean between a number of pairs of extremes), his *Ethics* gave the traditional account more definition and substance. For Aristotle, moderation was a case of mastering one's proclivity for sensuous pleasures habitually. The wife, or potential wife, should have been wary lest the husband become profligate, too prone to give sway to sensuous pleasures, or become insensible, too negative regarding sensuous pleasures. The profligate man would likely place himself in too many circumstances in which he might be viewed as base in character. The woman should be on guard also for a husband who might tend toward the flaw of being insensible. The insensible man would be insufficiently ambitious and overly timid. Accordingly the wife should not forget that the domain in which the man needs to make a living in the public arena is often times a rough and tumble world: so "wives should neither importune their husbands, nor be restless in their absence" (Aristotle, p. 335).

Aristotle's view, like the later Christian view of marriage, does not deem man and woman "equal" in the modern sense of the world. Yet, according to Aristotle, marriage is a relation between equally important partners who are indispensable to life on the home front:

Divine Providence has fashioned the nature of man and of woman for their partnership.

For they are distinguished from each other by the possession of faculties not adapted in

every case to the same tasks, but in some cases for opposite ones, though contributing to the same end. (1935, p. 333)

Aristotle states the equal importance of the husband and wife for the sake of the family another way. In a rather remarkable claim relative to other ways women were regarded in the ancient world, Aristotle recognizes a kind of friendship between husband and wife, even if theirs' is not a friendship of true equality in our sense.

The friendship between parents and children is not the same as that between ruler and ruled, nor indeed is the friendship of father for son the same as that of son for father, nor that of husband for wife as that of wife for husband; for each of these persons has a different excellence and function, and also different motives for their regard, and so the affection and friendship they feel are different. (Davies, 1970, p. 90)

For Aristotle, there are three types of friendship: friendships of pleasure; friendships of virtue; and friendships of utility (Price, 1990). Friendships of pleasure are mostly for the young and rather irresponsible. As interests change quickly in and among young persons, it is no wonder that friendships of pleasure are almost as short-lived as the interests that bring such friends together in the first place. Relative to the institution of marriage, husband and wife should not delude themselves into thinking marriage is mainly a friendship of pleasure or will forever be one.

In Aristotle's view, marriage is a unique combination of friendship of virtue and friendship of utility. Of course, the husband and wife would be expected to obtain excellence in different virtues because they had different roles. And, of course, the tedious tasks of marriage are ever to be kept in mind. The husband and wife are to realize that, in a sense, their ultimate friendship is just as much a friendship of utility as it is of virtue, partly because they have the

same job as friends of utility, namely that of parenting. The purpose of marriage for Aristotle very much resembles the later Christian ideal, that is, to procreate and to generate noble and educated children for the good of the state or larger society.

On the strictly domestic front, however, the woman is quite a powerful person, even if a person with exceptional responsibilities:

A good wife should be the mistress of her home, having under her care all that is within it, according to the rules we have laid down. She should allow none to enter without her husband's knowledge, dreading above all things the gossip of gadding women, which tends to poison the soul. She alone should have knowledge of what happens within, whilst if any harm is wrought by those from without, her husband will bear the blame. She must exercise control of the money spent on such festivities as her husband has approved, keeping, moreover, within the limit set by law upon expenditure, dress, and ornament; and remembering that beauty depends not on costliness of raiment, nor does abundance of gold so conduce to the praise of a woman as self-control in all that she does, and her inclination towards an honorable and well-ordered life. (Nystrom, 2005, p. 129)

The domain of the woman in the Aristotelian view of marriage is by contemporary standards distinctly limited. She is not expected to be rankly servile. Still, she is not to regard herself as occupying a position of power from which she can regard and judge her husband as an equal. Thus,

If, through sickness or fault of judgment, his good fortune fails, then must she show her quality, encouraging him ever with words of cheer and yielding him obedience in all fitting ways; only let her do nothing base or unworthy of herself, or remember any wrong

her husband may have done her through distress of mind. Let her refrain from all complaint, nor charge him with the wrong, but rather attribute everything of this kind to sickness or ignorance or accidental errors. (Aristotle, 1935, p. 3.1)

Both Plato and Aristotle have considerable disregard for popular polytheism as a model for the good life at large or marriage in particular. When Plato rehabilitates the reputation of Zeus in *Phaedrus*, it is not because he takes the Olympian gods seriously but because he knew his audience, to some extent, would regard them as models for their behavior and the right sort of life. Aristotle recommends husband and wife find models to imitate—not gods but heroes and heroines.

Let her bethink herself how Alcestis would never have attained such renown nor Penelope have deserved all the high praises bestowed on her had not their husbands known adversity; whereas the troubles of Admetus and Ulysses have obtained for their wives a reputation that shall never die. For because in time of distress they proved themselves faithful and dutiful to their husbands, the gods have bestowed on them the honor they deserved. To find partners in prosperity is easy enough; but only the best women are ready to share in adversity. (Aristotle, 1935, p. 3.1)

While Aristotle, the pagan, may not have been preoccupied with suffering in the manner of a Jew or Christian, for whom suffering is integral to their faith, in his advice to wives, Aristotle reminds them that one of their basic virtues is the ability to endure hardship. Even during difficult times, the wife was not to complain. She had to remain subservient and encouraging in down times, even as she was to be resplendent and appreciative in the best of times. When the husband lost face or fortune due to bad judgment, the wife was not to complain. Moreover, she should not attribute such failures in her husband to a basic flaw of character but

rather to misfortune or an understandable ignorance in light of the complexity of human affairs in the public arena. Aristotle had keen powers of observation. His philosophy regarding marriage was prescriptive to a degree, but surely described many of the marriages in his social universe. With him, there begins the long history of the partial silence of women in a world that nevertheless accords high value to the institution of marriage and women's role within it.

To be sure, the hierarchical ordering of all relationships in traditional cultures, embedded as they were in the "Great Chain of Being," set the parameters and conditions for pre-modern marital interactions.

Only a careful analysis of the different socio-political, economic, juridical, literary and religious ambits could bring about the emergence in their complex articulation of the web of relations among the two spheres of the male and female, whose variously graduated complementarities remain the ineluctable constant, even though frequently kept silent about or relegated to the margins of historical discourse, of the values of every human society. (Gasparro, Magazza, Spada, & Halton, 1999, p. 37)

The silence that the post-modern person "hears" in the cultural life of the ancient world certainly makes sense in light of the fact that so many women simply served their households in diligent suffering. Yet surely many such women would be offended to hear us moderns or post-moderns deem their roles merely "marginal." A margin is defined in relation to an understood center and while the public life in Aristotle's world is principally "where the action is," it is plain from Aristotle's *Economics* that he had the highest regard for the activities of the domestic sphere, and acknowledges that the woman is really the ruler of that domain.

There were, indeed, some philosophers, and their minions, who willingly chose to live on the margins of Greco-Roman society. For example, the philosophy of the Epicureans celebrated

a marginal way of life implemented by moving to an Epicurean “garden,” a kind of planned community outside the walls of cities. It has been widely assumed that Epicureans, unlike Platonists or Aristotelians, saw men and women as complete equals (Sharples, 1996). However, we hear nothing in the Epicurean literature about wives or their roles in society because, as we know, marriage was not allowed in the Epicurean garden. Indeed, it appears that sexual relations themselves were typically forbidden. Epicureans were recruited, not bred. Rather paradoxically to our ear, the Epicureans advocate a lifestyle that begins and ends in pleasure, yet proscribes sexual relations. This may reflect the fact that they sought to cultivate only those pleasures that have little or no pain attached. Still, it may be no wonder that their recommended mode of coping with the perplexities of marriage has few successors.

Stoicism, a prominent school of philosophy in the Greco-Roman world, has exerted a profound and lasting influence in subsequent history (Sharples, 1996). Cicero, one of the most notable Stoics, still widely read and appreciated today, was quite suspicious of the Epicureans because of their indifference to and disdain for so much of that which makes up natural inclination, beginning with the desire to reproduce the species itself. In Stoicism, a high value was attributed to matrimony as an indelibly “natural” institution whose end is to guarantee the succession of the human race. Matrimony was considered crucial for a harmonious life in both the city and the wider cosmos because marriage, at least in principle, imposed limits within which the Stoic was expected to operate in virtually all phases of existence. Also therewith, in Stoicism there was an insistence on an aptitude to virtue common to both sexes, based on equally important, albeit different and complementary natural faculties, very much as in Aristotle's *Economics*.

In the 3rd century BCE, the Stoics referred to the perfect natural parity between the sexes (Colish, 1985). Musonius, in harmony with Stoic principles, praised matrimony relative to its specifically sexual dimension, as matrimony is supreme in the ability to demarcate certain spheres of pleasure:

Men who are not wantons or immoral are bound to consider sexual intercourse justified only when it occurs in marriage and is indulged in for the purpose of begetting children, since that is lawful, but unjust and unlawful when it is mere pleasure-seeking, even in marriage. (Dillon, 2004, p. 22)

An even more famous promoter of the virtue of marriage is the Platonist, Plutarch of Chaeroneia, who proclaimed the principle of equality of disposition to virtue in the two sexes and dedicated a work to demonstrate this proposition by means of a gallery of portraits of women who in the Greek, Roman, and barbarian worlds exemplify the capacity of the female to realize a high ethical ideal. In Plutarch's *On Love* (modeled on Plato's *Symposium*) one can find a kind of extension of love, as praised in *Phaedrus*, to the heterosexual arena, where Plutarch exalts the love of the married couple over and against the otherwise commonly celebrated practices of pederasty and Typhonic love (Hadas, 1957).

Early Christian Marriage

The most influential account of marriage to emerge from the Greco-Roman world, however, was the *christianioi*, or Christian. Initially, Christianity, as a sect within Judaism, was a Jewish-Christian mission to the *gentiles*, namely, to those tribes and Greco-Roman nation-states outside of Jewish Palestine. The mission spread quickly across the Hellenized Roman Empire. It morphed into diverse groupings of peoples that came to include Jews, Greeks, Romans, wealthy landowners, slaves, men, women, and children. It was a loosely unified *koinonia* or community

that saw itself constituting an altogether new quality of “family” as unified in Christ, or “the anointed one,” who was understood as both their brother and *Lord* (Campbell, 2003).

Christians believed that the God of the Hebrews, the creator of heaven and earth, had adopted them to become, with the Christ, beloved children of the “Heavenly Father.” Through the *Anastasis Nekron*, or the “resurrection from the dead,” Christians also believed that Jesus continued to live among and between them, precisely by God’s *Spirit*. As Jesus was said to have embodied God’s *love* on earth, the Christians were to embody Jesus’ love through their love for one another. The Jewish and Greco-Roman families that had become Christians thus began to reimagine what it meant to love one another as brothers and sisters, parents, husbands and wives in what they understood to be a *heavenly* family that nonetheless lived its life on earth (Sampley, 2003).

Against the backdrop of the hierarchical social order that characterized both Jewish and Greco-Roman society, early Christianity emerged in part as a counter-cultural movement. The Christians’ allegiance to Jesus as *Lord* relativized the authority and status of family and kin in a culture that presumed family and kin as central to the welfare of the society as a whole. When we recall that the paterfamilias of Greco-Roman society held virtually absolute authority over his subordinated women, children, and slaves of the *domus* or household, (even if there are indications that such absolute rule of the household was waning by the first century), we can better appreciate the degree to which the earliest Christians appeared as disloyal and insubordinate citizens of the empire. For those who endorsed a system predicated on a carefully ordered caste of almost unrestrained patriarchal power, the fact that Christians across the Roman Empire now gave their allegiance to *another* order—above and beyond the Empire—meant that,

strictly speaking, Christians could no longer be controlled by the mythos and apparatus of the *powers-that-be*.

The New Testament records Jesus announcing that the Family of God would inevitably undermine the all-important kinship and/or family ties that provided 1st century society with its most basic framework for establishing both religious and cultural security and identity. As Jesus said, “From now on five in one household will be divided...father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law” (Luke 12.52-53 NIV). However one interprets such passages, the New Testament view of family cannot be said to endorse without question the predominant models of 1st century family relations in either Jewish or Greco-Roman cultures. Jesus himself defines his kin, not in terms of blood relations or the *paterfamilias*, but as those who “[do] the will of God.”

And a multitude was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Behold, your mother and your brothers are outside looking for you.” And answering them, he said, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking about on those who were sitting around him, he said, “Behold, my mother and my brothers! “For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 3.31-35, NASB)

In such passages, he radically disrupts the usual chain of command within the Greco-Roman family structure and reorients family loyalties, as indicated by his saying from Luke 14.26, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sister, yes, even life itself, cannot be my disciple.”

The transvaluation of family relations had implications for common marriage practices. For instance, in the encounter between Jesus and his adversaries in Matthew 19-20, Jesus

undermines the usual practice that gave men the virtually unrestricted prerogative to divorce their wives. He directs their attention away from appeals to casuistic legal arguments that sought to justify divorce to what he seems to take as the basis for marriage in the first place:

At the beginning of creation, God made male and female. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together let no one separate. (Matthew 19.4-6 NIV)

Tellingly, Jesus's own disciples, conditioned as they are by Jewish and Greco-Roman moral codes regarding relations between men and women, are scandalized by the implication that men and women might be constitutionally, mutually, and irrevocably united; they protest, "If this is the situation between husband and wife, it is better not to marry" (v. 10).

Jesus's statement derives from the description of the original marriage in Genesis that imaged God in creation: "So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1.27 NRSV). Jesus challenges marriage practices of 1st century Judaism as having missed the originative intent: in his view, rather than reflecting something of the unity and nature of God, and the responsive covenant love intended between God and God's people, they merely reflected the divisions and oppressions of the culture-at-large.

According to the Biblical narrative, the original marriage had fallen into disunion through a kind of envy (Gen. 3): Adam and Eve broke trust with God and one another and turned against each other as a result of their deformed desire to take hold of God's power for themselves. Presumably, the restoration of that "fallen nature," and the reconciliation of the man and the

woman, would require the transformation of their desire to possess what the other possessed (Sedgwick, 2008).

Their reconciliation would require a whole new way of thinking, feeling, and acting (VonRad, 1973). It had to come from the bottom up, not from the top down. In Matthew 20.17-28, the ambitious mother of two of Jesus's disciples asks Jesus to give her sons a special place of honor in Jesus' Kingdom. She wants to guarantee her sons' success in a world that honored lords and masters, yet shamed servants and slaves. When the other disciples learn of her request for special favor, envy and rivalry breaks out. Jesus gathers them and says,

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Matt.25.20-28 NIV)

Serving others was to be the antidote for the rivalry and oppression that their desire to lord it over each other had engendered.

Slaves looking at things from the bottom of the socio-cultural ladder obviously see things and people very differently from the way an Emperor views them from his position at the very top. As theologian Sherman Beattie (2011) points out, "That difference in point of view affects a person's very ability to see, which means that just possibly the slave perceives much that his master misses. . . .The slave knows the master, not the master the slave" (4.32) Jesus's identification of his vocation with the slave reveals something of his strategy and approach to bringing relationships of trust and communion into being. Beattie (2011) continues:

The sheer presence of force implies coercion. That's why a position of power, prestige and authority tends to get in the way of who-to-who relationships. It interrupts confident communication to say nothing of trustful communion because it allows no freedom.

Everyone must attend to the Master's voice, which usually puts persons on their guard.

(4.35)

It is difficult for those in positions of great power to treat others as more than a means for procuring their own desires. While a master may gain compliance from his or her subjects by force, he or she cannot force their friendship. Only when the master lays aside his panoply of powers and approaches the subject from the bottom up as a vulnerable servant will the subject feel secure enough to lower his or her defenses and choose to let the master into his personal thinking and feeling processes and so become a trusting friend and partner.

In a vivid illustration, Jesus scandalizes his students by washing their feet on the evening before his death, something only a slave would do. After he had finished and returned to his place, he explores the meaning of his actions. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked. "You call me 'Master' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Then if I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:12-14 NRSV).

In his actions with each he had totally reversed his position in regard to them. Moving from his place on high from whence he would tell them where and how they should serve him, he had taken a lowly position at their feet, from which he sought to find out how he could serve them. He was contemplating them so he could know and help them. And that was how they should be with and for one another. (Beattie, 2011, 4.36)

This way of thinking made its way into early Christian teachings about how husbands and wives were to relate to one another in marriage. The widespread Greco-Roman household code derived from Aristotle was adapted by Christians to reflect this approach. As discussed in Chapter 2, Aristotle sought to structure the household in such a way that the respective virtues and excellences of each member contributed to the honor and glory of the greater good in the wider social order; accordingly, the code prescribed various roles and functions that were to be enacted within the household. It was taken for granted that the husband was the master to whom the wife must submit. Thus, when the Pauline author in Ephesians 5.21-6.9 tells husbands and wives, “Submit to *one another* out of reverence for Christ,” many would have been shocked.

The idea of mutual submission, or that a man should ever submit to a woman, went against the grain of the prevailing order, and yet there it is, provocatively stated. While the next sentence appears to reaffirm the subordination of women in accordance with the classical code, the subordination is now transformed into a heroic Christian ideal of sacrifice,

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. (Eph.5:22-24 NIV)

In its context, this reinterprets the natural order of things not in terms of a hierarchy of power, but of humility and love, as Paul immediately adds, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy. . . .In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself” (5:25).

In the early Christian view, as envisioned in such New Testament texts, marriage between husband and wife was to be effected, precisely, through the mutual submission of one to

another to mimic and incorporate Jesus' sacrificial love. A distinctive feature of this view is how it transforms the notion of master-servant relations in marriage into the kind of loving companionship believed to characterize not only Jesus's relationship to his beloved, but also the mutual indwelling of Father and Son as depicted in the Gospel of John. In this vein, the following words of Jesus to his followers could just as easily be spoken to partners in marriage, as marriage represented the relationship between Jesus and his Church and, more generally, between God and God's people:

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends....I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. (John 15:12-15 NRSV)

This passionate love language conjures up the uninhibited love poetry of the Song of Solomon in the Hebrew scriptures; there, husband and wife lay down everything for one another and consummate their love in joyful ecstasy. As Jesus puts it, "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be overflowing" (John 15:11 NRSV).

The Greek word *perichoresis*, translated "inter-penetration," refers in early Christian literature to the mutual indwelling between Persons of the Godhead, also known as the *Trinity*. The intensely personal nature of this concept is vividly expressed in John 17:21-23 in Jesus's prayer for his friends just prior to his arrest and state execution:

As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us....The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one.

This idea and expression of unitive and abiding love or mutual indwelling becomes part of the DNA of the Christian theology of relationship, and it has carried over into meanings of marriage ever since. We might say that at the heart of the theological formulation of Trinity is the notion that different persons are “married” into unity yet without merging or erasing their essential differences.

The implications of this for understanding the intrinsic nature of Christian marriage is significant. Ever since the Bible described marriage as “two become one flesh,” there have been countless efforts to make sense of it theoretically, socially, and politically. On one end, the “one flesh doctrine” has meant the mystical union of souls in some deep spiritual sense; on the other end, it has been construed in terms of *coverture*, i.e., the legal doctrine that subsumes all legal rights of the wife under her husband’s. The very idea of marriage raises the ageless philosophical question of the “One and the Many”—i.e., how can different individuals live together in society without merging into the One or fragmenting into the Many?

Early Christian theologians thought they had an answer to this question, even if, ultimately, it remained a mystery. In trying to interpret their belief that the creator of the universe had become one of them in order to join them to God’s self, they had to wrestle with whether God was one, or two, or three; they also had to make sense of how God could be substantially present in Jesus the human being. In the course of these very tendentious and nuanced debates, they developed sophisticated and profound understandings of how the One relates to the Many, and vice versa, and how the Many relate amongst themselves. A majority of these Christian thinkers, bishops, and monks believed that their life on earth, their social interactions and relationship to others, was a microcosm and even extension of the divine life in heaven. God’s

nature was to be enacted in their natures and relationships. Therefore, they agonized over trying to understand God's nature within God's self and with God's people.

It was not until the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in CE 451 that the Church gave its official consensus about how the different natures that were thought to be unified within the person of Christ—divine and human—could exist “without confusion, without change, without separation” (Kelly, 1978). The consubstantiality of these natures was defined as an interdependent relationship. The human and divine natures of Christ coexist in one and the same person, not in two individuals, and this person is also consubstantial with God the Father. It is a perfect unity which does not destroy but affirms otherness (Zizioulas & McPartlan, 2007). The different natures interpenetrate and co-constitute one another. As Orthodox theologian Kallistos Ware (1979) elaborates:

There is in God something analogous to ‘society’ in the sense that ‘He is not a single person, loving himself alone, not a self-contained monad or ‘The One.’ God is rather a ‘triunity: three equal persons, each one dwelling in the other two by virtue of an unceasing movement of mutual love, and the final end of the spiritual Way is that we humans should become a part of this Trinitarian coinherence or *perichoresis*, being wholly taken up into the circle of love that exists within God. (pp. 33-34)

When the marriage relationship is conceived as a “society” of persons, and the unity of the partners is seen to be constituted by their unmerged different “natures,” then the way in which two become one flesh can be construed along the lines of these classical Trinitarian and Christological doctrines.

The Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) was fascinated by early Christian views regarding the nature of Christ, God, and the Church for how they sought to

articulate the relationship between unity and difference. Inspired partly by the Chalcedonian doctrine, he comes to his own understanding of how this dynamic process operates in secular communities through dialogical interaction. One of his interpreters elaborates this in a way analogous to marital interaction:

[Bakhtin] emphasizes the interactive yet separate mutual relations of community, stressing that community is characterized as much by the constitutive diversity of its disparate participants as it is by its impulse toward human connection and self-definition. In a brilliant rhetorical twist, Bakhtin transfers the Chalcedonian ideal of the unmerged yet separate human and divine natures of Christ to the exclusive and secular realm of the human sphere, foregrounding the idea of community as a forever divided union.

(Mihailovic, 1997, p. 148)

Marriage as a “forever divided union” is surely one way to put it. Bakhtin’s ideas will be explored in more detail in Chapter 9, but for now it is worth noting how he offers a contemporary approach for better understanding the mystery of marital difference-in-union as first conceived in early Christian thought.

This sketch of how early Christians viewed marriage amidst Greco-Roman society may be enriched by looking at how Paul regarded marriage in his first letter to the church at Corinth around CE 55. In the 7th chapter of that letter, Paul communicates his personal preference for celibacy, and yet he affirms marriage as a relative good over and against certain spiritualizing “purists” who think it “unspiritual.” His focus, to be sure, is upon the apocalyptic event of Jesus’s incarnation, which has turned all of his values upside-down; his reflection upon marriage should be seen in this larger context. That is, for Paul, the earthly marriage between husband and wife, while good in and of itself, only paled in comparison to the urgency of partnering together

as a member of the larger community “in Christ.” For Paul, anyone living in Christ was a “new creation,” reconciled with God and one another. The Spirit of God had been poured out upon these persons, giving them a “foretaste” of the heavenly Kingdom. By the Spirit, they shared something of the love, faith, and hope of God’s Kingdom on earth.

Having said that, what Paul says in this letter about being in communion with “brothers and sisters in Christ” (1 Cor. 1.10) may also be said, by extension, about being in communion with one’s spouse (Sedgwick, 2008). In this sense, husband and wife belong to one another most essentially. Their marriage constitutes them as “one flesh.” Literal sexual penetration reflects the kind of intercourse that makes both of them organically and spiritually connected. It represents the fact that, as one flesh, each is constituted most essentially by the other. Being married thus gives individuals the gift of a new identity that becomes real only in relationship with the other (1 Cor.6.16-20).

Furthermore, husbands and wives are to recognize the Spirit of Christ in each other, for they share the same Spirit (1 Cor.3.21-23). They are to act towards the other as they would act towards themselves—for they belong one to another. This means they are never to treat each other indecently or immorally (1 Cor.10.23). Their actions towards one another should communicate *hospitality* (1 Cor.12). Hospitality most literally means the “love for a stranger” and in a marriage between two different humans it is enacted by being ready for surprise and interruption and most critically requires *vulnerability*.

Finally, when they work as a team, they are given what they need when they need it. They are to honor the other as if they were honoring God, and they are to experience God's love as given by and for one another. They are to do nothing that might shame the other. They are to care for one another: this will be evident in how they are patient with one another's weaknesses.

When they honor one another as belonging to God, when they recognize each other as brother and sister, when they share the same body, then they are patient and kind towards one another. They do everything they can to build up the other. They put the other first. They wait for the other. They grow into their full stature and maturity when the two spouses begin to act as one for the common good, for God's sake (1 Cor. 13).

Chapter 3: The Construction of Marriage in the Middle Ages

The story of marriage in Western civilization from the fall of Rome and end of the classical age to the Reformation of the Church in Europe reflects the growing power of the church and resultant rise of the Papacy, the ordering of religious and family life throughout the Middle Ages, and yet also the rise of forms of resistance against an over-reaching religious and political system. During this period, marriage took on four distinctive aspects that gave shape to its social, political, and religious goods: it was sanctioned by the church as a religious sacrament; it was legitimated by the state as a social estate subject to local laws and customs; it was made a voluntary association by the consent of persons contracting to be married; and it was deemed a natural part of the created order, rooted in the laws of nature and the Bible. The hierarchically ordered authority of medieval church and state held these goods together by canon law. The Reformation, and the subsequent revolutions that were arguably inspired in part by the Reformation, would have much to say about the dubious weight of canon law and the role of the church.

New Foundations: Christianizing the Ancient World

By the fall of Rome in 410 CE, the Church was uniquely situated to take over as the principal civilizing force for a fractured Roman empire that was being overrun by successive waves of Germanic invaders. The civilizing force came not just from the church as institution but from the intellectual climate the church brought with it. Indeed, the most sweeping classical criticism of the foibles of polytheism and the inability of paganism to generate lasting and profound institutions can be found in early Christian literature, most famously in Augustine's *The City of God*. Much early Christian literature sought to lay new foundations for an exceedingly Christianized civilization, including new commentaries on family mores and ideals that sought to

secure and stabilize family values and practices in an uncertain time (Brown, 2000; Milavec, 2003; Osborn, 1976).

In the late Ancient and early Medieval world, the head of a personal family in some areas and circles of the Greco-Roman world might rule a family so broadly defined and so arbitrarily governed that he was entitled, if so inclined, to take the life of almost anyone he chose within his family's reach. While this authority and practice steadily declined in late antiquity, no other clearly defined structures took its place. With such arbitrary rule spread out over so many places or provinces, the society at large suffered from instability, as it would never be entirely clear to kin, servants, or clients where loyalties began and ended, how long they were expected to last and on what norms and authorities they were based. This situation reflects the general breakdown of law and custom in the age.

The institutionalization of Christianity would serve to bring some kind of order to such chaos. Over time, the church would supersede the family, in part, because it was in the church's DNA to establish and sustain a social matrix beyond the authority of the whims of the *pater*, a matrix not beholden to the pathological inclinations and indiscretions of his subjects or anyone else. It was to be based on Christ's command to love one's fellows.

The emerging church gave order to a hierarchy of goods in the waning days of the Roman Empire that was determined in no small measure by a neo-Platonic worldview that denigrated the material world and viewed human sexuality as little more than a necessary evil. Love and affection needed to be strenuously and rightly ordered. To illustrate, Christian theologian Origen of Alexandria (CE 185-254), writing in the early 3rd century, argued that love was not to be evenly or randomly distributed. The highest order of love was due first to God, then one's parents, children, "domestics" (staff, servants, live-in relatives, etc.), and then, in lesser degree,

to one's neighbors (Trigg, 1998). It is of note that spouses were not specifically mentioned in Origen's list. The spouse, as in the *Economics* of Aristotle in part, would presumably hold the position of first among domestics.

The church's demand for unconditional, practical love of God and neighbor took precedence over ordinary familial affection and love, and what was considered pathological love would inevitably lend a certain suspicion on those forms of love exercised in the private relations legitimized by the church, namely in marriage itself. Celibacy became regarded as a spiritual virtue and was the chosen way of life for those seeking the higher goods of God's heavenly Kingdom. While the great ecumenical councils of the early church (spanning from CE 325 to the middle of the 5th century) affirmed both the divinity and the human embodiment of the Son of God as Jesus of Nazareth, thereby affirming the natural goodness of the material world, they too were nonetheless influenced by the neo-Platonic dualism of the day. This, in part, made it easier for the church to urge its members, especially clergy, to avoid marriage altogether and to keep away from the practice of concubinage (Witte, 1997, p. 19).

Marriage, then, was treated as the least virtuous form of Christian living and sexual intercourse was strictly forbidden except for the purpose of procreation. As one of the early Greek Church Fathers John Chrysostom (CE 349-407) wrote, "Marriage was created by God to make us chaste, and to make us parents. Of these two, the reason of chastity takes precedence. When desire began, then marriage also began. It sets a limit to desire by teaching us to keep one wife" (Chrysostom, Roth, & Anderson, 1986, p. 85).

Supernatural Marriage

The great Latin Church Father, Augustine of Hippo (CE 354-430), laid the foundation for a model for marriage that would predominate through the Middle Ages. In his articulation *On the*

Good of Marriage, Augustine sought to outline what marriage was for, and he integrated the spiritual, social, contractual, and natural goods that eventually made it into a powerful medieval institution under the control of the church. Although Augustine himself believed in the superiority of virginity, he also wanted to ensure that the church would not be easily tempted to dismiss marriage as evil. Augustine said, “Marriage is the ordained means of procreation, the guarantee of chastity, and the bond of permanent union” (Witte, 2006, p. 332; Brown, 2000). Interestingly, *love* is not considered one of its goods, even if he speaks of fidelity. Legal scholar John Witte (1997) claims that Augustine’s theological views had a formative impact on how marriage came to be institutionalized:

As a created and natural means of procreation, Christian marriage rendered sexual intercourse licit, and by nurturing and educating children helped to perpetuate the human species and expand the church. As a contract of fidelity, marriage gave husband and wife an equal power over the other’s body, an equal right to demand that the other spouse avoid adultery. (Witte, p. 21-22)

Augustine’s formulation of marriage, along with other Biblical and Patristic principles, would be expanded and consolidated into a full-blown system of sacramental theory and canon law by the time of the High Middle Ages in the twelfth century. The most notable scholastics of this period, like Hugh of St. Victor, Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas, had catalogued and detailed all extant knowledge regarding marriage and family into impressive theological systems of thought. Witte (1997) offers this succinct inventory of their work:

Viewed collectively, these new theological and legal sources taught three broad perspectives on marriage. Marriage was conceived at once (1) as a created, natural association, subject to the laws of nature; (2) as a consensual contract, subject to the

general laws of contract; and (3) as a sacrament of faith, subject to the spiritual laws of the church. These three perspectives were designed to be complementary, each emphasizing one aspect of marriage: its natural origin, its legal form, and its spiritual significance respectively. It was the sacramental quality of marriage, however, that provided the theological and legal integration of these three perspectives into a systematic model of marriage. (p. 23)

In accord with the general premodern outlook, the primary lens for viewing marriage, sexuality, and reproduction was *teleological*. Medieval writers who inherited the ancient traditions of medicine and the natural philosophies from which they were derived, including the writings of Galen and Aristotle, imagined that the natural order was structured purposefully and that nothing happened by chance. Everything in nature had its own end, or *telos*, which in turn determined its nature.

Thus sexuality was tied to reproduction, and the social and religious norms surrounding marriage and family were constructed to be congruent with this purpose, which, in its own turn, was to serve the higher good (Cadden, 1995). Likewise, male and female sexuality was understood and expressed in terms of the gender differences that accorded with nature. For example, the source of maleness was found in the genitals, specifically semen, which then correlated with the degree of masculinity in the male. Too much sexual activity for the man meant less virility, less rational thought, and less strength. Female sexuality was the opposite. It was thought that the woman's nature predisposed her to receive sexual pleasure, something which also made her at times somewhat "dangerous" to men. Also, sexual activity was not thought to be as damaging for women, who were by nature "always ready" for intercourse and whose primary function was reproductive. At any rate, as part of the natural sphere, marriage

posed a risk for men who sought to live truly virtuous lives of contemplation in fullest accord with the supernatural sphere of grace (McInerny, 2004). These broad assumptions, tied to natural sexual functions, prompted many medieval thinkers to thus divide the world by gender.

If men served the state by bringing their masculine gifts to its service, women served by bringing their reproductive capacities. . . .It is perhaps not surprising that one of the most influential contributions of the ancient world to medieval views of female sexuality had to do with the production (or lack) of female seed. (Salisbury, 2000, p. 84)

Each element of reproduction and desire served an instrumental role in the neat order of creation:

Sexual distinctions, dispositions, and behaviors were thus an aspect of the natural order with links to the larger scheme by which species were perpetuated and with implications for individual females and males whose bodily parts suited them for and whose appetites guided them toward sexual acts in the service of reproduction. (Cadden, 56)

In about 1140, the *Decretum* of Gratian provided canon lawyers with a comprehensive legal textbook that would become the basis for teaching canon law in the universities up until about the time of the Reformation (Gratian, Thompson, Gordley, & Christensen, 1993). It was difficult not to draw from this text the conclusion that sexual activity was so fraught with complications, conditions, and restrictions that it was probably in one's best interest to avoid it altogether. Incest, sodomy, bigamy, and all sorts of "vices against nature" were vigorously proscribed.

By the time of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, the natural act of marriage had been lifted to spiritual significance and had become one of the church's seven sacraments. Shortly thereafter, Thomas Aquinas, whose *Summa Theologica* had synthesized theological notions of grace and Aristotelian ideas of nature into a unified system of thought, devoted hundreds of

pages in consideration of the institution of marriage both as an “office of nature” and as a “sacrament of the church” (Province, 1922, pp. 76-372). Concerned with explaining how a marriage was made, he explicates in great detail the theological meanings behind the canon law pertaining to marriage, including its definition, its goods, its sacramental quality, the conditions for betrothal and consent, the impediments to marriage, and divorce.

As an office of nature, marriage is directed by two goods. The first good consists of matrimony’s primary intention and end, which is the *offspring* borne of the couple’s union. Aquinas calls marriage *matrimony* (from *mater*, or mother) in reference to this good, “because a woman’s sole purpose in marrying should be motherhood” (Province, 1922, p. 109). The second natural good is faith, which consists in the promise of monogamous fidelity. It also involves the promise that the husband and wife make to “pay the marriage debt” owed to each other, namely the unity of “one flesh” brought about by intercourse.

Marriage’s third and most excellent goodness, however, is its sacramental aspect, because whereas offspring and faith pertain to matrimony as directed to an office of human nature, sacrament pertains to it as instituted by God. As a sacrament of the Catholic Church, marriage became the visible and outward sign of the invisible and spiritual grace and union between Christ and his church. Thus, the bond of marriage, like the union of Christ and the church, was deemed utterly *indissoluble* and binding. The husband and wife were to reflect the personal communion and joyful love that existed between Christ, the bridegroom, and his church, the bride. The wife was to honor and obey the husband, just as the church was to honor and obey Christ. The sacrament of marriage, moreover, was deemed valid and effective only when the couple freely consented to be married strictly according to the purposes for which according to the church and common custom marriage existed. Any marriage that was forced or arranged by parents without

the consensual agreement of the couple, or that was entered into apart from its intended purposes, was declared invalid. Aquinas reinforced the sacramental force of marriage's indissolubility by integrating this with its natural aspect:

According to nature's intent marriage is oriented to the nurture of offspring. Thus it is according to the law of nature that parents save for their children and that children be heirs for their parents. Therefore, since offspring are the good of both husband and wife together, the latter's union must remain permanently, according to the dictate of the law of nature. (Mackin, 1984, p. 342)

This declaration of marriage as a sacrament did several things. It lessened marriage's stigma as a merely necessary concession for humanity's sinful sexual desire; in fact, when marriage was deemed as *holy* matrimony, it became recognized as a channel for God's grace such that the married couple shared in the blessings of Christ's union with the church in a special way. It also brought marriage under the jurisdiction of the church, the Holy Roman Empire, which governed all of Christendom by way of canon law.

Institutionalizing Marriage

Though the church and its canon law shaped the form and function of marriage during the middle ages, the church would always have a subtly tense relationship with the family. As the structure of the medieval feudal system rested its full weight on the institution of the home, feudalism and manorialism eventually took the place of the Roman imperial system in Europe, as land was redistributed to a landed aristocracy.

As a fundamentally hierarchical system of military recruitment and resource management, feudalism broke the land held by the crown into parcels that could be managed by a single lord. The land directly used to provide for the lord and his household was his *demesne*.

Generally, expanding from the demesne and the manor house, the territory of the lord encompassed land that was worked by peasants for the manor's benefit, and lesser land worked by the peasantry for the benefit of the peasant. The laws of inheritance, which prevented land from being broken up into small, impoverished parcels, and prevented division of lands at a manorial level, governed the transmission and division of lands under the care of peasants (Mitterauer, 1982). In sum, in the manorial model, the household itself became a microcosm reflecting the structure of fiefdoms: there was a central ruling authority which divided land or labor from the top down, and, in principle, with the same institutional continuity at every level (Cantor, 1994).

The household, like the Roman familia, became a middle ground between the greater society and the intimacy of husband, wife, and their charges. Thomas Aquinas wrote, "It is manifest that the domus holds an intermediate position between the individual and the city or the kingdom; for just as a single person is part of the domus, so each domus is a part of the city or kingdom" (Cohn, Epstein, & Herlihy, 1996). By the *domus*, Aquinas implied the family, the household, and the house itself, as represented by the hierarchies between father to child, husband to wife, and, again like the familia's extended hierarchies, lord to servant.

One of the societal triumphs of the feudal system was its ability to impose the same rules and social mores governing marriage on every level of society, from the servants' quarters, to the main house, to the church itself, which was seen as the "Bride of Christ." It was understood that the church, which legitimized the sanctity of marriage, would be the law-giver to the lord, who in turn would be the law-giver to the serfs outside his "house" and to the family members inside his house. The concept of house, family, and marriage existed at every level of society, from the Church itself down to the dwelling of the peasant.

In the Aristotelian world, the *nomos*, the law, of the *oikos*, the house, or the private domain, that is, *eco-nomics*, existed to run an orderly household that would serve an orderly society. In the medieval Christian world, the family would still exist to serve the greater society, but now that society itself would be synonymous with or legitimized by another society, the Holy Roman Catholic Church. In ancient Greece, the Aristotelian mother had an enormous responsibility: to be a constant and consistent care-giver at home so as to generate an orderly household in which the father could serve, in turn, as the prime educator by introducing the children to the laws that governed the greater world outside the *oikos*, or house. In the medieval world, the medieval lord, or Christian father, still had the function of being the lawgiver in the private domain. But now the original moral laws were laid out more obviously a priori from the revealed religions of Judaism and Christianity. The medieval lord or Christian father had a different “economics” from the pre-Christian, Greek or Roman, father: an economics that began, in principle, with obedience to the laws of the church. The Church, accordingly, could lay claim to being the true authority even in the private domain of each family, as its laws were the ones that governed and legitimized the family in the first place.

As the Church had basic and rigid laws, a strict and rigid patriarchy would seem to suit the ordered medieval society—a system where the eldest male retained power as long as he was able, with the family and its subordinate units ordered under the lord of the household. But in some ways this orderly arrangement had the seeds of destruction within it and was in due course subverted by the scripture and teachings of the church itself. For example, the “leave and cleave” concept woven into the Christian definition of family from its Hebraic origins actually hindered the establishment and consolidation of power in large, extended patriarchal clans.

Over the course of the Middle Ages, as the Christianized family took root as a core organizing principle, the cult of the “Holy Family” rose to prominence, perhaps because it provided a more nuclear model of how the ideal family expressed love and affection. The almost palpable equanimity associated with scenes of the Holy Family suggest that proper domestic love is not overly intense; not a distraction from the love of God. That equanimity is perhaps most obviously on display in the iconic nativity scene, originally attributed to St. Francis in the 13th century (Herlihy & Molho, 1995).

The role of the paterfamilias in the holy family was slow to develop. St. Joseph is the most earthly figure at the crèche, at least compared to his divinely incarnate adopted son and his wife Mary, whose “immaculate conception” had kept her from the stain of Original Sin. Thus, it was not surprising that Joseph had faded into the background for so long (Herlihy & Molho, 1995). Yet the Christian world seemed to feel a need for a new, benign model of a paterfamilias, a foil to the somewhat arbitrary and unpredictable pater we saw portrayed in the ancient Roman world. So alongside the cult of the nuclear holy family, the cult of St. Joseph formed and began to attract large numbers of followers in the later medieval period. A number of masses were composed in Joseph’s honor throughout the 15th century (Neel, 2004). From being a relatively late addition to the hagiographies in the 10th century, St. Joseph’s popularity grew exponentially so that by the end of the Middle Ages Joseph was able to stand tall beside his “blessed” wife and divine son as a full and worthy member of the Holy Family.

Joseph, indeed, came to be seen as a new kind of blessed paterfamilias, even if the Bible itself never saw him as such. Images of the Holy Family’s flight into Egypt to escape the hostility and dangers from Herod, clearly resonated with small and similarly marginal families in the later medieval era. As Neel (2004) puts it, “The great plagues, famines, and wars, the

economic troubles and social upheavals, threatened the welfare and even the survival of households” (p. 206). As Adam and Eve did, so many pages and centuries before, the Holy Family came to represent an archetype of the family, a societal prototype that seemed to bind the identity of the family with the heart of the church itself—Joseph faithful to both God and wife even in duress, Mary in sublime obedience in the essentially tragic task of bearing the Son of God.

Marital and Courtly Love in Conflict

The fundamental unit of the household became slowly but surely more nuclear: the house was a kind of fruit that would drop from the tree, creating new life, not merely an identical limb of the tree itself. This inevitable expansion of families prevented the consolidation of large amounts of wealth and served to create ever more autonomous family units that would have to find their own dwellings. This in turn led to the rise of cities.

Such increase in the number of domiciles would seem to have undermined the influence of the church. Yet, social critics such as Jack Goody (1990) have argued that the church was not altogether altruistic in its shaping of the institution of marriage. He claims that while the church might appear to be losing control of family life with greater expansion of families, the church probably saw a hidden benefit for itself in the expansion of domiciles. Goody argues that certain efforts of the church, such as preventing the consolidation of feudal holdings by the nobility, aimed at destabilizing patriarchal institutions and tended to embrace the expansion of domiciles. The creation of new and divergent lines of inheritance would prevent consolidation of powers and monies that might compete provincially with the church's authority (Goody, 1990).

Goody notes that the church actively discouraged many practices that produced family heirs—widow inheritance, adoption, concubinage, remarriage after divorce, close kin marriage,

and other strategies that, generally and in pre-Christian eras, were available to the Romans, peoples surrounding the Mediterranean, and much of the rest of Europe. Concubinage, for example, once a legitimate means to create new heirs, came to be demonized by the church—children outside of marriage became “bastards,” unable to inherit. Goody argues that even behind seemingly benign ecclesiastical touches, such as the English Church’s insistence on consensual marriage, marriage of affection rather than marriage arranged by higher authorities, either intentionally or unwittingly led to a reduction of the ability of any non-ecclesiastical patriarchy to control the generational transmission of resources.

These ecclesiastical strategies, and the core imperative of the new couple to break out of the kinship unit and rely on each other for their sole support, gave the Church in England, for example, strong control over both the ceremony of marriage and the dynamics of inheritance. Consequently, Goody (1990) concludes that, broadly speaking, the church shaped marriage in the direction of our more modern conception of the family:

If we want to characterize these trends, they would be in the direction of the elementary family as we know it, a concentration on the small group of lineal descendants, with women and children as important members, each with their own individual rights, depending upon sex and age. (p. 155)

All the while, the English Church, aided by these formative strategies, ensconced itself as the largest landowner and the most powerful of institutions by the end of the Middle Ages.

While the Church in England was using the ceremony and mores surrounding marriage to build its foundation in the physical world, an esoteric heresy spreading from France laid claim to superior spiritual knowledge that served to alter the way in which love itself came to be understood. The Cathars rose to prominence in the 11th and 12th centuries. Many of the Cathars'

beliefs were drawn from the rich but often strange strains of ancient Gnosticism that held, in sum, that the material order, as a nature categorically different from a transcendent God (or “All Soul”) was inherently evil. The Cathars generally believed that the earthly world was base and imperfect, a corrupt version of the spiritual, ideal world, and the same could be said of the deities that ruled each realm (Martin, 2004).

In Catharism, the Gnostic *demiurge* became the *Rex Mundi*, or “King of the World,” the creator of an evil physical world. The God worshipped by the Cathars was a discarnate being of pure, untainted spirit. This faith put them in conflict with the Catholic Church theologically. The medieval Catholic was faced with virtual Gnosticism: If this world and all of matter is evil, then how could God pronounce it all good upon its creation? Also, how could Jesus wear the mantle of Son of God if he became a creature of base flesh? Undoubtedly, politically speaking, the Cathars were also suspicious of the church’s vast material wealth and power, and the Cathars’ theology of extreme spirituality allowed them to claim that the church was more on the side of the King of the World than the true God of Spirit.

To greater and lesser degrees, the Cathars’ teachings put their followers in conflict with medieval society as well as the church—if indeed those two things can be separated. As a group, the Cathars were discouraged from pledging oaths, from killing and eating meat, and from engaging in reproductive intercourse. In their theology, all of those endeavors only served to enslave the spirit to the world of the flesh. Accordingly, they strongly discouraged marriage—a provocative view, given the exceeding worth of marriage for the medieval world, not only as the means for procreation, but even as the central metaphor for the church as “the bride of Christ.” According to Louis Crampton (2006), in his discussion of homosexuality in the medieval world, the popular medieval mind often closely associated homosexuality and heresy (the French word

bougre, after a Bulgarian heresy, might refer to either). It was easy for the public to believe that the Cathars must have been pursuing other, non-reproductive sexual opportunities—the capital crime of sodomy would be one of the major charges brought against the Cathars in the 13th century pogrom against their heresy (p. 190).

It is hard to overestimate the odd influence the Cathars had on European society. And, if the Cathars, in their own way, upset so much of European society with their claim that marriage was an evil enterprise, there was another movement that flourished in Europe at the same time that claimed that marriage was, if not evil, then simply boring. To be sure, by the high Middle Ages in the 12th and 13th centuries, marriage had become a means for noblemen to expand their feudal holdings through strategic alliances with wealthy dower estates; even then, it functioned in terms of Catholic scholastic theology and canon law that had set, a priori, marriage's course in terms of its delimited goods. At its best, the individual parties accepted their fate in marriage as part of God's sovereign purpose; at worst, they felt dominated by social, religious, and legal constraints not of their own making (Martin, 2004).

The Troubadour literary movement flourished alongside of, and indeed hand in hand with, the Cathars. It may be an exaggeration to say that the two great literary forces in the medieval period were writings of faith and religious legendry on the one hand, and writing and song in praise of romantic love composed by the troubadours on the other. These were not always exclusive categories. That is, in the work of some medieval Christian mystics, such as Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), there were sometimes romanticized and even eroticized depictions of communion with the divine. Yet, for the most part, the troubadour movement served to suggest to the world that while marriage may not be inherently evil, it was, as defined and endorsed by the church, an institution simply too legalistic and tedious to endure. Instead,

the troubadours sang of chivalric romance, courtly love, and unconsummated passion (De Rougemont, 1983).

Denis De Rougemont (1983), in his classic book that traces the evolution of western romantic love, *Love in the Western World*, argues that the myth of *Tristan and Iseult* became popular amongst the troubadours because it brought home the growing antagonism in the last half of the 12th century between the rule of chivalry and the feudal customs under canon law. De Rougemont sees the Tristan romance illustrating two different kinds of duty and, really, two different kinds of “religion” (p. 33).

One kind of duty, according to feudal law, was the moral duty of a vassal to warn his lord of anything that might violate the safety or honor of the lord. The other kind of duty enjoined the knight or courtly lover to give fealty to the higher law of courtly love. This meant that the knight-lover and his beloved were both vassals to love and had to overcome the obstacles placed in their way, which kept them from consummating *true* love. The loyalty that courtly vassals gave was to love itself, and this was deemed incompatible with the good of fidelity in marriage. As De Rougemont (1983) puts it, “The Romance misses no opportunity of disparaging the social institution of marriage and of humiliating husbands...as well as of glorifying the virtue of men and women who love outside, and in despite of, marriage” (p. 34). The courtly religion of romantic love, for all of its passionate intensity, yet displays this curious feature: it opposes the fulfillment or satisfaction of love as much as it opposes marriage. As soon as love is consummated, it ceases to be courtly love and its passion dies out. Its energy and power, as Ethel Person (1988) has said, is derived from its having obstacles that prevent it at every turn.

Person (1988), who has written extensively on psychology and love, has captured in many ways the transcendent state lovers allegedly achieve as recounted in the songs and writings

of the troubadours. The natural state of a pair of lovers, Person says, is to be filled with desire to be in the embrace of the beloved at all times and to brood the absence of the beloved in painful yearning. For the troubadour or romantic, the very visceral love experienced by real lovers creates a state beyond empathy, for it is a state of concordance between two interpenetrating souls who become so identified with one another that they recognize immediately that they are somehow *one*. It is, perhaps, as Person (1988) says, a condition of “emotional telepathy” (p. i.v.).

The overwhelming force of romantic love is strong enough to give lovers the sense that their love can bridge the chasm between their two minds:

When things are going well, the exultation of love seems to offer a kind of freedom; nor is this sense of freedom wholly illusory. Falling in love confers one of the greatest of freedoms—freedom from the confines of the self. Momentarily one exchanges one’s preoccupation with oneself for a consuming interest in the Other. The lover is bound to the beloved, but paradoxically is freed from himself. He has the sense that someone has entered his subjective world, and he hers. (Person, p. 38)

Such lovers experience this as a religious state—the beloved is an object of worship, a means of communion, and a path to self-transcendence. In another time and for different reasons, Paul of Tarsus describes his communion with Christ in terms that sound a lot like this notion of romantic love, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).

This raises some perennial vexing questions about the nature and function of love in marriage. Does marital love, courtly love, and divine love partake of the same phenomenon or derive from the same source? What exactly is love? Are there different kinds of love? What is the relationship between the different forms? Paul claims that love constitutes the thing itself,

which is to say, “without love, one has nothing.” He offers this famous definition of love frequently read at weddings of all kinds:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. (1 Cor. 13:4-8a, NIV)

While not intending to survey and then compare and contrast all types of love known in literature, psychology, scripture, and song, I nonetheless think it important to differentiate between the kinds of love found in the Middle Ages that constituted marital and religious love on one hand, romantic and spiritual love on the other. Only then, can we begin to understand how the goods of traditional marriage, as codified and known from the Middle Ages (i.e., producing and raising offspring, monogamy, indissolubility), stand in considerable tension and conflict with those goods prized in modern relationships, whether married or not, that include but are not limited to: personal autonomy, sexual passion, freedom from oppression, security of belonging, mutuality, compatibility, and emotional connection. To what extent these goods constitute love and whether they can infuse and sustain a lifelong marriage with children is at issue. Is marital love, as contrasted with courtly romantic love, an oxymoron? Can they be one and the same? Can marriage sustain the power of Eros while transforming it through Agape, i.e., marital love?

In Western tradition, romantic love is often spoken of as the quest for one’s other half, as in Plato’s *Symposium*—a search for (or communion with) one’s “soul mate.” This quest for one’s soul mate would allegedly rejoin a divided soul. Yet, therein lies the inherently tragic element of the thesis of the troubadour: should those two souls really merge, then, at least symbolically, both are annihilated by the other.

Much troubadour literature focuses on the obstacles separating the lover and beloved—in the stories of King Arthur, Lancelot seems to quest endlessly for the unattainable and forbidden, either in the form of the Grail, or that of Queen Guinevere. It is indicative of the role and regard of marriage in the medieval period that an affair between Lancelot and the wife of King Arthur leads to the fall of Camelot.

Then again, courtly or romantic love was also seen as redemptive. Dante's beloved Beatrice almost entirely swept Dante away from the mundane world altogether, even though he allegedly met her only three times. Beatrice was Dante's muse, and his salvation. "She has ineffable courtesy, is my beatitude, the destroyer of all vices and the queen of virtue, salvation," Dante writes in his autobiographical *La Vita Nuova* (O. C. Thomas, 1997, pp. 571-581). As a woman of flesh and blood, Beatrice represents the ideal form of romantic love. Even after her death in 1290, Dante describes a vision where, under the eye of God, Beatrice literally consumes his heart.

Yet, it is possible that Beatrice may have been purely a creation of fiction and metaphor. Owen C. Thomas (1997), viewing the phenomenon of Dante's love for Beatrice in the greater context of medieval history and its conflicts, sees the romantic love of Beatrice purely as a metaphor, an almost unconscious display of disaffection with the Church's legalistic view of marriage and limited affection. The suggestion is that only romantic love can provide true grace and true salvation: love becomes a unitive moment within the kingdom of God whereby the beloved can guide the lover's soul through paradise. When Dante encountered Beatrice, he wrote: "a flame of caritas [charity or love] possessed me, which made me pardon anyone who had offended me" (para.8). While his love for Beatrice does not measure up well against

Gratian's canon law for the holy union that was to be found only in the sacrament of marriage, Dante understands it to be no less divine or holy, for all its passion.

The transcendent quality of passionate love invites the lover and the beloved into a communion of souls and into the dialogue that redeems both of them. Beatrice herself is framed as a transcendent form, likened even to Christ. Courtly, romantic love is not lawless, for it appeals to the higher law. It encounters obstacles and boundaries that seemingly prevent it at every turn. Yet, its boundaries and obstacles turn out to be the very things that fuel the rapturous passion that, in a world of law, can only lead to transgression against norms and customs of civil society. Inevitably, then, courtly love leads literally and figuratively to tragedy of the sort that Tristan and Iseult encounter because of their adulterous affair under the nose of Iseult's husband King Mark.

In the view of the troubadour, however, this is not a clear-cut moral issue. What the casuistic canon lawyers sacrificed in their campaign to control human affection through the enforcement of its goods in sacramental marriage was precisely love and passion of the kind praised in canticle and psalm. What the three goods of medieval marriage had missed was a fourth good, namely the experience of self-transcendent union and passionate love. This kind of love could not be circumscribed because it went way beyond the rule of reason and the application of natural and revealed law. The troubadours of courtly love looked down upon sacramental marriage as a legalistic, culture-bound contract held together by abstract concepts and principles. They praised romantic lovers because, for all of their madness, they at least knew they were intensely alive.

De Rougemont (1983) is finally interested in showing that the relationship between love, romance, and marriage has always been tenuous, at least in the way that marriage was

constructed over the course of the middle ages. And yet he also wants to illuminate the possibility that marriage today, rightly understood, has a built-in capacity for uniting reason and desire, love and passion. De Rougemont established that since its origins in the 12th century, “passionate love was constituted in hostility to marriage and that the objectives of Eros and Agape are in a relation of systematic antimony” (p. 376). He then explains his larger purpose in drawing such a sharp disjunction between passion and marital or divine love:

I have tried to isolate passion as is done for a chemical compound—the better to learn its properties. I have shown that isolated from its opposite (active love, or Agape), in its pure state, passive or ecstatic, passion is deadly, such as for Tristan and some of the great mystics. There remains to be seen what passion can produce in composition—if it can tolerate it. Pure chlorine is lethal, but sodium chloride is the salt of our meals—of our agapes. (De Rougemont, 1983, p. 376)

He asserts finally that just as it is a mistake to found a marriage entirely upon romantic love, it is yet also a mistake to *exclude* passion from marriage. He suggests that the obstacle which nurtures all passion can somehow be reborn within marriage itself:

If it is true that passion seeks the Inaccessible, and if it is true that the Other as such remains the best-defended mystery in the eyes of a demanding love—could Eros and Agape not join in a paradoxical alliance at the very heart of an accepted marriage? Is not every Other the Inaccessible, and any woman loved an Iseult, even if no moral prohibition, no taboo symbolizes...the very essence of the exciting obstacle, the obstacle that will never depend on anything but being itself: the autonomy of the person loved, her fascinating otherness? This search for the Angel, which is the mystery of the Other,

exciting both Eros and Agape—might it not be a third form of love, similar to the mysticisms of spiritual marriage? (De Rougemont, 1983, p. 378)

In a postmodern cultural situation, whereby sexual, religious, and cultural taboos are largely lifted, and individuals don't feel subjected to the laws and customs that have functioned as hurdles in the past, it becomes possible to appreciate De Rougemont's intriguing question. That is, a culture that prizes the autonomy of the individual may for some give rise to married individuals who can recognize their spouse not as the useful, predictable, or expected husband or wife, but as the "fascinating Other" who remains just beyond reach, inciting Eros to yearn for Agape's embrace.

Section Two: Modern Marriage

Chapter 4: Making Marriage Ordinary Again

Charles Taylor (1989), in his masterful exploration of the Western identity, *The Sources of the Self*, talks about the slow but steady displacement of the traditional outlook on the world as hierarchical by the modern conception of the self as self-responsible and free. While early moral sources for the development of the modern Western identity may be found in Plato's ethic of self-mastery and in Augustine's view of God *within*, the modern outlook per se does not emerge as an articulate moral vision until around the time of the Protestant Reformation and with the writings of Rene Descartes (1596-1650) and John Locke (1632-1704) among others (p. 111).

While we will discuss this epochal shift of the Western identity in much detail in chapter eight, for our present purposes it should be sufficient to note more generally that what characterizes the shift into modernity is a movement away from a teleological moral order structured by notions of the Good *out there* and a turn towards individual *inwardness*. The goods of life must now be accessed through the subject's own perception and appropriation of them. Reformers like Luther rejected the authority given to the sacred hierarchy; the personal faith of each believer became more important than belonging to the Church or being connected to a wider order. Moreover, Descartes abandoned the theory of the "ontic logos" (i.e., the idea of a meaningful cosmic teleology) and sought instead to ground all knowledge of the outer world, now seen as an impersonal, mechanistically arranged order, through a method of rational inquiry that demanded subjective certainty. For Locke, at the heart of this inward turn is a focus on the methods that enable us to "remake" ourselves without interference from custom, tradition, or religion. As such, a strong moral notion of self-responsible agency was required in order to relate to those outside others in terms deemed best for each acting self (Taylor, 1989, p. 166).

In the traditional social order, therefore, marriage was generally predicated upon the idea that the hierarchical arrangement between husbands and wives constituted an inherent part of the natural hierarchy of creation. This arrangement was thought to promote the conditions that enabled culture to reproduce itself according to the natural order.

In the modern moral order, hierarchy was displaced by a notion of equality that transformed both the meaning and practice of marriage. This change was clearly for the better in so many ways: it brought with it goods like freedom and more equality for women, it made mutual intimacy and personal happiness central for both men and women, and it allowed for the development of the emotional riches of the private home.

At the same time, certain sharp inner tensions emerged. The traditional notion of commitment, for example, was altered. Indeed, the commitment that post-traditional husbands and wives make to each other in marriage would come to be tested by the notion of the modern person as a free and independent agent unencumbered, in principle, by any obligations other than those to which the person freely consented. Commitment began to depend upon the power of consent and the determination of one's own will.

In premodernity's traditional cultures, the commitment in marriage involved primarily a public act that instituted socially approved sexual intercourse between a woman and a man for the bearing and rearing of children born from the union of one husband and one wife. In the modern social order, marriage is often, perhaps most often, seen as an exclusive private relationship entered into by consenting adults for the sake of mutual support and personal fulfillment. This general shift in the meaning and import of marriage may be described summarily: In traditional marriage, the vow is prior to the couple, and the institution, the temple or the church, which composes the vow, in effect creates and legitimizes the couple. In modern

or postmodern marriage, as it were, the couple is prior to the vow, and the persons themselves often compose whatever vow is offered.

Contractual Marriage: Milton and Locke

The history of revolutionary literature in the modern era in the West is sweeping and voluminous. Yet, properly, that literature may be said to begin with the reformers of the Church, especially Martin Luther (1483-1546) and Henry VIII (1491-1547). And Luther and Henry, at the very center of much of the change from the medieval world to the modern, brought marriage especially into the spotlight. The numerous histories about Henry's many marriages, and the controversies throughout Christendom surrounding his divorce, are both sensational and plentiful. The biographies of Luther, too, and of how he elevated his marriage and those of others to central stage are numerous and many of them excellent. Still, it is possible to generalize about the role of marriage in the controversies in the Reformation.

One such summary statement comes readily from Nietzsche (1996), regarding Luther at least: "...perhaps Luther performed no greater service than to have had the courage of his *sensuality* (in those days it was called, delicately enough, 'evangelical freedom')" (III,2). Nietzsche argued that the accomplishment of Luther was that he gave the priest a wife, and that feat alone, he suggests, undermined much of the very psychology of the European. The ascetic life was no longer deemed the ideal. Marriage itself was no longer deemed sacred but was just another civil relationship, even if for Luther it was an immensely rich part of ordinary life that he valorized as a blessed estate. When heads of church and state divorce and when priests marry, something new is happening, something that lay at the core of the Reformation.

In the effort to understand even better these changes in perspective regarding marriage, it behooves us to refer to the works of John Milton (1608-1674), regarded by many as the greatest

literary figure of the time (Luxon, 2005). Much like Luther, Milton set out to reform or even undermine the Catholic Church. Like the thinkers of the Enlightenment soon to come, in his own way Milton was a champion of Reason who intentionally shocked both civil society and the Church.

Milton became one of the earliest and most vociferous critics of marriage as traditionally defended by the Church. On a philosophical level, Milton rejected the argument that the structure of civil authority was, or should be, comparable to Adam's original patriarchal authority. Indeed, as something of an original de-constructor, Milton reversed the analogy: should a government be shown to be worthy of dissolution from injustice or mismanagement, so should an individual be allowed to sue for divorce in a non-functioning marriage.

Milton himself suffered a failed marriage. His first wife left him for two years, resisting all of his attempts at reconciliation. Frustrated, Milton appealed to no less than Parliament itself to remedy not merely his lot but also the lot of many others. Milton would have Parliament amend the terms of marriage so as to allow persons to sue for divorce for reasons broader than those stipulated by the Church, and to remarry without the traditional stain of adultery attached (Witte, 1997, p. 180).

In Parliament, Milton had, in theory, an audience sympathetic to his appeal to amendments of terms of divorce. Parliament itself, after all, had argued that the authority of royalty need not be deemed absolute; and that whole states that committed injustice or governed to the disadvantage of their subjects could be overthrown or dissolved. Why should the issue, Milton argued, be different for individuals? Why should individuals endure the pain of a miserable marriage?

Thomas Luxon (2005) presents Milton as the chief mover and shaker among his contemporaries who “took on the huge project of reinterpreting heterosexual Christian marriage. . . as a classical friendship” (p. x). Milton's social cause regarding marriage was an ambitious project that set out to resolve a dissonant trinity of traditions: elements of homoerotic friendship common to the ancients; heterosexuality traditional with Judeo-Christianity; and “manly ambition” associated with modern Republicanism.

Part of the difficulty in Milton's cause was the discrepancy among the classical models that Milton used as models of friendship. It would be hard to square completely the senses of mutual servitude within marriage, found in the Old Testament, Peter, and Paul, with the sense of manly friendship between genuine equals as described by so many ancient philosophers.

In the end, Milton could not assemble an entirely persuasive argument that marriage ultimately should be seen as an exercise in friendship that somehow expressed a bond that both surpassed any other type of human relationship and superseded the dynamics of marriage then authorized by the Church. Milton knew that in appealing to classical friendship as his principal model, he would encounter difficulty in persuading his audience that heterosexual marriage (that allowed for divorce, and was no longer primarily a lasting bond constituted for the procreation and education of children) was superior morally to the Typhonic friendships described in Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*.

Indeed, despite his many stinging criticisms of marriage as promoted by the Church, Milton never seemed to settle on a proper definition of marriage. Perhaps Milton's real views regarding marriage can be found more in his poetry than in his prose. Commentators such as Luxon (2005) speculate that much of Milton's poetry that concerns marriage, most famously *Paradise Lost*, can be read as an offering of apologies for Milton's own failures at the

undertaking. In Milton's imaginative re-construction of the Garden of Eden, Adam, when alone, seems to regret his having sought a companion with whom to converse. The conversationalist he was granted proved inferior to his God. The “married” Adam did not anticipate the degree to which the state of being married would actually bring about a confounding sense of alienation. Adam, inferior to his God, and superior to his spouse, could never be satisfied.

Samson, in *Samson Agonistes*, recovers the kind of happiness in life that Adam felt he had irretrievably lost only after a certain removal from his spouse (Milton, 1959). In general, Milton's writings suggest that only a heroic effort, combined with divine grace, can make a good marriage. Yet, this conception stands in considerable tension with his own operating premise that marriage, as an intrinsic part of God's design, should not be so agonizing.

While Milton never found a satisfactory definition of marriage, and never seemed to sway many persons to his side, his enthusiasm for the controversy was taken up by figures whose work would swiftly shape ideas about marriage on both European and American shores. Perhaps the most significant of those figures in early modern thought was John Locke, who had learned much from the most consistent font of anti-Catholic thinking in the early modern period, Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679).

One of the hallmarks of tendentious modern thought, especially aggressive in its critique of Roman Catholicism, is a preoccupation with contracts. Locke and Rousseau in particular would become most famous for their new emphasis on private and social contracts; contracts between and among parties made entirely independently of the influence of Rome. The original master of modern contract theory was Hobbes, whose *Leviathan* was manifestly a primer in the subject (Hobbes & Curley, 1994).

Hobbes thought he was doing Europe a major favor by writing *Leviathan*. With great foresight, he saw that Rome was losing power in Europe, and Hobbes was delighted to see the dwindling power of the Papacy. Yet, Hobbes was not naive. He knew something like new nationalisms would have to fill the Catholic vacuum. So, in *Leviathan*, Hobbes was showing Europeans how to write constitutions and contracts, social and personal, throughout the length and breadth of society.

The summary example from Hobbes's *Leviathan* on this point comes with Hobbes's reminder to his audience that Judaism and Christianity themselves are contractual religions. Moses brought the Old Covenant (contract) and Christ brought the New Covenant (contract). The very legitimacy of the contracts made with God by Moses and Christ is manifest in the fact that the terms of those two contracts with God are entirely consistent with Natural Law (a rationalized, secularized redefinition of Aquinas's doctrine of Natural Law).

Locke was determined to reject systematically much of the European tradition and philosophy, especially the Catholic and Anglican religious tradition in a number of areas, including marriage. Regarding marriage, Locke was determined to repudiate the influence of the ultra-traditional political theorist Sir Robert Filmer (1588-1653). Filmer's argument regarding marriage was that God's creation, on the human front at least, had begun as a patriarchal household. For Filmer, all forms of human government should reflect that original family-government and the hierarchical arrangement found in, or implied in, the Garden of Eden. Filmer's project was a reactionary effort to reinterpret the ancient record to counter the increasing democratic impulses that were sweeping across Europe (John Witte, 1997, pp. 171-172).

The essence of Locke's work on marriage, as an expression of a self-conscious modernism, lay in the rejection of any natural or necessary connection between Bible-oriented or Church-authorized domestic arrangement and constitutions of governments (Locke & Cook, 1970). Locke rejected Filmer's claim that God had created Adam as lord and/or master, and Eve as subject and/or slave. For Locke, if an appeal to the Garden of Eden was inevitable due to the lingering presence of Christian sentiment, then a new view of God was needed. For Locke, God was the unequivocal champion of equality. Adam and Eve were created equals. So, all marriages thereafter should be deemed contracts between equals, nothing more and nothing less.

Locke's view of the marriage contract itself, in direct contrast with Catholic tradition concerning the indissolubility of the sacrament of marriage, was that the marriage contract was hardly unconditional. Indeed, not only was it understood that a marriage contract might have all manner of particular terms, such as provisions against physical or sexual aggression between the parties, but the contract itself could be dissolved for legitimate reasons.

For Locke, contrary to Catholicism, marriage was not a lifetime bond and sacrament. Rather, the fundamental purpose of marriage was merely to produce and educate children who were to grow into adults who could then choose whatever vocation they desired. In such an arrangement, once it became evident that the children were able to fend for themselves in the world, the parties to marriage should consider the *raison d'être* of the marriage satisfied. Theoretically, the purpose of the contract fulfilled, the marriage could be dissolved. Marriage was there to ensure a reasonable amount of social stability, but it was not an inviolable sacrament never to be broken.

While Locke never addressed the issue of divorce in great detail, his idea of a divorce due to a natural course of events suggests that Locke would likely champion much more lenient

standards for divorce. In contrast with Rome in particular, Locke was opposed to the notion of coerced annulments when, for example, one of the parties to marriage proved impotent or opposed to the generation of offspring. Locke allowed that childless partners, childless for whatever reason, might legitimately stay married on other contractual terms.

Locke was obviously opposed to Catholic doctrine and tradition, and opposed to most Anglican tradition. Yet, it seems that he might have gone further in his rebellious, egalitarian views. Had he gone further with his critique and its implications, he might have advocated more openly the idea of allowing the lower and middle classes of his time a personal and familial liberty already enjoyed by the upper-classes in Europe. According to John Witte (1989), Locke, in his diaries, flirted with the notion of excusing the middle and lower classes for entering into “left-handed” or extra-marital liaisons:

He that already is married may marry another woman with his left hand. . . . The ties, duration, and conditions of the left hand marriage shall be no other than what is expressed in the contract of marriage between the parties. (p. 189)

Perhaps Locke was reluctant to volunteer this suggestion more openly because he seems to suggest that only the man might be allowed to enter into left-handed marriages. That particular allowance would undermine his egalitarian premise otherwise.

The ultimate implication in all of Locke's deliberations on marriage is that State and Church should have little influence on the marriage contract. Locke's rethinking of marriage established a new premise. Locke's empiricism was an antidote to the metaphysical presuppositions regarding nature, humanity, and marriage that had shaped the thinking of humanity for centuries.

Hume and Rousseau

With time, the debate regarding presuppositions about an institution as basic as marriage added fuel to the fire of rethinking broader questions about who the primary lawgiver might be in the private realm and in the realm of the state. Enlightenment concerns about the issue of the primacy of the lawgiver on both domestic and civil fronts played a major part in the thought of that figure who would later awaken Kant from his "dogmatic slumber," i.e., David Hume (1711-1776). Hume seconded much of Locke's thought and transformed it into a formidable body of skeptical thought.

Hume (2006) offers a quite distinct and succinct treatment of marriage in his essay "Of Love and Marriage" (p. 552). Hume shows he is very familiar with both the joys and difficulties that marriage can bring, but especially the difficulties. In addressing the issue of marriage, he humorously says that he once conceived of writing both a panegyric and a satire on marriage. Clearly, Hume finds marriage a difficult proposition, and he strikes right at what he considers the fundamental problem in all marriage relationships: the desire for dominion. For Hume, in keeping with the early modern motif of challenging the assumptions about marriage promulgated by the Church, the basic questions about marriage and family remained centered on the question as to which party would be, or should be, the original lawgiver in the household. By the 18th century Rome had become increasingly powerless to execute its claim to being the one, true lawgiver, even in the reach of private households; Hume could have a field day with his cavalier commentaries on marriage.

Hume cleverly and with a bit of mock humility counseled women in his essay on "Of Love and Marriage." He suggests to women that he can locate for them the single font of complaint that all men have had and will have in the marriage relationship, namely the inordinate

desire of the female to have dominion over everyone in the household, especially the husband. Hume recounts the tale of the Scythian women who once, we are told, conspired as a body against the men, and kept the secret so well, that they executed their design before they were suspected. They surprised the men in drink, or sleep, bound them all fast in chains, and, having called a solemn council of the whole sex, debated what expedient should be used to improve the present advantage, and to prevent their falling again into the slavery they found in their relationships with men, especially in marriage.

The most obvious plan, to kill all the men, did not seem to find favor with the greater part of the assembly, notwithstanding the many and various injuries, some almost lethal, that a portion of them had suffered. It was agreed among the women, therefore, that they would execute a drastic punishment, but one falling short of death. They would put out the eyes of the whole male sex. In the absence of eyesight, the women would all be delivered from judgment about their physical appearance, secure a measure of authority over all males, and enjoy a kind of equality among themselves. They would, granted, hear no more tender sighs from their men; but, in turn, they would no longer have to endure so many imperious commands regarding appearance and manners. Love must for ever leave us, say those women. Yet the loss of love comes with a great reward: the almost total subjection of men. Hume says he would not condone the actions of the Scythian women unequivocally. But he proceeds to say that the Scythian women, and all women as far as he can see, would probably be justified in such action insofar as the history of humanity in general and marriage in particular shows that men have taken undue advantage of their role as original lawgivers in both civic and domestic arenas.

Hume (2006) also recounts another tale from the ancient world. This myth suggests that humans were originally androgynous, and were split in two by Jupiter. That split created great

discord and unhappiness. Jupiter had a remedy. He ordered an immediate reconciliation between the personified forces of masculine *Love* and feminine *Hymen*, as the necessary means for achieving happiness. To make this reconciliation durable, he strictly enjoined these personages never to join with any other halves without first consulting their alter egos, *Care* and *Pleasure*. *Care* and *Pleasure* were to be the ultimate arbiters in the exercise of joining two parties, with married couples being no exception. Where this order to include *Care* and *Pleasure* is strictly observed, the *Androgyne* is perfectly restored, and the ever-expanding human race enjoys the same happiness as it once did in its primeval state (pp. 555-558).

It is obvious from the *Androgyne* myth that Hume held a strong belief in the essential equality of the sexes, even if he felt he needed to be cautious about saying so publicly. To what degree Hume truly believed equality between the sexes was actually attainable we will never know. But at least, for Hume, both parties to marriage should be fully aware of how much “care” the one might be expected to receive from the other. And both parties should be fully aware of the “pleasures” with which the other party might be preoccupied. Hume is making the point that something resembling what has come to be called compatibility is actually a *necessary* condition for marriage, as opposed to the traditional notions of marriage in which these ordinary qualities of human companionship were at best secondary.

We don’t know if Hume influenced his occasional friend, Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s (1712-1778) views of marriage, or vice versa, but they entertained similar outlooks. Rousseau's approach to the topic became more famous and influential. He promoted a kind of equality between the sexes in the marriage relationship. It was theoretically an equality of power. The woman was equally powerful but in different ways and by different means, and her education should be an education in and about such power.

A woman's education must therefore be planned in relation to man. To be pleasing in his sight, to win his respect and love, to train him in childhood, to tend him in manhood, to counsel and console, to make his life pleasant and happy, these are the duties of woman for all time, and this is what she should be taught while she is young. The further we depart from this principle, the further we shall be from our goal, and all our precepts will fail to secure her happiness or our own. (Rousseau, 2004, p. 269)

Rousseau was famous, or infamous, for living a life of contradictions. His manifesto concerning the woman's role in marriage and life falls right in line with these contradictions. How could a modern man, such as Rousseau, who was so openly defiant of tradition, especially Catholic tradition, write words so reminiscent of the text of Aristotle's *Economics*? It appears that the traditionalist in Rousseau saw marriage as a virtual necessity for both man and woman, while the radical in Rousseau sought to find subtle but effective ways in which women in the domestic sphere could exercise a power comparable to that of their husbands.

At the basis of Rousseau's counsel to women lies a subtle analogy. As the man is dependent in part upon the greater society for much of his well-being at the same time that he always strives to be utterly independent of that society, the woman, ever-dependent in many ways upon her husband for her well-being, should strive to be as independent of the man as far as possible.

In Rousseau's view, the education of the girl, and then the woman, just as much as the education of the boy and then the man, was to be fiercely realistic. The male child should be educated so as to be independent of civil society which, by Rousseau's account, is largely corrupt. The education of the female child was to make her realize that while she may find her independence from the wider society by being in certain respects dependent on her husband, she

may nonetheless find ways to make the husband dependent upon her. This independence from society is the hallmark of Rousseau's appeal to the natural, unconditional freedom of the human person, a freedom that civil society steals from him primarily by the imposition of laws that hamper the expression of the individual's natural affections and native impulses. Rousseau, the father of modern Romanticism, wrote that an individual should always follow the "first impulses of his being," which are "always good." Social laws and customs, at best, get out of the way of the expression of these impulses, at worst, they stifle them (Botting, 2007).

Rousseau saw the nuclear family as one of the few human institutions worth maintaining, but for reasons quite different from those of Aristotle and the Church. For Aristotle, men and women exist to become husbands and wives so as to generate and educate children to become virtuous citizens in civil society. Happiness lay in the performance of actions in accordance with virtue, and the virtues of the husband and wife, as father and mother, consist heavily in building good young citizens for life in the *polis*, or wider civil society. For the Church, parents are to procreate and raise offspring who, first, might live to the glory of God and, second, love and serve the world for God's sake.

For Rousseau, men and women exist to become husbands and wives to generate and educate children so as to become independent of civil society so far as possible; marital happiness lies in the performance of activities that reflect the simplicity and spontaneity of the natural man. The woman, or wife, in Rousseau's marriage system, should therefore note her peculiar role in that (ideally) natural order of freedom. The woman will not likely be the man's equal in physical might, but she has the most powerful instrument in nature at her avail, her ability to offer sexual relations and satisfactions (Schwartz, 1985).

The good wife, according to Rousseau, does all of the ostensible cheerleading and care-giving for the husband that the Aristotelian wife provides. But the modern wife, who may not yet be able to extend her power through means authorized by the state, is supposed to know that she is in many ways the superior party in marriage, insofar as she owns the strings to the dressing gown. If she can also read and can chop down a tree, she is more powerful than any man, or would be so in the simpler world of the household of natural man independent of decadent society.

It is difficult for us moderns, or postmoderns, to peek into the world of Rousseau and not see there a kind of wonderful naiveté. For most of us, it is neither possible nor desirable to live a satisfactory life apart from the rule of law in a modern, productive, industrialized, and commerce-driven world, all of its constraints and stresses notwithstanding.

Kant and the Enlightened Marriage

Though his writings on marriage are hardly well-known, marriage was an issue Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) felt compelled to address with his usual earnestness. If legend is correct, the one occasion on which Kant did not take his famous daily walk around the streets of Königsberg was the day he first became infatuated with the work of Rousseau. Kant, the celibate Prussian bachelor, must have been intrigued by Rousseau's idea of a world largely without the guidance of rules or laws.

The skepticism of Hume, late in his career, awakened him from what he famously termed a “dogmatic slumber.” By dogmatism Kant was referring to one of the three classic schools of philosophy. Dogmatism, distinct from both skepticism and honest academics, assumed without questioning that there was a universal objective reality and that those who do not assent to its universally applicable rules or laws in every area of human endeavor are ignorant, obstinate, or

insane. Kant was raised a Christian, but subsequently abandoned much of the institutional religion of Christianity and belief that its articles of faith served as the unquestioned basis of the right way of life. At the same time, Kant acknowledged that he was still in some sense a dogmatist, who was unwilling to abandon entirely the idea of an objective or transcendent order of things. He was deeply shaken by Hume's skepticism but could not imagine abandoning the quest of reason for wider truths that Hume largely undermined (Hoffe, 1994).

Rousseau stimulated Kant's imagination and rattled his residual dogmatism in another way with his picture of a world with few rules and a way of life marked by considerable disregard for the *sensus communis*, or "common sense." The massively influential critical philosophy that Kant subsequently devised outlined a profound third alternative to traditional dogmatism and Hume and Rousseau's profound revolt against the rule of reason. That philosophy showed that there was no way to avoid living in a law and rule-governed world, but such rational principles were not dogmatically imposed by the arbitrary authority of tradition or religion. Rather, they were an expression of the structure and ordering activity of the human mind, ultimately beholden to no authority beyond itself. Here was a way to abandon "heteronomy" and preserve "autonomy" without undermining the essential role of reason and law in human life (Kant, 1982).

Travelling down this path of thoroughgoing autonomy without abandoning the power of human reason, for Kant was the true meaning of Enlightenment. Kant's essay, "What is Enlightenment," defines the function of Enlightenment to be the development of human institutions based, indeed, on law, but laws derived from those inherent in the human mind itself (Schmidt, 1996, p. 58). To reiterate, the Enlightenment, then, would neither promote essentially lawless skepticism, as Hume's philosophy all but compelled it to do, nor encourage trying to live

in an impossible, lawless world of the sort Rousseau's philosophy seemed to promise. For Kant, an enlightened humanity would appreciate that all of its endeavors involved some kind of guidance by rationally defensible rules or laws. However, there could be no appeal to revealed religion as *the* ultimate source of those principles. This view of enlightenment banned any appeal a priori to Moses or Christ as the primary lawgivers.

In line with these ideas, Kant viewed marriage, most fully explicated in his *The Science of Right* (Kant & Hastie, 2006) as based on laws and principles in no way grounded in revealed religion but based on principles of reason imposed by human minds on the world or “phenomena.” In hindsight, it is easy, if not entirely fair, to read Kant on the issue of marriage and other topics and hear an echo of Nietzsche's complaint that Kant, for all of his blustering about Enlightenment, is little more than an “underhanded Christian” (Strong, 1988, p. 52). For while Kant appeals neither to Scripture nor tradition for his view of marriage, the principles in Kant's account of marriage are otherwise almost entirely consistent with the traditionally understood bases of it in scripture and with Christian, indeed Catholic, tradition, and doctrine.

Like the Catholic tradition, for example, Kant held the ultimate purpose of marriage to be the procreation and upbringing of children. In fact, for those activities themselves, no sexual relations are to be expected or demanded within the marriage framework beyond relations for the sake of procreation. Yet, unlike the Catholic, and more in the vein of Locke, Kant writes of marriage in terms of civil contracts.

While the marriage contract is traditionally supposed to exist for the procreation and education of children, a marriage contract in Kant's view could properly exist apart from those goals, namely in the contracting for the use of the sexual organs to another person, something he called “sexual intercommunity” (*commercium sexuelle*) (Kant & Hastie, 2006, p. 32). It is

another matter that this raises the question as to whether this notion runs counter to one of Kant's main ethical principles, that a person is never to be used as a mere means to the ends of another.

There are some perhaps irresolvable tensions in Kant's view of the marriage contract. On the one hand, he envisions the possibility of a contract merely for sexual relations apart from any procreative intent. They are contractual equals, as there is a mutual transfer of rights to one another's sexual organs. On the other hand, when marriage partners in this sense contract away the use of their sexual organs to another person, they implicitly contract away, in his view, the whole of their person. This is so because there is something unique about the sexual act itself, consisting in the fact that it is the means by which another human person comes into being. Thus for Kant, marriage partners are equals in the weightier moral sense that they are equally necessary for generating offspring. Individuals should be conscious of this fact, lest their partner be reduced to the status of a mere thing, a mere means to the end of one's own pleasure. This mutual transfer of right is what prevents matrimony from being reduced to concubinage. In concubinage, one party has arbitrary rights to the body parts of the other.

On other fronts, Kant's stance on marriage is quite consistent with traditional Christian thinking. Sex acts such as homosexuality and bestiality are forbidden. Kant terms homosexuality and bestiality *crimina carnis contra naturam*, crimes of the flesh against nature. Only two human persons of the opposite sex may be properly married in Kant's view, as it takes two, and only two, such persons to generate another person. In addition, Kant proscribes any sexual activity outside the sacred marriage contract (Kant & Hastie, 2006).

The extraordinary lengths to which Kant would go to codify even the sexual act must have seemed odd at the time. But there was a serious ethical intent behind these codifications that sound to us a bit comical. While few later thinkers discussed Kant's somewhat convoluted

view of the marriage contract in any detail, broadly speaking, Kant's conception of Enlightenment won the day. From that day forward, modern secular societies, for the most part, understood themselves to be developing systems of law on the basis of either autonomous, self-validating human reason or some kind of natural law that swings free from the particularities of any cultural tradition, not on revealed religion or traditional authority.

Chapter 5: The Search for Modern Foundations

In Western culture, the Enlightenment ushered in a new, post-traditional modern world in which humanity was faced with many novel perplexities and challenges. Many people would have been somewhat uncomfortable with Locke and Kant's view of marriage as a strictly civil contract, one that at first blush seems to have been concocted in a laboratory. At the same time, in both theory and practice, the repudiation of the church as the foundational source of moral goods and principles for human society was becoming widespread. How far humanity in Western culture, at least, would proceed with that repudiation was now in question. Was the Enlightenment project of displacing universal norms of hierarchical and religious authority with the modern core values and strong moral goods like equality, individual rights and freedom, justice and the relief of suffering really tenable? If so, were these goods sufficient to meet the many challenges and demands of modern life?

Hegel and "The German Ideology"

The philosopher G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831), an intellectual giant whose influence will rival Kant's in the years to come, emerges to say "no" to both of these questions. Hegel's transition from a champion of Kant's rejection of revealed religion as the basis of morality to a serious, if qualified, defender of the Christian faith would set the stage for the next wave of revolutions in the modern era (Taylor, 1977).

The young Hegel was a student of theology at Tübingen who initially found a relatively comfortable home in the Lutheran Church. He soon came to identify, however, with Kant's view of Enlightenment that was not grounded in the traditions borne of revealed religion, Judaism and Christianity in particular. In making this change from traditional Lutheran to enlightened Kantian, Hegel, "the young Hegel," as that Hegel is now called with the hindsight of history, was

rebellious even against the Lutheran church that had come to repudiate Rome, Catholicism, as the foundational lawgiver for human social institutions. Rebellion is difficult to keep in check, so it is no surprise that many young Lutherans such as Hegel, riding the antinomian wave that Luther himself had started, came to reject not only Rome but even the Lutheran Church itself as society's lawgiver.

Hegel rode the wave for a time, but his continued personal and intellectual struggles, coupled with the responsibilities that came with raising a family, led him to devise a radical synthesis of some traditional values and Enlightenment Reason. He conceived of a system that would explain how certain traditional values of family, church, and state emerged in the immanent dialectical process of *History* rather than as authoritatively revealed from on high at various points over time.

There was a distinctly modern, critical dimension to Hegel's account, as his was arguably the first philosophical system to see History as a subject on a par of importance with religion and the sciences. Indeed, in Hegel's view, the origins of religion and the sciences were all to be traced in an all-encompassing historical process, not derived from an autonomous human reason that swung free of and often starkly opposed tradition.

On the social front, Hegel's exceptionally complex philosophical system had, at bottom, a simple impetus: to persuade Europeans to return to substantive recognition of the Church as the foundational law-giver for all of society, reaching all the way down to hearth and kitchen. Hegel summarized a number of cultural and intellectual trends in this direction at the time, which came to be known as "The German Ideology."

Just before Hegel, Johann Fichte (1762-1814), the avowed Kantian, had devised an ingenious way of popularizing the seemingly obtuse philosophy of Kant. In a kind of secular

European precursor to America's later, Second Great Religious Awakening, Fichte filled entire stadia on a regular basis with lectures about duty, humility, and family. While Fichte saw his lectures (almost secular sermons) as derived from Kantian principles, those principles so often turned out to be consistent with Christian ethical values and sentiments that the lines between the secular Kantian Enlightenment rejection of the church as foundational lawgiver and the Lutheran rejection of Rome's authority became almost entirely blurred (Taylor, 1977).

It was relatively easy for Hegel to tweak the particulars of Fichte's project to incorporate it into his philosophy of history. Hegel's later moral philosophy, hence the "old Hegel," was in effect a dialectical justification, allegedly drawn from history itself, of the Lutheran theology that Hegel had come to re-embrace. So, it is no wonder that Nietzsche would later contend that all German philosophy in the modern era that preceded him could be described as nothing less and nothing more than Luther's theology (F. W. Nietzsche & Mencken, 2008).

This situation reflects an enduring puzzle at the heart of modern moral philosophies. In his influential book *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) elucidates the puzzle. He argues that all modern, post-Enlightenment ethical systems, such as Kantian and utilitarian moral philosophy, are all embroiled in the paradox of claiming to ground morality in some facet of autonomous human nature considered apart from any sacred cosmos or teleological scheme of life at the same time that they end up reproducing, and depend for much of their moral force on, norms and ideals from older traditions. In MacIntyre's view, clarifying and resolving that dilemma remains the principal challenge of ethical theory today.

In *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and other writings, Hegel preserved but recast a traditional conception of hierarchical relationships within, between, and among family, state, and church (Moyar & Quante, 2008). Perhaps because of his relative comfort with many traditional

values and historically derived practices, Hegel started his social theory with descriptions of the family and private domain. The father, the married man and the hierarchical head of the household, is the lawgiver in that domain. In keeping with supposed Pauline principles, the husband and wife are equals in the eyes of God but they are unequal, or at least different, in function. In the greater social world, the man, who must win the daily bread, has the privilege and responsibility of being the primary lawgiver in the smaller world of the family. The woman must be the queen of the household, transmitting to the children the laws promulgated to the household by her husband, who is essentially the king in the family.

Beyond the domestic sphere, there is another, higher level or additional link in the chain of social existence. The man, the father and husband, must legitimize in turn the laws he lays down in his private domain by proving to his wife and children, by his moral consistency and productive labor, he is a worthy private lawgiver. The father legitimizes his lordship in his private domain when he submits to the laws of the state.

Then we arrive at a further and the final level of Hegel's scheme. As the father in the private domain legitimizes his role as lawgiver in the private domain, the state legitimizes its role as lawgiver in the public domain by making provincial laws that respect and reflect the universal laws coined and promulgated by the Church. The ongoing dialectic at the root of historical process may critically sift and modify some of these traditional norms. Without going into detail, Hegel incorporates many distinctively modern conceptions of personal liberty and the rule of law in his view of civil society. Nevertheless, he envisions profound and indelible organic ties within, between, and among all of society's institutions: Family, State, and Church.

Contra Hegel

It would not take long for critics to emerge who would challenge the presuppositions and

workability of Hegel's scheme in particular and the "German Ideology" as a whole. Perhaps the most famous of those critics were Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), who with their followers, sometimes known as Statists, sought to undermine two of Hegel's three pillars, namely church and family. For Marx and Engels, the state would be the ultimate lawgiver, and the laws it would promulgate would have an exclusively "natural scientific footing" in a wholly materialist world (P. Thomas, 2008).

If all of metaphysics is folly, as it was for Marxists, then all of the church's dogma and pretensions to superior moral insight are, at best, arbitrary and arrogant. Hegel saw Kant's philosophy having an alienating and dangerous leveling effect. Its repudiation of tradition or revealed religion as the primary source of such insight entailed a repudiation of all kinds of hierarchy and gradations of authority in society, which Hegel saw as essential to social order and human flourishing. The Hegelian version of the German Ideology sought to recoup, in a quasi-Christian and partly modernized fashion, the kind of hierarchical ordering that prevailed in ancient society, reaching from the altar to the kitchen. Marxists and other like-minded critics were quite happy to level those hierarchies once again, even beyond the way that they were undermined by Locke, Hume, and Kant.

Other critics of Hegel, such as John Stuart Mill, attacked the Hegelian system not so much from the standpoint of ideology, but on a more practical basis. They argued that the way in which all parts of the Hegelian system has to smoothly interface and work together organically was simply unworkable. Hegel envisioned a global, universal Christianity that would take the form of a pan-monarchism, with distinct, yet still Christian, nation-states from China to Norway, each with its own Christian monarch and each seeking to realize the universality of Christian doctrine, uniquely shaped by provincial manners and climate. Like Cardinal Ratzinger (now

Pope Benedict) in recent years, some in the church world respectfully criticized Hegel's system as a form of idolatry that virtually put the State in the place of God (J.A. Allen, 2001).

Before consigning Hegel's vision of an interconnected social universe to the dustbin of history, it is worth pausing to consider the recent work on the sociology of the family by the historian and "new demographer" Peter Laslett (2000). According to Laslett, something resembling the Hegelian family existed in parts of European society from late medieval times to the Industrial Revolution. Households were relatively small, from 4-6 all over Europe, but not as small as would later be the case (p. 95). In this period, nuclear families formed around voluntary marriages with close affectionate ties were much more common than is appreciated by such influential modern critics as Lawrence Stone (1990), who argued that such nuclear families only arose later, due to the uprooting effects of the Industrial Revolution. Many of these families went to churches that were sanctioned and supported by the State. The social and moral vision of these churches, in turn, shaped political and social policy and fostered a communitarian ethos in society at large (Laslett, 2000).

We might, in hindsight, say that Hegel and the German ideology represent a last gasp effort to retain, even while modernizing, a stabilizing synthesis of some traditional goods and values relative to the institutions of church, family, and state. Over the ensuing century, however, influential critics would go much further in undermining this synthesis by developing contractual, democratic Enlightenment ideals, first crystallized by Locke and Kant. Many modern studies on the history of marriage give prominent place to the work of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), who radically reconceived human and social relations on the model of the contract and forcefully advocated the emancipation of women and the woman's role in marriage. Nadia Urbinati (1991) holds that "it was only Mill who

transformed this notion [of an ideal marriage, of a soul mate] into an instrument with which to denounce the reality of family life” (p. 638).

Mill denounced the traditional system of marriage for being abusive towards women and children. He objected to “the whole character” of the marriage relation as constituted by law because “it confers upon one of the parties to the contract, legal power and control over the person, property, and freedom of action of the other party, independent of her own wishes and will” (Shanley, 1993, p. 3). According to Witte’s (1997) analysis, Mill’s attack on the institution of marriage was really an attack on the church’s theological interpretation of natural law and scripture:

The prevailing theology and law of marriage and the family supports a threefold patriarchy, Mill charged. The church dictates to the state its peculiar understanding of nature. The state dictates to the couple the terms of their marital relation and abandons them once the terms are accepted. The man lords over his wife and children, divesting them of all liberty and license in their person and property, thought and belief. (p. 200)

Instead of church and state hegemony over marriage, Mill championed making marriage into a social contract between equal partners who would share mutual affection and friendship. He argued that nature taught not the bondage and submission of women to men but natural liberty and equality of all. He thus asserted that marriage ought to be an institution “shaped by the preferences of wife and husband, not the prescriptions of church and state” (John Witte, 1997, p. 201). In applying the implications of his view, he sought to end what he considered as controlling institutional practices like parental consent, church consecration, and formal witnesses. He thought that the exalted status of heterosexual monogamy should be questioned.

He championed the idea that husbands and wives should be equals in everything, including property, and he promoted severe punishment for abusive husbands.

Some recent studies have shown that a century before Mill, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), a British writer and denizen of a prominent salon in the era of the French Revolution, anticipated almost line by line Mill's view of marriage as a friendship/partnership “that incorporates the major features of the classical notion of higher friendship such as equality, free choice, reason, mutual esteem and profound concern for one another's moral character” (Abbey, 1999, p. 78). Wollstonecraft, like Rousseau, believed that marriage was an inevitable institution for most and therefore should be taken seriously. However, in contrast with Hegel's portrait of conservative families in a conservative state, Wollstonecraft entertained a vision of the family that incorporated many of the more liberal, individual-rights based, and contractual trends that were coming to the fore in early modern society.

The cornerstone of Wollstonecraft's argument is that the promotion of individual dignity and rights can best serve to eliminate arbitrary power relationships and domination in the social world. Later, Mill became famous for daring to go beyond the limits of critiques about arbitrary power structures in the public domain only. He extended that critique into the home and, indeed, into the bedroom. Yet, for all of his fame, he was not the first to do so. Rousseau had initiated a critique of this sort a little over a hundred years before, and soon after Wollstonecraft extended it in what now seem like some remarkable and prescient ways.

To be sure, Wollstonecraft did not translate the liberalism of the marketplace into the private sphere in a wholesale or unqualified manner. Like Rousseau, she believed the strictures of the female body and the inclinations and talents given her by nature indicated different duties for the woman in the household as wife and mother. Yet she took a somewhat more liberal stance

than Rousseau concerning the education of women. She felt that the same woman might appropriately assume different roles in society at large, and should be educated for possibly undertaking both private and public duties (Wollstonecraft & Lynch, 2009).

Wollstonecraft was years ahead of her time and anticipated much of the ideal of companionate marriage of the 20th century. As Shumway (2003) observes, in the 20th century the new middle classes are positioned economically and educationally to develop new patterns of love and intimacy. No longer are marriages typically arranged, as in the ancient world, to preserve social status and long-accumulated wealth. Also, marriages are no longer understood in mainly practical terms, as in medieval and early modern times where couples would marry in large part for the sake of generating children, who would in turn provide more hands to work the farm or estate. Wollstonecraft, under the sway of Rousseau's Romanticism, promoted a conception of marriage based almost entirely on personal intimacy and intense passion, not mere duty and ordinary affection (Abbey, 1999).

Yet, Wollstonecraft was in some ways very much the creature of her times. She could not conceive of the advancement of the individual woman on her own outside the institution of marriage. And like Rousseau, Wollstonecraft, concerning a future wife's education for her role and her considerable influence in the domain of the family counsels her to flirt, play the coquette, and be wily when she needs to be. Still, Wollstonecraft argues that the woman needs to be trained to appreciate the limitations of the behavior enjoined by that counsel. To an extent, she needs to transcend that role. Otherwise, it will make of her little more than an older child and, indeed, an incompetent mother to her actual children.

Wollstonecraft's emphasis on a proper education of the male and female seemed to foresee that which might become a problem for individuals in the course of time itself; that is,

that the passions in a relationship may burn out and that a married couple might have mistaken sexual passion for genuine intimacy.

Wollstonecraft was less naïve than Rousseau, who seemed to think that a married couple could withdraw from society and live largely within the womb of their relationship. But she romanticized the marriage relationship much more than Hegel, for whom it was primarily a matter of proper duty and function. In this way, Wollstonecraft anticipates theories of companionate marriage in the 20th century, in which feelings of intimacy become the dominant motif for conceptualizing the good marriage. Indeed, Shumway (2003) argues:

It was not...until the romantic movement and the rise of the novel, especially the pulp novel, in the 19th century, that society at large accepted a new idea—that it was normal and indeed praiseworthy for young men and women to fall passionately in love, and that there must be something wrong with those who have failed to have an overwhelming experience sometime in late adolescence or early adulthood. (p. 75)

Wollstonecraft also anticipated the fact that some women might not choose to marry at all, a possibility that Mill stressed and approved of to a much greater extent. She thought that natural reason would move the majority of women to marry. Therefore, she encourages women to seek a fit romantic partner. Such a man would be much more emotionally involved than the traditional, dominant, but usually absent breadwinner. Such physical and emotional distance is a necessary condition of the (in our eyes) arbitrary power relationships in traditional marriage, a situation that Wollstonecraft's picture of the good marriage effectively undermines. To be sure, Wollstonecraft saw the French Revolution as a watershed moment in the destruction of arbitrary power relationships.

Looking back, it appears that Wollstonecraft's study of marriage was narrow and limited in the sense that it did not sufficiently take into account the wider social context that would increasingly put considerable strain on marriage and nuclear families. Frédéric LePlay (1806-1882) began to focus on these problems (Fauve-Chamoux & Ochiai, 2009). LePlay argues that perhaps the most lamentable characteristic of the then emerging industrial society in Victorian times is “the unstable family,” one composed of a married couple and their unmarried children. Urbanization, the quickening pace of life in the city, and the fragmentation of social life dictated that those unmarried children would eventually leave home to found new households, often far away and among strangers with often quite different ethnic and religious backgrounds. LePlay regarded the family as valuable and indispensable, but felt that in the age of industrialization it had become one of the most fragile institutions in all of history. The only antidote, in his view, was somehow to return to the larger kinship groups of the pre-modern, traditional cultures (Casey, 1989).

LePlay proposed that Western society promote the notion of a *stem family*, a modification of institutions and practices from Western society in more traditional times. LePlay felt that this alone could stem the tide of rampant, alienating change (Fauve-Chamoux and Ochiai, 2009). The key feature of the stem family is that a single “house” would be transmitted from one generation to another, guaranteeing the family’s continuing stability and cohesion. The father was to establish a house and home and transmit it to the eldest son, who would become the manager of this “estate.”

As far as possible, younger siblings would work for the house rather than alien employers in factories. The whole family and others would be guided by a moral code that even if not derived from the church directly, reflects many more traditional values and would be transmitted

to the next generation. All family members were expected to be celibate, except for the “heir” to the house. Those who did not want to participate in the house system were allowed to leave. They might continue to receive some income from the family, but the basic family capital was held by the heir to sustain the house for generations to come. LePlay also advocated a form of “home-schooling” that might employ tutors but provided a complete education for offspring. Finally, no serious personal or practical conflicts would be farmed out for resolution to impersonal public authorities.

It is easy to imagine how LePlay’s critics would respond to this utterly sincere but rather cockamamie proposal. Echoing Wollstonecraft, they would wonder: Where is the romance? Where is the companionship? And, of course, it seems quite impossible that the institution of such a house could survive the onslaught of modernity.

Marriage in the United States

The development of marriage and family life in the 19th century took some different turns across the Atlantic in the United States, as traditional marriage and family culture sought to accommodate itself to modern trends such as pluralism, respect for individual liberty, and eventually the uprooting effects of the industrial revolution. During the 1990’s, as the Director of the Lilly Project on *Religion, Culture, and the Family* at the University of Chicago, Don Browning (2000) summarized extensive research of his own and his colleagues into the North American experience of marriage and family in his book *From Culture Wars to Common Ground: Religion and the American Family Debate*. One of Browning’s overriding concerns was to find a way to mediate between contemporary conservative and progressive ideologies in their struggle over the future—if it should even have one—of American family and marriage.

Browning (2000) delves into the 18th and 19th century roots of the North American experience of family. He identified two major patterns in family life of that era. In the northeastern colonies in and around Massachusetts, where the English Puritans had settled in the 17th century, family life reflected the sort of commonwealth that had been established by the Calvinist wing of the Protestant Reformation in Europe. The Calvinist emphasis on the presence of the divine in ordinary and everyday life was a reaction against the perceived dominance, actual or potential, of a medieval Catholic hierarchy that mediated grace primarily through a system of sacraments under their strict control. In the Puritan view, God's creative and ordering activity was present in every sphere from the ground up, which included the family.

In the Puritan communities, marriage was deemed a sacred covenant equal to, or superior to, the priesthood. In a sense, the home was to be a little church unto itself with its own congregation and minister. Although husbands and fathers occupied the position of an authoritative patriarch, this authority was moderated by a sense of mutual responsibility between husband and wife, and parents and children. In both the family and the community at large, life was based upon individuals exercising discipline, self-control, and responsibility, for the good of the community and, ultimately, to the glory of God. By contrast, in the middle and southern colonies, established by Anglican aristocrats and landowners, a somewhat different family form took root, a blend of Anglican high church and Catholic models, that reflected not the actual hierarchy of Catholicism but hierarchical patterns echoing the English monarchy—a pattern that included a servant class and even slavery.

The Revolutionary War against England undermined both Puritan and Anglican/Catholic family forms. Any semblance or analogy to monarchical forms of government was discouraged and for the most part quickly disappeared from the scene. A constellation of forces, including

industrialization, religious revivalism, and the Enlightenment philosophy of John Locke, began to transform the ideology and form of the North American family.

As the agricultural economy gave way to industrialization, as cities superseded towns and small communities, husbands and fathers began to lose their almost imperial authority. The shift from a farm labor economy to a wage economy altered roles within the family because it signaled the end of the interdependent family who shared the burdens of work on the farm under the singular authority of the patriarch. Moreover, as progressive forces took hold, and the ideas of democracy, equality, and individual rights came to the fore, the traditional authority of the husband and father became more symbolic than actual. Thus, by the end of first half of the 19th century, a new type of family had emerged as a result of these modernizing forces and trends. In that period, the phenomenon of the stay-at-home mother who became dependent upon the wages of the absent working father became commonplace among bourgeois, middle-class families.

In this process, Browning (2000) saw more plainly what sociologist Max Weber had viewed in only incipient form as a hallmark of modern Western society: the spread of “technical rationality” or means-ends thinking into everyday life. Browning viewed the spread of technical rationality into everyday life as a destructive influence upon the practice of traditional marriage. Indeed, once machine production had set the terms for economic flourishing in the “industrial age,” it became obvious that technical rationality (the idea that causal laws determined how everything worked and how these laws could be rationally applied or manipulated to control and predict outcomes) had become the distinguishing factor in modernity. The very discipline of sociology itself, some say, emerged to identify and analyze such laws in operation.

Even Weber, who had argued that the phenomena of the universe were reducible to discoverable or rational principles through technical rationality, recognized that this meant the

universe had thereby been “disenchanted.” It had lost its mystery and was made subject to the logic of *techné*, a force that seeks ever more efficient means to satisfy individual and collective ends. Paradoxically, this reduction of all goods to purely instrumental efficiency or effectiveness has itself, come to be our ideal of the good life for much of modern culture (Habermas, 1991; Frank Richardson, et al. 1999; Taylor, 1989). Ironically, the Second Great Awakening of religious faith and fervor in the second half of the 19th century, according to Browning (2003), served ultimately to reinforce rather than effectively challenge these rationalizing trends. Increasingly, late-modern society was organized into sharply divided public and private spheres of life. In line with this public/private divide, families increasingly became modern “nuclear” families with less and less intense social or moral ties to one another or public institutions. In Browning’s words, “Methodist-style preaching, conversion, and spirituality interacted with this new industrial economy to reinforce, legitimize, and purify this middle-class family pattern” (p. 34).

The coupling of industrialization with revivalist religion functioned to solidify the 19th century family pattern and institutionalized a tacit cultural agreement regarding sexual roles between men and women. As the men assimilated to religion and vowed to work hard and remain loyal even in the face of alienating pressures wrought by the new economy, the women submitted in turn to their role as homemaker, helpmate, cook, and emotional nurturer for the family. This arrangement was validated, according to Browning (2003), by a singular reading of the “household codes” of Ephesians 5.21-33 and elsewhere, which served to “endow this family pattern with the aura of sacred legitimation” (p. 35).

These household codes, not entirely dissimilar to those found in Aristotle’s *Economics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, were applied in this period to establish a gendered arrangement that

collapsed much of a woman's identity, including her legal name and possessions, into that of her husband. The Biblical idea of "becoming one flesh" was thus construed to justify this so-called godly arrangement in terms of the common law. In her history of American marriage, Nancy Cott (2000) explains:

The common law thus turned the married pair legally into one person—the husband. . . .

This legal doctrine of marital unity was called *coverture*. Coverture in its strictest sense meant that a wife could not use legal avenues such as suits or contracts, own assets, or execute legal documents without her husband's collaboration. (p.11)

This is exactly the kind of inequality and subordination that Mill, ahead of his time, argued against so vociferously.

Browning (2003) summarizes this new moral configuration, "The nineteenth-century middle-class ideal of the family—with its synthesis of commercial, legal, and revivalist elements—should be seen as a creative if flawed response to modernization in the form of market rationality" (p. 36). Viewed somewhat positively, at least in Browning's perspective, the peculiar convergence of modern rationality and Great Awakening morality relative to the institution of marriage provided needed stability to the institution of marriage specifically and the social fabric in general, at least in the United States. It made divorce rare and made marriages more "companionate" and child-centered than perhaps at any other period in human history.

It wouldn't take long, however, for this social fabric to begin to unravel. Western culture at large could not sustain for long a "one-size fits all" institutional pattern of marriage and family, especially not one modeled on a 19th century middle-class Anglo-American view of the home as a private sanctuary for the conjugal core—i.e., working father, homemaking mother, and their offspring. Since the mid-1960's, especially, the normative force of this model has

dissipated considerably. The light has been shined ever more brightly on its internal inconsistencies and injustices. An explosive growth of multiple forms of intimate relationships, family formation, and diverse lifestyles has ensued. What happened?

Chapter 6: Marriage in 20th Century Social Science

One of the effects of the increase in wealth of Western societies that came with industrialization was the increase in the number and reach of institutions of higher learning. With the founding and expansion of new universities came an increase of the number of sciences and disciplines. New sciences, including the social sciences, were born, and with them came a burgeoning of studies of marriage and family (Bockstaele, 2004).

From the ancient world to the present, marriage and the family of which it is part has been a basic, intrinsic aspect of civilized Western culture. In the 19th century, however, these new kinds of social scientists examined marriage with new research tools, like demographic research and statistics. And for the first time, marriage and family began to be considered a problematic social institution. The rapid industrialization of Western culture began to disrupt the traditional family pattern, and the movement from farms to cities began to shift the roles of husband and wife in the domestic sphere, and to isolate families socially and emotionally. These changes highlighted the weakening solidarity of the existing social order, and led many scholars to study the institutions of the family and marriage (Casey, 1989, p. 11).

The new disciplines of sociology and social anthropology emerged, in part, in response to this massive dislocation of persons. Also, over the course of the Industrial Revolution, the division of labor and the accumulation of wealth had given rise to a new middle class, and the traditional social hierarchies were no longer serving to stabilize the social order as in the past. Sociologists like Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) examined the impact of industrialization upon traditional family structures (and the impact of family structure on industrialization). Durkheim, for example, sought to delineate the scientific laws that governed social life, including the institutions of marriage and the family (Lamanna, 2001).

Varying approaches to the study of the family and marriage surfaced, reflecting what might be termed relatively more “liberal” or “conservative” viewpoints in the culture at large, setting the stage for the multifarious and antagonistic debates about the form and function of the family that rage throughout the 20th century. Marriage and family relationships were undergoing transformation and could no longer be seen as just historical or biological inevitabilities or in terms of religious requirements, but as contingent, evolving phenomena that needed to be studied in a more unbiased and objective fashion.

These new studies, in the main, examined the influences of industrialization on the sort of conjugal or nuclear kind of family that was emerging in Victorian times, with the home organized around a wage-earning father and home-making mother. For the new bourgeois middle class, this “home” seemed the absolutely best way to promote traditional values, patriarchal discipline, and the emotional bonding of husband, wife, and children. The conjugal family was deemed an autonomous, private refuge within a competitive and otherwise impersonal wider society. As Christopher Lasch famously put it, the family became a “haven in a heartless world” (Lasch, 1995).

Contemporary socialists like Engels and Marx, however, saw the nuclear family as anything but a natural or inevitable and desirable state of affairs. It was a bourgeois invention, an oppressive derivative of the patriarchal Church, whether Catholic or Eastern Orthodox, and a suffocating residue of the conservative German Ideology. Others, like LePlay, sought to shore up the nuclear family that was simply too fragile for the exceedingly mobile, fragmenting society. In hindsight, we can see that the nuclear family was not going away any time soon, but its relevancy would be called into question by the second half of the 20th century and into the next.

The 20th century was a time of turmoil for the entire planet, and the family and the institution of marriage were hardly spared rough and damaging treatment. However constructive or benign the motive of diverse schools of thought about marriage in this era, continued debate hardly resolved the problem that marriage and family presented. Questions persisted: Is the family a kinship group or a biological unit? In either case, what is the purpose of marriage? Were there advantages to allowing divorce? Did the family stem from a patriarchal clan or a matriarchal commune? Is the family a necessary social structure or a hindrance to authentic individuality?

One influential school of thought sought to address these questions in terms of a single, overriding principle of *functionalism*: namely, how did marriage and family function to bring about presumably desirable ends? Functionalist theory, introduced in the early 20th century in Great Britain, grew out of Durkheim's anthropology. Its principle theorists were Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955) and Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942). Inspired by the growing interest in the ideas of evolution and natural selection, functionalism sought to analyze social practices and institutions the way biologists study the various functions of the parts of a living organism (Stocking, 1991, 1998).

Functionalist analyses sought to explain how social institutions like the family functioned in or adapted to particular contexts to preserve and contribute to the health and welfare of the larger society. Marriage and family were no longer to be understood as intrinsic goods with their own purposes and values, constituted as a part of an essentially ethical or religious order. Rather, they were to be investigated in terms of the ways they contributed to things like social coherence and stability (Sussman, Steinmetz, & Peterson, 1999).

Functionalists intended to provide a less speculative, less purely theoretical approach to the study of institutions like the family than the kind of evolutionary theories and perspectives that were popular at the turn of the century. Evolutionary theories of the family sought to derive a historical understanding of primitive social groupings by applying the supposedly universal and uniform processes of natural selection to contemporary customs and practices, and then making deductions about the past. The evolutionary approach presented a progressive, linear picture of how primitive societies developed into supposedly more advanced cultures. Functionalist theories took none of this for granted and promoted careful empirical observation of particular practices and institutions in their specific cultural context. On this basis, they felt they could offer credible judgments as to how various human activities serve particular needs and valuable functions.

During the first half of the 20th century, the functionalist approach—seemingly objective, fact-based, and pragmatic—became the privileged view in the social scientific community (Martindale, 1965). In their enthusiasm, however, proponents of this view may not have realized the extent to which their work entailed not just a new methodology, but a significant shift in the basic meaning of marriage and family for humans. Marriage, that is, lost considerable value as a divinely sanctioned union or a naturally good and fulfilling activity in and of itself and was reduced to just another organ in the social body, whose purpose and meaning was entirely relative to its “function.”

The two major early proponents of functionalism, Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, each took the theory in a different direction (Young, 2004). Both Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown agreed that society was structured to operate as a working unity, a system in which each part functioned to accommodate every other part in order to maintain the efficient operation of the

whole, and that socio-cultural systems function to maintain social stability and equilibrium. However, they disagreed as to whether the individual parts or the collective whole should be the primary focus of attention. Radcliffe-Brown favored a sociological, soon to be known as “structuralist” approach that focused on delineating and theorizing broad social systems and structures (Sturrock, 2003). In his view, replaceable individual parts were important largely in terms of whether and how they fulfilled necessary roles and functions. Malinowski privileged the individual and inaugurated lines of inquiry that concentrated on individual agency including some psychological aspects of it (Young, 2004, p. 140). For Malinowski, social institutions exist to support and satisfy the needs of individuals rather than the other way around.

Developed first in England, Malinowski’s ideas crossed the ocean and were adopted by the influential Chicago School (Bulmer, 1986), among whose leaders were the progressive, pragmatist thinkers John Dewey (1859-1952) and George Herbert Mead (1863-1931). Dewey and Mead became famous for further elaborating just how the individual was shaped and influenced by his or her social environment. They generated a kind of social psychology that carried functionalist principles forward to describe how social forces work through individuals in an often unconscious and quasi-automatic fashion. However, Mead developed this perspective, which he called *symbolic interactionism*, in a way that increasingly gave greater prominence to the ways individuals sought meaning and developed their identities through purposeful interaction with others in their social milieu. In such interactions, individuals in relationship co-created the meanings, structures, and the guidelines for their shared activities (Mead & Morris, 1967).

Some researchers were not comfortable with such broad, “big picture” social theory. Over the period roughly from the Great Depression to the end of the Second World War,

academic research into marriage and family took a decidedly empiricist turn. For example, the *National Council on Family Relations* was founded in 1938 partly with the intention to develop standards for family studies that put greater emphasis on quantitative measurement and methods (L'Abate, 1985). So for the next few decades, the field of marriage and family studies developed along two different, sometimes complementary, sometimes divisive pathways. One approach, part of a growing emphasis on a genuinely experimental social psychology, sought to explain individual human behavior and action in terms of impersonal, objective, would-be universal laws (Bengtson, 2005). The other approach held on to a broader sociological and anthropological viewpoint of human action as a function of the wider social context and subject to influences—indeed mutual influences—that could not be reduced to straightforward effects of identifiable causes.

Protagonists of both these approaches continued to hone their respective methodologies and among other topics, devoted a significant amount of their energies to investigating factors that contributed to or weakened the stability of the family system and the cohesion of its members (Sussman, et al., 1999). Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) was the best-known American sociologist at mid-century and the most prominent exponent of the more theoretical, holistic approach. He blended the key ideas of contending structuralist and functionalist schools of thought and applied them in devising detailed explanations for how individuals acted out of specific roles within social systems to keep them in balance (Parsons, Shils, & Smelser, 2001). In the late 1940's, Parsons helped launch the *Department of Social Relations* at Harvard, which brought sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists together to advance their understanding of how social systems maintain themselves, adapt to interruptions and challenges in society, and socialize individuals to play their part in this process (Gerhardt, 2002).

By the early 1950s, building on a tradition crystallized by the work of John B. Watson (1878-1958), author of the influential book *Behaviorism* (Watson, 1924), many marriage and family researchers were adopting strict behaviorist principles and positivist methods in their work. They sought to make marriage and family studies a branch of experimental natural science. Their ideology, stress on controlled methods, and aim of finding context-free principles of human behavior have exerted considerable influence on the field of marriage and family studies down to the present (Bengtson, 2005; L'Abate, 1985).

In the 1950's, anthropologists like Gregory Bateson (1904-1980) and psychiatrists like Murray Bowen (1913-1990) and Don Jackson (1920-1968) founded a new school of marriage theory and therapy that derived from the theoretical tradition of Parsons and distinctly rebelled against the new behaviorist approaches ascendant in the academy (Harries-Jones, 1995). They theorized families and marriages as part of a homeostatic family system that functioned to coordinate individual actions in ways that maintained the system's equilibrium and well-being (Hecker & Wetchler, 2003; Piercy, Sprenkle, & Wetchler, 1996). They enriched the structuralist/functionalist model with input from a wide variety of other perspectives: Kurt Lewin's field theory, Harry Stack Sullivan's holistic view of interpersonal relationships, Einstein's general theory of relativity that seemed to call into question any ideals of absolute objectivity, linguistic theory that viewed language as a system of inter-defined meanings, and an emerging view of biology that saw organisms as constituents of a living system that work together to produce a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Elements from cognitive and developmental psychology, as well as attachment theory and new object relations psychoanalytic viewpoints, were included in this rich new perspective on human relations in general and marriage and family relations in particular. This perspective attracted a great deal of attention in

some academic quarters, in the worlds of clinical and counseling psychology, and in popular culture (Piercy, et al., 1996).

Starting around 1960 and for the next 20 years, however, family and marriage studies in the academy came to be dominated more by an emphasis on exploring how individuals manage inevitable conflict and negotiate the often sharp individual differences within their families than on families as bastions of mutual harmony (Wilmot, Hocker, Hocker, & William, 2010). However dry and academic these studies might seem, this shift resonated with an emphasis on conflict and concerns about domination that were being brought to the fore by critical social, sometimes Marxist, theorists and new feminist theory and research. The accent was now on social conflict and on understanding how individual members struggle to control and protect limited resources within the system (Nass & McDonald, 1982; White & Klein, 2008). The most prominent academic approach in this vein was *social exchange* theory and research, concerned with conceptualizing and measuring the specific ways individuals negotiated their interests and needs in close relationships. Applying some concepts from economic exchange theory and integrating the idea of behavioral reciprocity from operant psychology, social exchange theory assumed that individuals act out of a natural desire to maximize their self-interests and to promote their personal satisfaction. Interacting individuals were thought to subject their actions to cost-benefit analyses and behave in ways thought to bring about the most satisfactory outcome for the individual (Boss, 1993).

Interdependence Theory

Perhaps the best known form of exchange theory is Kelley and Thibaut's (1959) *Interdependence Theory*, which sought to integrate psychological and sociological perspectives in order to provide a genuinely scientific explanation of interpersonal human interaction in close

or emotionally valued dyadic relationships, especially marriage. Their work has spawned much commentary and a host of empirical studies by social psychologists in recent decades. In 1959, Harold Kelley (1921-2003) and John Thibaut (1917-1986) published their seminal work on social interdependence which focused on the balance of rewards and costs in social exchange among interdependent individuals in groups (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Kelley's (1979) view of a happy and committed relationship was one in which both individuals in a relationship have the capacity to coordinate their needs and goals with the sometimes different needs and goals of their partner. This process, often called *accommodation*, involves a high degree of personal trust and commitment. At the same time, individuals seek to control one another's reactions in a sequence of interactions (p. 13). The core notion of this view is that the *type* of interdependence structured in a situation determines how individuals interact with each other and, as a result, what benefits and satisfactions they will accrue (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978).

Since interdependence involves being sensitive to and responding to the other's reactions in close relationships, an inevitable tension arises between (1) protecting one's own interests and (2) honoring one's obligations to the other and treating him or her in a sensitive, generous, or loving fashion. The positive qualities of sensitivity, generosity, and love as listed in (2) make it plain that Kelley (1979) *presupposes* the importance of traditional values of this sort in some form, even if trying to make sense of them within the confines of his theory turns out to be quite a challenge. Kelley attempts to address this dilemma by analyzing precisely the affective consequences of different sorts of interaction, conceptualized largely in terms of costs and benefits. He tries to specify just what kinds of coordinated interdependent behaviors promote cooperation and what kinds create conflicts of interest, alienating competition, or unhealthy dependency. Although Kelley uses the language of economics and seems, at times, to present

individuals as exclusively self-interested beings who instrumentally use others to obtain desirable outcomes, Rusbult (1998) argues that the heart of the theory concerns the nature and effects of truly interdependent interaction rather than merely hedonistic motivation and behavior (Rusbult, Bissonnette, Arriaga, & Cox, 1998, p. 222). Nevertheless, it remains something of a puzzle as to how this kind of interaction might come about.

Kelley (1982) is especially concerned with the manner and degree to which an individual's self-interested preferences can be superseded for the sake of developing healthy, long-term relationships based on mutual trust and commitment. While Kelley never makes it clear just what it is that enables one to establish mutual trust, he nevertheless differentiates between two types of interdependence. One type is in fact hedonistic, economically oriented, and based strictly on the immediate and reciprocal exchange of goods and services. The other type is altruistic and oriented by certain stable, general interpersonal dispositions and attitudes, like trust and commitment.

Kelley (1982) theorized an interpersonal behavioral system that might regulate emotion and behavior in fairly predictable ways. His model assumes that an individual's behavior in successful close relationships, while motivated by the desire to maximize one's own outcomes, still sensitively takes the partner's wished for outcomes into account. He appreciates the fact that such a model is predicated on the ability of individuals to either accommodate or defer their own goals based on their partner's perceived needs or behaviors in a particular situation. He recognizes that the struggle to negotiate how one preserves one's own autonomy while remaining happily connected presents a real challenge. Kelley writes that "an exchange of benefits occurs only if each person sets aside their countervailing preferences" and that, in due course, "the exchange always involves some intrapersonal conflict for each person." Thus in any

ongoing relationship, “this conflict sets the stage for one person or the other to fail to give benefits to the partner while receiving benefits from the partner” (p. 128).

Although, according to Kelley (1982), “the exchange problem can be solved on an ad hoc basis, through each person making the giving of benefit contingent upon receiving one,” he also realizes that such a strictly quid pro quo exchange is inherently fragile and subject to breakdown and that durable reciprocity is attainable only over a long time-span. At any given point in time, he suggests, such exchange may be facilitated according to the rule of “always help the other.” That is, following this rule promotes the exchange and “the pair is spared the vicissitudes of the ad hoc process” (p. 129). This suggestion nonetheless seems to entail a rather substantial paradox. It seems that one must exhibit the generous and cooperative behavior that is the fruit of a mature interdependent relationship in order to first begin to develop such a relationship, well before it even exists.

Kelley (1982) seems to have two main solutions to this problem, neither one of which fully addresses it. First of all, he suggests that the healthy development of voluntary personal relationships proceeds along the lines of mutual rather than asymmetrical dependence. Such a relationship amounts to a coordinated process whereby partners evaluate events in terms of their combined consequences, seeking the highest possible outcomes for both, something he terms a “mutual max joint” transformation (pp. 74-75). Mutual max joint moments in relationships are characterized by the fact that an individual’s own reactions to the partner no longer need to be oriented mainly to controlling that individual's future behavior. Rather, the couple together can transform their given, even if self-serving, preferences into a mutually beneficial outcome. As a result, the two individuals may reasonably conclude that they will be happier together instead of apart.

Kelley (1982) argues that the cumulative benefits accrued from mutual max joint moments of transformation lead to the formation of “transformational tendencies,” relatively stable dispositions that predisposes relationship partners to alter or temporarily set aside immediate personal preferences as a result of being responsive to how the partner’s behavior will affect one’s own (p.76). Later theorists in this research tradition term these habitual orientations towards others *macromotives* (J. G. Holmes, 1981; C. E. Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998) or *relational schemas* (Baldwin, 1992) that function to sustain the relationship.

Even if these ideas tell us something important about stable, cooperative interdependent relationships, they do not resolve the aforementioned paradox that the presumed eventual fruit of such relationships seems required in advance to get them underway. Kelley (2003) acknowledges that some kind of trust is required for the transformation of immediate self-interest into pro-relationship behavior, but he never explains what that trust is or where it comes from. The alternative, as he indicates (p. 297), is a kind of cautious reciprocity that demands immediate evidence or assurance that one’s partner’s self-interested preferences are falling in line with exchanges in which one’s own needs are being met.

Rusbult et al. (1999) point out that an alliance is volatile and subject to a self-interested calculus concerning current levels of satisfaction, available alternatives, and the amount of resources already invested in the relationship. Once it becomes clear that the relationship can no longer provide expected levels of satisfaction, negative traits begin to be attributed to the other, and perhaps the judgment is made that the partner is ultimately self-serving, irresponsible, or totally untrustworthy. One becomes insecure, sensing that the partner is not considering one’s best interests, and necessarily takes steps to protect them. If one is “other-focused” and unclear about one’s own identity and begins to feel that he or she *needs* the relationship more than the

partner, one may strategize ways to bind the other more securely to the relationship. If “self-focused” and overly assertive, one may become domineering, less caring, or simply withdraw.

Other theorists have sensed this difficulty and tried to address it from within the framework of interdependence theory. They appreciate the importance of trust in marriage and interpersonal relationships generally and seek to clarify a kind of trust calculus that could be used to assess the status of relationships or to predict their success (Holmes, 1989; Insko, 1998; Kramer, 1998). The dispositions to trust and to make long-term commitments are recognized as crucial factors in enabling partners to transcend their own immediate self-interest to order to accommodate the other’s needs, even when their own needs have to be at least temporarily set aside. Without trust, Holmes (1981) writes,

[Persons are] tempted to take out various forms of security insurance to protect themselves against the rising tide of risk. They essentially move to decrease interdependence in the relationship by forging an implicitly social contract that puts their fate less in the hands of their partner. (p.94)

Holmes (1981) understands that “trusting individuals typically have a sense of personal control predicated on the assumption that attachment figures will respond to their efforts if they make their needs clear” (p.62). Holmes has found that, while power over another’s reactions provides some control in the absence of trust, trust actually serves to reduce risky and apprehensive dependence upon others. Thus, Holmes states, “The sense of control described for trusting individuals was achieved by their taking the risk of increasing dependence, with the expectation that the closer the ties they forged, the more responsive partners would be to their efforts” (p. 62).

Still, the ultimately hedonistic premises of the theory remain firmly in place. According to Holmes (1981), persons' decisions to trust the relationship become “increasingly tied to their subjective forecasts of what the future holds” (p. 66). In his view,

people discover that for the relationship to grow they must be willing to give more, and increasingly sacrifice personal interests to accommodate the needs of the partner. Of course, efforts to maximize joint outcomes may be done in a spirit of caring and will often show quite immediate dividends. But it is the promise of increasing rewards in the future, the anticipation of the benefits of deeper levels of intimacy, that ultimately controls decisions to give more and increase the level of involvement. (ibid)

Actually, then, trust amounts to knowing with some certainty that one will not be disappointed by the one trusted. As Rusbult et al. (1999) explain:

To the extent that partners possess knowledge of one another's orientations, uncertainty is reduced and the odds of achieving congenial and mutually gratifying outcomes are enhanced. Given that such knowledge rests on abilities and traits such as empathy and perspective-taking, long-term functioning should be enhanced to the extent that one or both partners excel at the sorts of social-cognitive and social-emotional dispositions that increase sensitivity and awareness of a partner's preferences and motives. (p. 244-245)

Empathy and perspective-taking, however, are not the same thing as being able to tolerate the stress and uncertainty created by the differences that rise without cease between relationship partners after an initial “honeymoon period.” Perhaps for this reason, a number of interdependent theorists have recently begun to give more attention in their research to the positive payoffs that result from finding partners who have similar preferences and thus who are more compatible from the start, between whom there ostensibly would be fewer conflicting

goals and interests and less need to negotiate rival differences. Surra and Longstreth (1990), for example, argue that recent research findings “underscore the straightforward, beneficial effects of similarity on problems of interdependence.” They write:

Correspondence in the form of similar preferences makes it easier for partners to satisfy individual preferences through interaction, promotes cooperation and communication, and negates the need for transformations and their negotiation. (Surra, 1990, p. 513)

Perhaps this hankering after similarity reflects a frank recognition that transforming one’s self-interest into a more altruistic orientation toward the other is difficult to achieve in a culture that prizes the freedom of individuals to pursue happiness as they see fit. But it is beginning to sound like “transformational tendencies” and “macromotives” are merely regrettable necessities to be cultivated when dissimilarity or conflict arise—but downplaying them or hinting at skepticism about them will, surely, undermine their effectiveness.

This only underscores the mystery as to where the motivation to cultivate an attitude of and capacity for trust might come from. The faith that a relationship might unfold such that annoying and often threatening differences may be compensated by longer-term benefits and satisfactions, and the ability to tolerate acute ambiguity as to outcomes while this understanding develops, are both in short supply at the outset of a relationship, but would seem to be required in good measure for healthy interdependence to grow. At this point, both good theory and common sense cry out for some notion of how individuals, already driven by their needs for intimacy, pleasure, and the other goods of a close relationship, might be motivated by a desire just to *be* a certain *kind* of person, a patient, courageous, compassionate, generous person, or something of the sort, whose entire sense of well-being or purpose in life would not ride entirely on the favorable outcome of long-term cost-benefit analyses.

The second way Kelley (1982) seems to soften this paradox, beyond trying to describe transformational tendencies and mature interdependence in the most plausible terms his conceptual premises will allow, is simply to *assume* the reality and importance of something resembling more traditional values of commitment, loyalty, and wider purpose guiding human relationships. There is no way to prove this, of course, but it seems that Kelley, a sensitive and thoughtful observer of the human scene, at times gives voice to such ideals. He suggests that the tension between autonomy and connection in a relationship may be resolved by the extent to which the partners experience freedom because of, rather than in spite of their commitment: “The members of the best personal relationships are able to evolve a sense that they genuinely share world views and that each one is understood in the way that he/she understands himself/herself” (p. 169). Here it sounds very much like, at least for successful couples, self-interest is no longer the orienting, determinative factor, and the economic quest for negotiating satisfactory outcomes is superseded by a sense of shared agency in the pursuit of common goals.

Nevertheless, there is really no place for such traditional ideals or any simulacrum of them in interdependence theory itself. One might ask why the “altruistic” exchanges between partners in a successful relationship are in any sense qualitatively different from the purely self-interested, strictly hedonic motivation and behavior on the part of individuals that the theory posits at the outset. If they are different, then a novel element has been illegitimately introduced. Among other difficulties, this would amount to an admission that the effort to explain and defend successful marriage relationships in modern social scientific terms had failed. If they are not different, then it is hard to see how such narrowly self-interested motivation and behavior could ever cope with the periodic, often intense levels of threat, uncertainty, risk, hurt and painful feelings, and tolerance of ambiguity involved in rethinking one’s core values and very identity at

certain junctures in living. Such ability and creativity would seem to be quite beyond the capacity of even the most complex apparatus for calculating rewards and costs over time. It is no wonder that interdependence theorists end up appealing to such factors as “trust,” “genuinely shared worldviews,” and “reciprocal altruism” to make sense of successful relationships. But the premises of the theory disallow the use of such constructs in their full sense.

Disguised Ideology

At the close of the 20th century, the most often cited approaches to marriage theory and research—interdependence, behavioral, social learning, and social exchange theory (Gill, 1999; Karney, 1995)—have in common the fact that they seem to classify marriages along a continuum according to how well they balance the tension between autonomy and connectedness, ranging, in effect, from severely dominant at one end of the scale to chaotic at the other (Fitzpatrick, 1988; Gottman, 1999; Lewis, 1997). From this perspective, the interpersonal aspect of the relationship is valued the extent to which the individual can secure intra-personal goods such as emotional closeness while yet retaining a strong sense of self-expression and personal freedoms (Barrett, 1997). This approach is reflected in one of the most widely used assessments of marital quality, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976), which appears to calculate individual satisfaction as a function of added benefits derived from the relationship and costs endured because of the relationship. In this view, couples who can honestly communicate their individual needs and negotiate meeting them to a reasonable extent are thought to have relatively good marriages. For those who cannot do so, divorce becomes an option, an assertive means to greater personal satisfaction (Doherty, 1998).

This characterization or model of marriage presents it as a delicate balancing act between competing aims of autonomy and relatedness, in conflict within and between individuals

(Rankin-Esquer, 1997) that can easily turn into a tense power struggle. This model's advocates acknowledge that the effort to realize both mutuality and equality in marriage has proved difficult and elusive (Steil, 1997). It is no wonder that many in the research community and in society-at-large are doubtful that the institution of marriage can be sustained in today's world. Is it necessarily that tenuous an enterprise? How might we go about answering that question?

The place to start is with the conceptual and value underpinnings of this model of marriage itself. I would contend that this model uncritically presupposes or reflects conceptions of human action and cultural and moral values that, indeed, shape many of the aims and institutions of our kind of modern society, but may not represent the last word concerning human possibilities or the good life.

A key feature of social exchange theories of marriage, right in line with the self-understanding and aspirations of modern academic social science, is that they pursue their theory and research on marriage, as on human behavior and social life generally, in a "value-free" or "value-neutral" manner. In a post-traditional world, they reject the idea of basing their interpretations of any facet of human behavior on ethical or theological views of any sort. Instead, they describe or explain human action and practices, and even their subjective worlds of experience, as if they were "independent objects," that is as events in the natural world that exist entirely independently of our interpretations of them. This assumes that they can be theorized in an "objective" and, in a sense, impersonal way, just as the natural sciences give accounts of their objects.

The trouble is, few philosophers of science any longer view science as strictly value-free. It is widely contended that even natural science is a creative, interpretive endeavor in which even "objective facts" depend in part on the theories in terms of which we frame them, and in which

theory selection depends on values like parsimony or fruitfulness (Bernstein, 1983; Bishop, 2007; Kuhn, 1996). Still, according to Taylor (1985), the “relation of knowledge to practice in the natural sciences is one in which we apply what we know about causal powers to particular cases, but the truths about such causal powers that one banks on are thought to remain unchanged.” Natural science theory certainly often transforms practice. But the practice it transforms is “external to the theory” and is merely an “application” of it. Knowledge of underlying mechanisms or processes may be applied to all sorts of different practices, from manufacturing weapons to building bridges, but those different practices are not what “the theory is about” (p. 101).

In the social or human sciences, however, the role of values is more intense, because there it is commonly the case that “accepting a theory can itself transform what that theory bears on” (1985, p. 101). In this arena, as Taylor (1985) puts it, social theory is itself a “form of practice.” Theory in this domain is not *external* to the practices it may influence but “transforms its own object.” In other words, there is a relationship of intimate co-constitution, between theory and the practice that it is about. In this domain, theories “can undermine, strengthen, or shape the practice they bear on.” This is because they “are theories about practices, which...are partly constituted by certain self understandings.” To put it another way, human actions and emotions, indeed our very selves, unlike events in the natural world, are symbolically structured aspects of social reality. They are constituted by their location within the practices and norms of “language games,” traditions, or forms of life. Thus, to “the extent that theories transform this self-understanding, they undercut, bolster, or transform the constitutive features of practices” (p. 101). They may shed new and surprising light on how those practices and institutions actually operate, or on their moral implications in terms of their ethical quality or consequences.

Richardson (2011) gives an interesting example of this process concerning the phenomenon of “trust”—interesting because the idea of trust has figured so prominently, as we have seen, in marriage theory and research. The case in point is Francis Fukuyama’s (1995) extensive and influential study of the role of trust in social and economic life.

Jonathan Sacks (2002) summarizes the results of this study as showing that “markets depend on virtues not produced by the market, just as states depend on virtues not created by the state” (p. 152). Sacks argues that Fukuyama’s (1995) book *Trust* provides a rich example of a new paradigm emerging today, according to which the “most fundamental forms of [human] association” consist in bonds “not of interest or advantage, but belonging.” These connections tend to be “open-ended and enduring,” and they operate on the basis of an “unconscious choreography of mutuality” in which individuals commonly help one another spontaneously, “without calculations of relative advantage” (p. 152). In this new view, the benefits of competition not only are compatible with such mutuality but cannot be sustained without the kind of “trust” it affords. It seems obvious that social and economic practices and ideologies in our society have been heavily influenced by theories that give pride of place to ties of mutual self-interest and advantage, not of mutuality and belonging. To the extent that Fukuyama’s analysis makes sense to readers, their self-understanding and practices cannot help but be disrupted and modified.

A number of contemporary theoretical psychologists and philosophers of social science (Bishop, 2007; Fowers, 2005; Richardson, 2005; Slife, 2004) have argued that because social theory is itself a form of social practice, our theories of psychotherapy, personality, or marriage are anything but value-neutral. Rather, these theories inevitably contain an ethical coloring or dimension of some sort. The very point of such theories is to make sense of purposeful,

meaningful human practices, and yet the very process of “making sense” entails, inescapably, an ethical and evaluative component. By not recognizing or in denying any such ethical coloring, all such theories are imbued with some sort of “disguised ideology.”

To be sure, these same theoretical psychologists and philosophers of social science contend that some form of modern “individualism” is the disguised ideology of much psychological theory. Robert Bellah and his colleagues (1985) suggest that such individualism comes in two main forms. “*Utilitarian individualism* takes as given certain basic human appetites and fears...and sees human life as an effort by individuals to maximize their self-interest relative to these given ends” (p. 336). Human thought and action are essentially tools for effectively and efficiently pursuing survival, security, and satisfaction. In contrast, *expressive individualism* is guided by the belief that “each person has a unique core of feeling and intuition that should unfold or be expressed if individuality is to be realized” (p. 334). Expressive individualism arose out of the Romantic movement of the late 18th and 19th centuries as a reaction against the overly rationalistic, calculating, deadening aspects of utilitarian views and has reverberated throughout our culture down to the present day.

Richardson et.al. (1999) argue that modern existential thought, very influential in 20th century psychological theory, also represents a form of modern individualism:

Like expressivism, existential viewpoints represent a protest against the scientism and technicism of our twentieth century way of life. But existential individualism also is skeptical of the expressivist idea of getting in touch with core feelings or impulses as the main way to find integrity and direction in life. Sartre’s (1956) classic formulation of existential freedom involves repudiating any notion of pregiven inner directives or objective values as inauthentic “bad faith.” Instead, we can take a kind of total

responsibility for the *de facto* basic choices that “invent” the ultimate values and “fundamental project” of our lives as a whole. (p. 314)

The ideology of modern individualism, then, can take significantly different forms. But Richardson (2011) argues that the same basic mold of thought shows up at the heart of each of them:

All these varieties of individualism have a similar overall *instrumental* cast. Once purposes and meanings have been arrived at in an inward, self-dependent, sometimes termed “authentic” way, their implementation in everyday life takes place in a largely instrumental manner, promoting mainly individual protection and enhancement rather than qualities of character, co-operation, or relationship that are deemed worthwhile for their own sake.

Another way to make this point is to say that, in its different forms, what social and political theorists (Sandel, 1996; Selznick, 1994; W. Sullivan, 1986) term “liberal individualism” (sometimes called “liberal instrumentalism”) is the disguised ideology of those kinds of social theory and research that claim a probably quite impossible value-neutrality. Such liberal individualism is virtually the official credo of our kind of modern society. Is it any wonder that social science, trying to explain and enhance life in our society, deeply reflects this credo? It might critically examine this ideological outlook, but to the extent it aims at a strict kind of value-neutrality, social science seems bound unreflectively to reproduce values that place the needs and desires of the individual over those of the state, church, or other corporate entities—including the family as an abstract concept. A closer look at the make-up and dynamics of liberal individualism is revealing and sheds light on some of the dilemmas and confusions that seem to crop up in marriage theory and research.

Liberal individualism does not simply characterize human action as purely self-interested. It is a moral or political outlook that enshrines values of human rights and dignity that, in some form, most of us cherish. Liberal individualism combines the ideals of self-interest and respect for the rights of others in a unique modern approach to ethics. First formulated by Kant, this approach centers on *formal* principles of *procedural* justice or fairness (Neal, 1990; Rawls, 1971). Such principles "constitute a fair framework within which individuals and groups can "choose their own values and ends, consistent with a similar liberty for others" (Sandel, 1996, p. 11). The purpose of this framework is to avoid designating any particular ends in living or ways of life as superior while still assuring respect for individuals and their choices.

Liberal individualism seeks to banish dogmatism, but without abandoning serious moral ideals altogether. But critics (Kolakowski, 1986; Sarason, 1986; W. Sullivan, 1986) point out that this approach to ethics is entangled in a paradox of advocating a thoroughgoing *neutrality* toward all values as a way of *promoting* certain basic values of personal liberty, political tolerance, and human dignity and rights. In this view, by definition, moral values are necessarily subjective, not objective. This means, in part, that reasoning together about the goodness or worth of the ends we seek, personally or socially, becomes problematic. Unfortunately, it also weakens our capacity to reflect on or defend even liberal individualism's own core values or its vision of a good society, one that respects individual human rights and dignity and the rule of law. The distinguished social critic and public intellectual Daniel Bell (1978, p. xv ff.), among others, points out that this kind of weakness and contradiction in theory unfolds in practice in a harmful, self-defeating manner. An overriding emphasis on the direct pursuit of satisfaction and security, only counterbalanced by an ideal of altruism or respect for human rights that lacks real

force or conviction, seems progressively to erode our capacity to respect and cherish others. A slide toward moral relativism and social fragmentation would seem inevitably to follow.

Philip Selznick (1992) aptly summarizes this process of decline. He suggests that the modern moral and political outlook, which he would agree is some form of liberal individualism, brings great benefits of individual freedom and increased equality of opportunity, efficiency, and accountability. But this, he argues, occurs at the cost of a progressive kind of “cultural attenuation,” namely the diminishing of those “symbolic experiences that create and sustain the organic unities of social life.” There has been a movement, he writes, “away from densely textured structures of meaning to less concrete, more abstract forms of expression and relatedness.” This development “may contribute to civilization—to technical excellence and an impersonal morality—but not to the mainsprings of culture and identity” (p. 6). Modernity, he contends, “especially in its early stages, is marked by an enlargement of individual autonomy, competence, and self-assertion. In time, however, a strong, resourceful self confronts a weakened cultural context; still later, selfhood itself becomes problematic” (p. 8).

Perhaps we can now see the degree to which much social science theory and research has been wedded to the ideal of value neutrality, given its liberal individualist ideological underpinnings. The only alternative to intrusive dogmatism has seemed to be a detached neutrality with regard to the meaningful human phenomena being studied. However, Slife, Smith and Burchfield (2003) point out that dedication to value-freedom or value-neutrality embroils social scientists or psychotherapists in the acute paradox of firmly believing that they *should* or *ought* to be neutral or objective. In other words, they ought to “value being value-free” (p. 60) in a way that seems a contradictory, even a rather tortured stance toward the world. We need,

perhaps, to find another way firmly to defend against dogmatism other than throwing out the baby of desirable ethical ideals with the bath water of arbitrary authority, so to speak.

Taking note of the liberal individualist or liberal instrumentalist moral underpinnings of much psychological inquiry may also shed light on some of the puzzling, problematic features of marriage theory and research in recent times. The tense, almost antagonistic relationship between self-interest and respect for the rights of others (which often will call for an abrupt and painful suspension of the pursuit of self-interest) may be the source of the tension between autonomy and relatedness, setting up sharp conflict within individuals and somewhat of a power play between them, and the difficulty of making satisfactory sense of trust and commitment, in social exchange and interdependence theory accounts of the marriage relationship. But rethinking these assumptions may open up new possibilities for making sense of marriage in a modern or post-traditional context.

One suggestion might be that it is, indeed, possible to imagine rational and fulfilling kinds of trust and shared values in marriage of a more substantial sort than long-term calculations of individual benefit. Such a conception of marriage would have to honor the best of our current ideals of individual integrity and the enjoyment of interpersonal intimacy. But achieving such a relationship would require cultivating a kind of depth of character that goes beyond just liberation from false authority and the strength to pursue one's individual self-interest.

Section Three: Beyond Traditional and Modern Marriage

Chapter 7: Modern Dilemmas and the Plight of Marriage

In this chapter, I examine the views of a variety of theorists and critics that discuss certain dilemmas of modern marriage and the question as to what goods marriage does or might embody in a somewhat broader and more explicit way than social exchange and interdependence researchers. There is no agreement as to the nature of these dilemmas and the widely differing ideas concerning what would be desirable responses to them. Solutions proposed range from (at least a few) radical calls to dissolve the institution altogether to the considerable moderation of Kelley and interdependence theory to recent demands that Congress and the states pass an amendment to the Constitution of the United States that defines marriage strictly as the heterosexual union of a man and a woman.

Amidst this confusion and disagreement, we need to broaden the frame of reference and sketch the sociocultural and economic situation of our modern, secular, capitalist society that confronts us with unprecedented challenges to making sense of marriage in a post-traditional world—the circumstances that lie at the root of this contentious debate. A quick review of the demographics of modern society illustrates the change that is underway. Fewer couples are choosing to marry. Government studies show that, over the last 20 years, the number of marriages per 1,000 people in the U.S. in a given year has steadily declined from about 11.6 in 1970 to 7.6 in 2009, and from 1960 to 2009 the percentage of children in single-parent homes has tripled (to 27% in 2009) (www.census.gov, 2009). Births to cohabitating families and single mothers nearly doubled from 1980 to 1994, to 11% (Scommegna, 2002). Many modern persons do not deem marriage necessary at all. And among those persons who still see marriage as desirable, the bride and wedding magazines that are wildly popular could probably supply

statistics that show that marriage ceremonies or weddings themselves are increasingly performed in places once or twice removed from the actual grounds of a religious institution. Is this liberation, decline, or some confusing amalgamation of both?

The sociologist and distinguished public intellectual Alan Wolfe (1989) gives us a brilliant analysis of the social upheaval underlying these statistics. Wolfe discusses what he calls “modernity and its discontents.” He notes that over the past several decades, many citizens of modern Western societies have enjoyed a unique freedom from the everyday struggle for modern survival. And while many of these citizens enjoy the possibility of living relatively untroubled lives and may even be unaware of political battles raging around them, many people nonetheless feel that something is missing from their social world. Recalling “Max Weber’s image of a society without a soul,” Wolfe notes that for such people, “economic growth and political freedom do not seem enough.” We appear to have the “basis for the good life, but its actual attainment seems just beyond the possible” (Wolfe, 1989, p. 1).

Wolfe argues that at the heart of this discontent lies a profound confusion about *obligation*. That is, in one sense, people today may be remarkably free and unencumbered by obligations, and yet in another sense, “economic growth, democratic government, and therefore freedom itself are produced through extensive, and quite encumbered, dependence on others” (p. 2). The “sheer complexity of modern forms of social organization creates an ever-widening circle of newer obligations beyond those of family and locality.” Even as “modernity expands the scope of moral obligations, it also thins their specificity” (p. 3), because many of the ties moderns have are to abstract, generalized others—in contrast to the more restricted, specific ties of family or locality in traditional societies. In this situation, it is impossible to rely solely on

traditional authoritative moral codes, leaving us unclear about how to resolve our differences and reach agreement about crucial matters of conduct and obligation in society.

Modern societies, Wolfe (1989) reasons, have generally sought to manage their complexity—much greater than that of traditional, simpler societies—through one of two large-scale, impersonal mechanisms: the “market” or the “state” (pp.9-10). Economic approaches to social and moral regulation have to rely on prices and other market instruments to allocate limited resources, restrain individuals’ desires, and coordinate their actions. But such a system tends to place a price on everything and turns individuals into cogs in the economic apparatus of the market. People have little opportunity to resist the constraints placed upon them or to renegotiate their obligations to others so long as they are governed by unseen forces, the “invisible hand of the market.” By contrast, political approaches to the moral regulation of society emphasize “collective obligation over individual freedom.” Yet these tend to undermine individual initiative and nationalize responsibility: “When, for example, government collects my taxes and distributes the money to others, [it] assumes responsibilities that would otherwise be mine.” Consequently, “[I am] not obligated to real people living real lives around me; instead my obligation is to follow rules, the moral purpose of which is often lost to me,” thus tempting Wolfe’s citizen to avoid such “abstract and impersonal” obligations to the extent he or she is able. In Wolfe’s words, “Unlike Rousseau’s natural man, who was born free but was everywhere in chains, modern social individuals are born into chains of interdependence but yearn, most of the time, to be free” (p. 2).

Wolfe suggests that there may be an alternative to allowing the impersonal mechanisms of the market or state to organize the codes of moral obligation we live by: We can cultivate and take responsibility for a third realm, namely “civil society,” something which we have allowed to

somewhat “wither away.” Civil society consists of “families, communities, friendship networks, solidaristic workplace ties, voluntarism, spontaneous groups and movements,” and the like. In this realm, “no abstract and formal rules exist specifying what we owe others and others owe us.” Instead, “moral obligation ought to be viewed as a socially constructed practice, as something we learn through the actual experience of trying to live together with other people” (Wolfe, 1989. p. 20). We need to view ourselves more as “rule makers” than as “rule followers” (p. 22) who mainly conform to the laws of the state or the law of supply and demand. In the realm of civil society, we may be less free than the individual aspiring to autonomy and whose primary goal is to do his or her own thing, but as civic individuals we are genuinely free and responsible for fashioning or reshaping the moral rules that govern the shared practices of intertwined lives.

The theologian, sociologist, and leading marriage theorist Don Browning (2003), in line with Wolfe’s (1989) analysis, argues that the good of marriage and the social goods that derive from it have been weakened or deformed by two dominant modern influences: the hegemony of utilitarian modes of thinking about human behavior and the force of a narrowly instrumental or technical rationality that increasingly reorganizes social and economic life on its own terms. Browning also agrees that this kind of organizing technical rationality is imposed by one or the other of two large-scale social mechanisms, the capitalist free market or government bureaucracies (Browning, 2003). Traditional discourses about the meaning and value of marriage have been rendered mostly irrelevant in such a world.

With more attention to sociological detail and no grand scheme for correcting the problem, Browning provides a 20th century social critique analogous to Hegel’s 19th century counter-Enlightenment views. Browning sees the bureaucratic forms of social life imposed by market and state as tending to abstract all human relationships, including marriage, from their

traditional customs, roles and communal contexts. Individuals are “atomized”—they are stripped of meaningful social and ethical ties except for relatively impersonal and contractual ones. Positively, they have more personal liberty, are afforded the protection of valuable new rights and privileges, and have greater powers and opportunities of self-definition. At the same time, however, much of this new freedom’s scope and meaning is undercut. As they seek to organize and manage their more complex lives and resolve their differences, they are made dependent on highly abstract law, the rules of bureaucratic procedure, and the norms of market competition. Browning’s citizens are neither encouraged to pursue nor have much time or opportunity to cultivate relationships of any depth or to learn to resolve differences and conflict in ways that might lead to more refined purposes or the achievement of greater wisdom about living. In many ways, we might say that state and market bureaucracies assume the roles of parents and respected elders in traditional societies.

This brave new world, Browning (2003) argues, encourages a consumerist approach to marriage that treats it as just another opportunity for purchase or investment, always keeping expanded individual choice and satisfaction in view. This approach makes marriages more like products in a way that tends to undermine commitment, loyalty, patience, and the selfless care of spouse or children. The influence of government-as-parent, however well-intended, predictably weakens ties of loyalty and mutual responsibility within the family itself. Though a political liberal in the ordinary sense, Browning argues that, despite their intent to support families displaced by industrialization, when governmental bureaucracies began to apply welfare policies to the institutions of marriage and family, they nonetheless disrupted and weakened the family’s relational bonds, making them exceedingly dependent on state policies and assistance.

Clashing Ideologies

To help sort out these confusions, Browning (2003) distinguishes three broad approaches to rejuvenating the family that clash with one another in our current society. They are *uncritical pro-marriage familism*, *hyper-liberal inclusive familism*, and *critical progressive familism* (Browning, 2003).

Uncritical Pro-Marriage Familism

Uncritical pro-marriage familism represents a strong reaction against anything that appears to denigrate or depart from what it deems to have long been regarded as the traditional norm of marriage in Western culture, namely a permanent, monogamous union of one man and one woman. The advocates of this view contend that the political forces seeking to change marriage's core definition, and its institutionalized purposes, are neither inevitable nor good. They take issue, for example, with the way in which human rights arguments are employed to attack the exclusive opposite-sex conception of marriage. They insist that the human rights argument on behalf of same-sex marriage is circular because it only discovers discrimination after arbitrarily redefining marriage as simply a union of consenting adults (Gallagher, 2000).

An admirable recommitment to strengthening marriage and responsible family life is easily detected in these circles. However, besides an unyielding dogmatism regarding their exclusivist position, this group of ordinary citizens, politicians, and intellectuals tend to downplay the pervasive influence of the social and economic forces that isolate and tend to disintegrate modern families. They tend to insist on fixed, stable, conservative norms and practices as if they could be maintained by sheer force of will, even as they and their children are caught up in a turbo-capitalist, pluralistic, risk-filled whirlwind of a life—one that parents have to participate in to gain its social and economic rewards.

Given that many courts have struck down the historic common-law definition of marriage, uncritical pro-marriage familists often urge legislatures to reaffirm the classical definition of marriage as a legal and ethical norm. Indeed, in 2004, President George W. Bush proposed to the U.S. Congress that a constitutional amendment was needed to protect marriage in America. Bush sought specifically to counter mounting challenges to the legal definition of marriage from advocates for same-sex marriage, an escalating trend that the conservative *Institute for American Values* described as one in which "...the married couple, mother-father child-raising unit is no longer normative for the society as a whole, but instead is viewed merely as one of many ethically and socially acceptable personal life-style options" (Blankenhorn, 2003, p. 62). Responding to a recent ruling of the Massachusetts Supreme Court in favor of equal marriage rights for same-sex couples and the authorization by the Mayor of San Francisco to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples, President Bush declared, "After more than two centuries of American jurisprudence, and millennia of human experience, a few judges and local authorities are presuming to change the most fundamental institution of civilization" (CNN, 2004).

While affirming that Constitutional amendments should be reserved for matters of national concern, Bush argued that the effort to preserve the traditional view of marriage met the criterion of a national priority. A new amendment was thus needed "to prevent the meaning of marriage from being changed forever" (CNN, 2004). The Federal Marriage Amendment failed to garner the two-thirds vote necessary to pass either chamber of the congress. A significant group of Republicans joined Democrats in voting against it because of "ambiguous wording" and because they felt such action would extend federal power too far into the states' domain. Others

argued that as long as the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), was in effect, an amendment to the constitution was unnecessary (Congress, 1996).

Browning (2003) argues that the contemporary cultural debate about marriage and the family derives from 19th century trends that came to shape the North American middle-class family. He says the conservative wing of the contemporary debate over the family appeals to the allegedly Christian values promulgated during the 19th century as the basis for a return to traditional family patterns. This particular understanding of the family was set in stone by 20th century evangelical Protestants who understood themselves as “defending Christianity from the secularizing implications of market rationality and its implicit attacks on the traditional authority of men in home and church” (p. 37). But the American Protestant church was only one player in a wider movement, according to Browning. “When Republican Ronald Reagan became president in 1980, a grand coalition of conservative political and religious forces began to emerge in American public life. This coalition was dedicated to the defense and preservation of the nineteenth century middle-class family pattern” (Browning, 2003, p. 37).

Activist Christian groups such as Focus on the Family, the Moral Majority, and the Christian Coalition arose to defend traditional family values. Browning (2003) views these movements as a response to the trend toward global modernization that took the form of a “bureaucratic rationalization that was developing in the budding new socialist countries of Eastern Europe” and of a market-based order in America and Western Europe (Browning, 2003, p. 37). It is as if these groups sought to defend not just marriage but Christianity itself from the secular implications of modernity.

These familiar activist groups in recent decades seem convinced of the absolute authority of their religious beliefs and moral values as given by tradition and scripture. Yet many feel that

these groups, somewhat ironically, fail to appreciate the degree to which their views are in fact an interpretation of tradition and scripture that may be colored by a modernist epistemology that reduces complexity to an either/or dichotomy in the name of objectivity. This kind of thinking oversimplifies the complexities and confusions of modern times, and also supplies needed scapegoats to rally against in ambiguous and uncertain times. There is no time to review the matter here, but there is evidence that more and more individuals in the evangelical Protestant and Catholic community—lay members, church leaders, and theologians and other intellectuals—are slowly but surely acknowledging the complexities and ambiguities we face concerning sexual identity and the need to sustain marriage and family life in the present day (Alison, 2001; Chamberlain, 2009; McLaren).

There may be no more articulate and carefully reasoned defense of traditional marriage, however, than the one put forth by Robert P. George, a professor of jurisprudence at Princeton and co-author of the 2004 proposal for a constitutional marriage amendment (Tubbs, 2004). George offers a very strong defense, if not an uncritical one, of a conservative view of traditional marriage as a basic human good grounded in natural law. He asserts that marriage is “an intrinsic good that provides noninstrumental reasons for choice and action, reasons that are knowable and understandable even apart from divine revelation” (p.11).

George (2001) reasons that the goods of marriage are grounded, in part, on the fact that they are constituted by *reproductive-type acts* occurring in the procreative union between male and female. “Rational reflection on marriage as it is participated in by men and women makes it clear,” argues George. “Since men and women are essentially embodied, the biological union of spouses in reproductive-type acts consummates and actualizes their marriage, making the spouses truly...‘two in one flesh’” (George, p. 11). While reproduction is a single function, it

must be carried out by a male and female both. In this function, unlike in solitary biological processes like respiration, they perform as a single organism. Without diminishing their individual dignity and rights, their marriage derives from an inescapable biological condition that gives their union a holism that takes precedence over any sort of instrumental reasoning that appeals to satisfying purely individual needs and desires, and over definitions of marriage that invoke affection alone as a basis for marital union (p. 5).

In George's view, secularism overlooks the intrinsic goodness of the human person as a whole entity as well as the inherently relational nature of the biological union of the spouses. Thus, "any sexual act that lacks the common good of marriage as its central specifying point" tends to violate the psychosomatic integrity of the person (George, 2001, p. 12). In other words, the overly instrumentalist and individualistic approach that affirms either same-sex marriage or that sees no ethical or human deficiency in sexual relations outside of marriage inevitably dis-integrates and depersonalizes the human person. This view presumes that everything outside the desiring self, including the body, may be enjoyed for one's individual pleasure. Because secularist orthodoxy misidentifies the good to be realized in marriage (for instance, using marriage as a means for emotional closeness, for sexual satisfaction, for mutual benefit, etc.), it inevitably destabilizes the marriage bond by basing it on the ever-changing, often fickle desires of individuals and their purely subjectively determined purposes. George says: "It takes the person apart, disrupting the good of acting as the dynamically unified being one truly is" (George, p. 13).

In a chapter entitled, "Same-Sex Marriage and Moral Neutrality," George (2001) addresses the often-heard, secular liberal opinion that the state should not legislate morality, or, more specifically, the claim that one's religious views of marriage should be kept entirely

separate from civil law. However, some advocate that the state should be neutral between different ethical positions, for example, in its position toward the worth or goodness of same-sex unions; others say it should not, and perhaps cannot be neutral. Should, then, the state remain neutral between neutrality and non-neutrality viewpoints? To do so would undercut its own pro-neutrality position and would make no less valid a non-neutral claim limiting marriage to its traditional form. He writes, “Of course the claim that the law ought to be morally neutral...is itself a moral claim. As such, it is not morally neutral, nor can it rest on an appeal to moral neutrality” (George, p. 75).

Even if George is right that such thoroughgoing moral neutrality is impossible (I would agree that it is), George still has to persuade us concerning the philosophical grounds of his own moral judgment that marriage should rightly be defined as strictly heterosexual and monogamous. He argues from our biological make-up that marriage as he views it is grounded in natural law.

The bodily union of spouses in marital acts is the biological matrix of their marriage as a multi-level relationship: that is, a relationship that unites persons at the bodily, emotional, dispositional, and spiritual levels of their being. “[This] distinctive unity of spouses is possible *because* human (like other mammalian) males and females, by mating, unite organically—they become a single reproductive principle” (p.77).

Thus, while not all reproductive-type acts are marital, there can be no marital act that is not reproductive in type. Therefore, any sexual act that is not reproductive in type (viz., sodomy, masturbation, etc.) simply cannot unite persons organically, as a single reproductive principle; therefore, by definition, they are not marital acts.

Of course, married couples can treat one another in an instrumental or manipulative fashion. But he argues that when they do, they degrade their sexual relationship. Only in marital acts of the *right* kind can it be said that spouses are not using each other instrumentally. As George (2001) puts it, “The end, goal, and intelligible point of sexual union is the good of marriage itself” (p.78). Accordingly, only sexual intercourse as a reproductive-*type* act between a committed man and woman who are “of one flesh” can be intrinsically good and not serve some other inferior purpose.

George anticipates the objection that procreation need not define marriage. As might be expected, he rejects Augustine’s view that sex in marriage is but the instrumental means to produce children yet not an end in itself. Then, he basically echoes Aquinas’ more embodied view of sex and marriage, which suggests that sexual relations in marriage are intrinsically good, and children so conceived are *gifts* which “supervene on acts whose central justifying point is...the marital unity of the spouses” (Elshtain, 2010, p. 155). These marital acts have their profound meaning because they belong to the “only class of acts by which children can come into being, not as ‘products’ which their parents choose to ‘make,’ but, rather, as perfective participants in the organic community (i.e., family) that is established by their parent’s marriage” (George, 2001, p. 80).

George further anticipates how his opponents try to reduce his argument to absurdity by showing that many married couples cannot in fact procreate, whether because of infertility or menopause. To this, he appeals to the history of matrimonial law, which has “traditionally understood marriage as consummated by, and only by, the reproductive-type acts of spouses” (p. 79). George’s traditionalism is not as conservative as some Roman Catholic views, however. He

does not agree that marriage law should treat sterility, even permanent infertility, as an impediment to marriage, because a sterile partner can still engage in a reproductive-*type* act.

George (2001) therefore makes his case for what he calls *subsidiarity*, whereby the culture or state ought to reinforce and support monogamous marriage because reigning cultural views and practices shape our own and our children's character and outlook and have an enormous effect on whether or not they can participate in and enjoy the good of marriage and family. If that sounds like circular reasoning, this may, by itself, not be fatal. Everything depends on the success of George's rational philosophical grounding of a particular view of marriage in biology and natural law.

Moreover, given his premises, he can argue somewhat plausibly that any law that defines marriage as inherently heterosexual, and as the union of one man and one woman, does not deny anyone any fundamental aspects of equality before the law. He reasons that just because homosexual persons lack the psychological prerequisite to enter into marriage is no fault of the law. Does George's definition of marriage discriminate and forbid? Yes, he might say, just we forbid children from entering into marriage and citizens under the age of 35 to run for president of the United States. Once again, George does not believe that a regard for equality requires a radically permissive kind of moral neutrality.

George (2001) also addresses the complaint that his natural law-based view seems to ignore the argument that Andrew Sullivan and others have made to the effect that some people are in fact homosexual *by nature* and, therefore, that society should accept and provide for marriages between same-sex couples on this basis (Sullivan, 1996). George understands Sullivan to say that the fulfillment of the longing for the emotional and physical union with someone of the same sex is "natural" in the sense that it can be truly uniting and meaningful in the same way

that heterosexual intercourse can be uniting and meaningful. If homosexuality is natural in a morally normative sense, then homosexuals are at least, as Sullivan (1996) says, if not the statistical norm, then at least “virtually normal” (p. 212).

According to George’s (2001) interpretation of Sullivan, Sullivan is arguing that because homosexuality is naturally fulfilling, it must be morally good, a goodness logically extending to include same-sex marriages. George's complaint is that Sullivan’s approach to the issue of marriage transforms the debate into a civil rights issue like that of racial discrimination. Sullivan’s goal, he suggests, is not so much to justify homosexual acts in themselves, but to institutionalize gay marriage so that gay unions can be deemed moral unions.

In sum, George argues that the most proper reason for marriage’s existence, given the natural conditions of male and female, is the procreation and education of children, even though procreation in and of itself may not occur within any particular marriage (p.77). He contends that his seemingly hyper-conservative position is only morally problematic for those who hold an essentially dualistic conception of the human being. These critics are in his view really “closet-Cartesians” or mind/body dualists who view persons as non-bodily entities who inhabit non-personal bodies that those non-bodily persons may then use indifferently as so much equipment (p.34).

Treatises on natural law might fill the shelves of a small library. It is a topic that has been debated for centuries. Fortunately, we do not have to delve into that controversy to detect serious flaws in George’s position. To begin with, he not only misrepresents Sullivan’s view, but also, in effect, sharply dichotomizes positions on the topic of homosexuality and homosexual marriage. He presupposes that *either* one holds to his view that marriage proper is limited to heterosexuals, based on the authority of tradition, revelation, or natural law, *or* one regards sexual relations and

satisfaction as mere subjective pleasures or feelings that are preferred or enjoyed as one enjoys or consumes like any other simple, non-moral satisfaction such as good food, fast cars, or a vacation at the beach. In other words, one is either a firm traditionalist or a crass utilitarian. In this sense, he ironically embraces a similar oversimplified dichotomy of the sort assumed by the kind of liberal individualism he rejects, according to which one either relies on firm authority or treats differing ideals of the good life as merely subjective and preferential. George and the liberal individualist just choose opposite sides of the forced choice between two options.

However, Sullivan (1996) argues that gay and lesbian relationships and families can and often do honor and enjoy the same moral, socially contributive, goods or qualities that heterosexual relationships and families often do (and sometimes do not) exhibit. They partake of the same “internal goods” of character and community (Fowers, 2005), to be discussed in the next chapter, as contrasted with mere, preferential “external goods,” payoffs, or utilitarian advantages. Sullivan is not arguing, as George suggests, that gay and lesbian couples have or ought to have the same “rights” as other citizens to the pleasures and activities of their choice, so long as they do not compromise the rights of others. He is arguing that their relationships can have the same ethical substance and contribute to the same social goods as heterosexual relationships. Even if George feels this is not the case, he does not argue or defend that position. He generalizes that marriages and families that do not conform to the model he advocates are merely instrumental in character.

George (2001) is correct in saying that the state cannot be strictly “neutral” among different lifestyles and sexual orientations. Parents may not beat their children, fail to give them adequate medical care, refuse to send them to school, or raise them in a community that openly practices bestiality. Most of us prize the wide range of personal liberties, including religious

freedom and freedom of speech within wide limits, that the rule of law in our kind of society enables us to have. To be sure, agreeing on where to draw the line on these liberties can be difficult, as in the case of medical treatment for children of practicing *Christian Scientists*. But Sullivan and others do not defend homosexual relationships and families on the basis that they represent a mere lifestyle choice or preference. They defend them on the basis of their moral quality, which may include a commitment to monogamy, the devoted care of children, and responsible participation in the wider political community. George is also right to worry about the coarsening of culture that modern ideologies of individualism and instrumentalism seem to encourage. But both he and Sullivan share that concern and embrace similar views of marital and familial goods that might help amend the situation.

It is hard to see how George can base his defense of traditional marriage on the basis of reproductive-type acts grounded in human biology. Adoptive parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents, teachers and friends in the community, and gay and lesbian parents all care for the well-being and character of children in ways that are qualitatively similar, and may be superior, to that of parents who fit George's model. Furthermore, one can imagine beings from another galaxy who conceive children by means of some sort of parthenogenesis, whose existence is mediated by language and culture and is as deeply relational or interpersonal as ours is, who would therefore not be less capable of realizing marital and familial goods, in some ethically comparable form, than monogamous heterosexual human parents. The rich personal and interpersonal life of human beings supersedes its biological underpinnings. Biology and embodiment are necessary *conditions* of personhood, but its forms and functions do not directly *determine* the shape or limits of human thought, imagination, or ethical life (Williams, 2001).

The theoretical psychologist John Christopher (1996) usefully suggests that all communities or societies operate out of some sort of “inescapable moral vision,” as reflected in their practices, institutions, and the very identity of their members. Such a vision, ever changing to some extent, ever being refined or degraded, is the product of many influences, conscious and unconscious, including tradition, exposure to other ways of life, and the insight, reflection, imagination, and judgment exercised by human agents in the face of fresh challenges and unforeseen events (Christopher, 1996). Human moral agents can participate responsibly in refining and applying their ethical outlook, but they cannot predict with any certainty even the outcome of their own experience and reflection. If they could, life would be devoid of surprises and they would never learn anything new. They can deepen their perspectives and extend their vision from *within*, but what they cannot do is *step out* of that vision and access some god’s-eye point of view, foundationalist platform, or pure reason transcending culture and all moral visions in order to verify or ground the correctness of their current ethical ideals. Any effort or claim to do so, like George’s speculations about natural law, is inevitably colored and biased by one’s current interpretation of the good life, justice, human decency, etc., and therefore lacks any objectivity or authority that can be said to utterly transcend those biases and commitments. There is no way to reach beyond all interpretation to ground or confirm one’s interpretations, in ethics, science or any other sphere of human endeavor.

For example, liberal Protestant theological thinkers or preachers like myself may feel that religious experience or understanding involves a relationship with God or a transcendent dimension of human life, or that such a notion seems to make the best sense of our human experience and struggles. But that view remains our defeasible interpretation of things, subject to challenge in dialogue from any point of view willing to let itself be challenged, as well. There is

no way to transcend these indelible human limitations nor, many of us feel, any good reason to want to do so. Quite out of step with the temper of our postmodern times and sensibility, George wants to make a foundationalist claim that shuts off dialogue. It is entirely unclear why his “philosophical reasoning” about natural law should trump the understanding of Sullivan and others concerning the ethical quality of homosexual relationships and same-sex marriages and families. We just have to keep on talking about these issues and discerning the presence or absence of genuine human goods as best we can. If this line of argument is correct, it helps explain why George’s reasoning probably carries much weight only with those who already share his moral vision and also feel the need to find a way to claim finality and certainty for their outlook.

Hyper-liberal Inclusive Familism

There are, of course, many in the modern world who vociferously attack any version of traditional marriage and family ideals. Some would dismiss the institution of marriage altogether, others would retain a much liberalized definition of marriage that is vastly more inclusive. For example, the non-profit advocacy organization *Beyond Marriage* offers the following statement on their website:

We stand with people of every racial, gender and sexual identity, in the United States and throughout the world, who are working day-to-day—often in harsh political and economic circumstances—to resist the structural violence of poverty, racism, misogyny, war, and repression, and to build an unshakeable foundation of social and economic justice for all, from which authentic peace and recognition of global human rights can at long last emerge. The struggle for same-sex marriage rights is only one part of a larger effort to strengthen the security and stability of diverse households and families.

(<http://www.beyondmarriage.org>)

The debate over same-sex marriage is not so much a difference of opinion as a clash over fundamental rival goods and ideals of the good life. If conservatives appeal to biblical authority, natural law, or the weight of tradition, liberals appeal to abstract ideals of civil rights, social justice, and fairness. The rhetoric can get quite heated, as in this entry:

The entire legal framework of civil rights for all people is under assault by the Right, coded not only in terms of sexuality, but also in terms of race, gender, class, and citizenship status. The Right's anti-LGBT position is only a small part of a much broader conservative agenda of coercive, patriarchal marriage promotion that plays out in any number of civic arenas in a variety of ways—all of which disproportionately impact poor, immigrant, and people-of-color communities. The purpose is not only to enforce narrow, heterosexist definitions of marriage and coerce conformity, but also to slash to the bone governmental funding for a wide array of family programs, including childcare, healthcare and reproductive services, and nutrition, and transfer responsibility for financial survival to families themselves. (<http://www.beyondmarriage.org>)

Many of those who take the perspective of the hyper-liberal inclusive familism insist that marriage has never held unquestionable status and unanimity. They argue that marriage has always been just a social construct whose rules and norms have shifted to suit each economy, era, or class. They pose the questions, “Whose traditions? And what if those traditions are a source of discrimination?” They point to inconsistencies and contradictions in the Bible and in the Western tradition to assert that there never has been one agreed-upon definition or form for marriage. For example, the *Legal Marriage Alliance* castigates that which they and many others presume to be the traditional values related to marriage and family:

The married couple Abraham and Sarah were half-siblings, sharing a father. And Jewish law *required* childless husbands to marry again (with or without divorcing the first wife). In the Roman Empire, only the very upper tier of society had the legal right to marry; everyone else lived together outside the law. For its first thousand years or so, the early Christian church considered marriage a tainted, earthly institution, and didn't declare marriage a sacrament until 1215. In English and American law, women did not have the legal right to be their children's guardians—their legal mother—until the 19th century. And while states were battling for nearly 150 years over whether to recognize each others' divorces, Protestant denominations were roiled by the question of whether it was sinful to re-marry divorced people whose ex-spouses were still alive. As recently as 1967, it was even traditional in many states for legal marriage to exclude interracial couples. (<http://www.lmaw.org/marriage.htm>)

By deconstructing traditional marriage and family values in this way, these critical approaches remind of Michel Foucault's "archaeology of knowledge" (Foucault, 2002). Foucault seeks to show how "truth regimes" legitimate their authority over time by constructing relations of power that function to determine whose tradition gets to have the last word. Radical critics of marriage assume that the "traditional marriage discourse" is a mere function of such power relations and thus disclaim any notion of its goods. Any distinctions that may be made about marriage's goods are swallowed up by the idea that it is an arbitrary institution that has little worth affirming.

In a similar vein, a number of family sociologists in the United States conclude that any effort to retrieve or shore up the ideals of traditional marriage in any form is naïve and bound to fail (Bumpass, 1990; Furstenberg, 1991). It seems obvious to them that family disruption is a symptom of unstoppable global transition, and that while the pain of the disruption may be

mitigated, family patterns must adapt or change in the face of inevitable social forces and new cultural configurations.

In a telling confirmation of this anti-marriage bent, family sociologist Norval Glenn (1998) has documented the extent to which many college textbooks on marriage and the family in the United States take a strikingly negative view of families as, almost across the board, questionable and oppressive institutions. Glenn (1998) found that these university textbooks viewed marriage as just one option among many different kinds of acceptable and productive adult relationships. In fact, if anything, “they tell us that marriage as a lifelong childrearing bond holds special dangers, particularly for women who, if they don’t find marriage physically threatening, will likely find it psychologically stifling” (p.5). Indeed, while some texts, like *Changing Families* (Aulette & Root, 2007), contain overtly anti-marriage rhetoric, none of them say much of anything regarding marriage’s benefits to individuals or society (Glenn, 1998).

It appears to Glenn (1998) that the texts omit or discount the voluminous research findings in major scholarly journals that consistently conclude, “Married persons, both men and women, are on average considerably better off than all categories of unmarried persons in terms of happiness, satisfaction, physical health, longevity, and most aspects of emotional health” (p. 6). Moreover, information about possible harm to children and society that accrues to kids growing up outside of intact marriages is almost absent. As Glenn (1998) observes, “When dealing with nontraditional families—households with divorced, remarried, or unwed parents—textbook writers completely reverse their filtering process” (p.7). Glenn (1998) acknowledges that it is difficult to produce texts free of ideological bias. Even so,

When all textbooks are ideologically biased in the same direction, the danger is that teachers and students will be locked into a narrow world view, lacking even the

information necessary to make their own judgments. Then the question becomes, “What are our kids learning about raising kids?” (p. 9)

The distinguished historian of marriage and social critic Stephanie Coontz (2005) outlines a subtle and sophisticated version of inclusive familism. She writes, “Like it or not, today we are all pioneers, picking our way through uncharted and unstable territory. The old rules are no longer reliable guides to work out modern gender roles and build a secure foundation for marriage” (p. 282-283). For Coontz, outmoded assumptions and dated legal policies no longer fit the realities of a highly pluralistic, democratic culture bent on social equality for all.

Coontz maintains there is no turning back to the earlier form of marriage and family as heterosexual, necessarily monogamous, and nuclear. She argues that family structures in advanced Western cultures have shown enormous resilience, adapting to evolving economic conditions and new cultural outlooks when and as needed. She welcomes these structural changes as good: more variability and flexibility of family forms have given more people greater freedom to make choices better suited to individual needs and preference.

The strong emphasis on individual liberty and personal choice among radically inclusive thinkers makes it difficult to say anything clear and constructive about marriage, should they want to do more than just condemn outmoded, oppressive marriage forms. Coontz (2005), for example, states that while traditional marriage is dead, modern marriage nonetheless can serve, and should serve, as an important and meaningful social alternative to utterly ego-driven lifestyles. She writes:

We can certainly create more healthy marriages than we currently do...but we can never reinstate marriage as the primary source of commitment and care-giving in the modern

world. For better or worse, we must adjust our personal expectations and social support systems to this new reality. (p. 313)

The problem is, it is unclear what is meant by a “healthy” marriage. It may be that we cannot determine what “healthy” means except on the basis of what we consider to be the *good* of marriage and the derivative goods it contributes to the maintenance of a decent, admirable way of life. Here is an attempt at the definition of “healthy marriage” from The Healthy Marriage Initiative that certainly has merit and would resonate with many of us. It comes from research funded by Congress to promote healthy marriage and fatherhood:

There are at least two characteristics that all healthy marriages have in common. First, they are mutually enriching, and second, both spouses have a deep respect for each other. It is a mutually satisfying relationship that is beneficial to the husband, wife and children (if present). It is a relationship that is committed to ongoing growth, the use of effective communication skills and the use of successful conflict management skills (HMI, 2005).

However, it is not clear if or how “mutually enriching” goes beyond notoriously fickle, evanescent, often quite selfish pleasures and satisfactions of the sort exchanged in a purely instrumental give and take between individuals, as Bellah, et al., (1985) describe in the type of marriage they dub “therapeutic contractualism.” Also, “respect” for the rights and dignity of another person is something citizens in a modern liberal democracy are supposed to extend to every person. This statement says nothing about the severe strains and conflicts that arise in any important human relationship, be it marriage, one’s relationship with one’s children, friendship, or interaction with others in arenas like business or politics. At least from time to time, such relationships are disrupted by fear, defensiveness, conscious or unconscious efforts to domineer the other person, suspiciousness, acute distaste for the failings or idiosyncrasies of others,

aggressive clinging to goods or prerogatives that give one a sense of significance in an uncertain and ambiguous life, crafty rationalizations for one's efforts to control others or withhold kindness and generosity from them, and a host of other "all too human" tendencies and failings. Coping with such difficulties often requires qualities of patience, forgiveness, the ability to tolerate ambiguity and insecurity, risk-taking, the ability to "do the right thing" without any assurance of the outcome, humility, selflessness at times, and others. I think it is correct to say that the cultivation of such qualities is significantly more demanding and difficult than "the use of effective communication skills and the use of successful conflict management skills."

Jerome Frank (1978), the noted psychotherapy researcher and interpreter of therapy as a cultural phenomenon, tries to articulate, right or wrong, the importance of such values. He observes, "As institutions of American society, all psychotherapies. . .share a value system that accords primacy to individual self-fulfillment," including "maximum self-awareness, unlimited access to one's own feelings, increased autonomy and creativity." The individual is seen as "the center of his moral universe, and concern for others is believed to follow from his own self-realization" (Frank, 1978, pp. 6-7). These values are no doubt admirable in many ways. Nevertheless, Frank finds them to be morally ambiguous. For example, he notes that the implicit value system of modern psychotherapy "can easily become a source of misery in itself" because of its unrealistic expectations for personal happiness and the burden of resentment it imposes when inevitable disappointments occur. In his opinion, the literature of psychotherapy gives little attention to such traditional, possibly worthwhile values or virtues as "the redemptive power of suffering, acceptance of one's lot in life, adherence to tradition, self-restraint and moderation," (p. 7).

It is hard to discuss values or virtues of this sort in the present day without sounding hopelessly antiquated or intrusively moralistic. It may be going too far afield, but here is another attempt to highlight their possible importance. In his recent book *The Difficulty of Being Good: On the Subtle Art of the Dharma*, Gurcharan Das (2009), the distinguished Indian philosopher, business executive, and public intellectual suggests that the major difficulty the title of his book speaks of is *envy*. Perhaps it helps to get a fix on these realities by viewing them through the eyes of someone from a different culture:

When I grew up and entered the business world I encountered both the healthy envy (that my father spoke about) and the negative and destructive faces of envy. As a young manager, I felt envious of my rivals and it spurred me to improve, but on occasion, it threatened to get out of control too. Many of my customers were petty wholesalers of the merchant caste, who were objects of deep envy in the small towns of India. During my travels, I found that people were quite happy to borrow from them, but they scorned and abused them behind their back and never mixed with them socially. The Bania trader has always been more prosperous than the locals and was envied for his wealth in many parts of Asia and Africa. This envy occasionally turns violent, as it did in Idi Amin Dada's Uganda when thousands of Indian families were expelled in 1972.

The envy I encountered in the business world, however, was nothing compared to what I would see later in the academic world. "The reason academic politics are so bitter is that so little is at stake," Henry Kissinger was fond of saying. There is a certain misery attached to the academic life, no doubt, in which envy plays a considerable part. As Max Weber noted, "Do you think that, year after year, you will be able to stand to see one mediocrity after another promoted over you, and still not become embittered and

dejected? Of course the answer is always: ‘Naturally, I live only for my calling.’ Only in a very few cases have I found [young academics] able to undergo it without suffering spiritual damage.” (Das, 2010, p. 19)

Envy, vanity, and the animosity and suffering they cause are a factor in all human relationships and communities. Overcoming or transforming them, however, involves more than liberating oneself from oppressive constraints, eliminating irrational “guilt trips,” or utilizing effective communication skills. It means coming to adopt qualitatively different *ends* in living, not just perfecting the *means* for reaching familiar goals (there is nothing wrong with them in their place) of satisfaction, security, honor, or success. Some would put this in terms of acquiring *wisdom*. In a culture of narcissism, it is hard to remember what René Girard (1978) reminds us of, that “fighting over prestige,” is “fighting over nothing” (Girard, 1987, p. 303). It has become actually difficult to recall what a genuinely modest life or person look like, but we often recognize them when we see them. Such a life is able to surmount envy and bitterness, not fall into fear and defensiveness, or practice patience and forgiveness, only because it is lived for qualitatively different—in the old days one would say “higher”—purposes or goods than just mundane, conventional ones. Such goods are valued for their own sake, not for any results or benefits they bring, even though when attained they may be found to be deeply meaningful and a great relief from such things as “fighting over prestige.” When such qualities imbue a family or community to a significant extent, they can afford a sense of calmness and security to children, as well as serve as essential models and guidance for them as they begin to form their own outlook and character.

Critical Progressive Familism

The third broad approach to rethinking marriage and family Browning (2003) identifies is *critical progressive familism*, the category in which he places his own work. It is meant to be fully critical and progressive, but also to clarify and encourage cultivation of the sorts of presumed marital and family goods at which I have just tried to gesture. Browning (2003) finds some support for his own view from the work of the American sociologist William Goode. In 1963, Goode had “demonstrated the global movement away from extended-family patterns toward the convenient fit between industrialization and what he called the ‘conjugal’ or ‘companionate’ family” (Browning, 2003, p. 8). For Goode (1965), at least initially, the move away from the extended-family pattern toward the companionate family was good news. That move seemed to represent and indeed justify the modernist trend toward emancipation from traditionally repressive forces.

By breaking away from traditional structures of hierarchy and patriarchy, the modern family seemed to promise more freedom for its individual members, more equality between spouses, less domination by oppressive traditions and class structures, more choice, and greater potential for human fulfillment (Goode, 1965, p. 380). The new conjugal pattern seemed uniquely suited to help create and serve the emerging modern order. Its smaller size, coupled with greater emotional support and companionship, provided a means for coping with modernity’s often alienating drive to urbanization, industrialization, and the mobilization of labor and capital.

Yet, thirty-one years later, by the time he wrote *World Changes in Divorce Patterns* in 1994, Goode’s initial optimism about the transition from the extended-family model to the companionate family model was derailed by the realization that too much unmanageable change

had occurred too fast over the intervening three decades (Goode, 1994). It appeared that enduring human relations had become more fragile than ever in the face of globalizing market forces. As Goode saw it, the most disturbing symptom of this was that the rising rate of divorce, along with the rise of co-habitation and out-of-wedlock births, was in direct correlation with rising rates of poverty among women and children. It suddenly appeared that Friedrich Engels may have been right in predicting that industrial era capitalism would eventually destroy families (Engels, 1884, 1972). Indeed, the evidence did seem to suggest that “modernization turned and began devouring the conjugal family that helped give it birth” (Browning, 2003, p. 10).

The cure for such a high degree of family disruption, according to Goode (1994), involved making the high-divorce societies in the West more stable by strengthening bureaucratic control over the distribution of wealth. He asserted, for example, that the state should increase its financial support for divorced or never-married mothers who fall through the cracks of the social order and need help raising their children (Goode, 1994, pp. 251-257). Goode, along with many European family researchers and theorists that were his contemporaries, promoted the idea that economic support coupled with education or training in responsible parenting might offer a cure for the growing number of families in need.

Browning, however, felt this solution was superficial and inadequate. It might soften some of the wounds from economic and social upheaval. But in many ways it merely provided more technical rationality for the ills of excessive technical rationality, i.e., more intrusive bureaucratic intervention that tended to undermine the independence and self-responsibility of families already compromised by earlier such intervention. The solution was as likely to create as many problems as it solved.

While Goode and his European counterparts have worked to stabilize high divorce societies by promoting social policies that aid married and unmarried parents who need child support (Goode, 1994), Browning argues for a rather different kind of response to family disruption suggested by the work of sociologist David Popenoe. Popenoe (1988) agrees with Goode that the western family is indeed in danger of dissolution. But he feels that such things as government aid or parenting classes will have little lasting impact on core problems of family dissolution and the rising tide of fatherless children. As Popenoe assesses the situation, family dissolution is at bottom a *cultural* problem having to do with the corrosive effects of cultural values such as utilitarian and expressive individualism. He argues that the modern Western ideals of Enlightenment—the rights individuals have to have greater and greater control over their lives, to be free from social and religious oppression, to re-make their lives in accord with their own dreams and goals, and to express them on their own terms with the larger society seen mainly as an aid or an impediment to realizing self-chosen goals, their virtues notwithstanding—have by themselves had a negative effect on the integrity and quality of marriages and families. Popenoe feels that the incessant drive towards individual autonomy has gone too far and that commitment to family solidarity has been sacrificed on the altar of unrestrained individualism.

This leads Popenoe and Browning to encourage a kind of large-scale cultural conversion in attitudes, values, and ultimately practices in the realm of marriage and family. Popenoe envisions the possibility of a worldwide renunciation of overdetermined individualistic aspirations and the birth of a new familism (p. 18). Thus, Browning advocates “a new moral conversation that would lead to a cultural rebirth of marital commitment, one tough enough and realistic enough to deal with the tensions of modernity” (Browning, 2003, p. 20). This would include programs and incentives that strengthen marital commitment and family life. In this vein,

anything that would make available high-quality, inexpensive day care for children would be welcome. Changes in law or corporate practice that allowed a parent to stay home for perhaps a year after the birth of a child with a guarantee of returning to their job might be of value, as would the institution of incentives to promote constructive mediation in divorce and child custody arrangements. Of course, even modest changes of this sort may require money and resources (raising taxes!), are controversial, and can have unintended effects requiring a real spirit of cooperation in making ongoing adjustments.

Browning's "new moral conversation," seeking to clarify the goods and devise ways of strengthening the family, includes addressing fully the structural inequalities between male and female roles left over from traditional societies. Also, there is nothing in his proposal, so far as I can see, that precludes no-fault divorce, or implies less than a full respect for gay and lesbian couples and families.

But, first and foremost, Browning and Popenoe are encouraging just what they say, namely a *conversation*, something that may seem amorphous, cannot be directly engineered but only encouraged and experimented with, with no assurance as to when or if it will ever take hold and foster real change. In this sense, it is much like the civil rights and feminist movements of recent decades, movements that finally reached a tipping point when long-entrenched attitudes and indifference were rather suddenly undermined, with lasting (if still incomplete) widespread change the result.

One might say that Browning and Popenoe are seeking to outline a genuine alternative to what Bellah, et al. (1985) term "authority-oriented" and "therapeutic-contractual" approaches to marriage. It is worth noting that even Bellah, et al. are quite terse and rather vague as to what might constitute such an alternative. That may be because in an individualistic and

instrumentalist age we have great difficulty imagining what the philosophical underpinnings and actual practices of such a new way might look like. The next chapter addresses this issue.

Chapter Eight: Hermeneutic and Dialogical Viewpoints

Peter Berger (1979) writes in *The Heretical Imperative* that premodern people lived in what was, for the most part,

[a] world of fate. . . a wide array of choices opened up by modern technology did not exist for them. A traditional society is one in which the great part of human activity is governed by. . . clear cut prescriptions. . . traditional institutions and identities are taken for granted, certain, almost as objective as the facts of nature. In other words, both society and self are experienced as fate. (pp. 11 ff.)

In such a world people apprehend themselves in a taken-for-granted way as in contact with and defined by a hierarchical and meaningful order of being, i.e., "the great chain of being." In this way of life, as Clifford Geertz (1973) puts it, myth or ritual attunes "human actions to an envisioned cosmic order and projects images of order onto the plane of human existence" (p. 90).

In the West, this took the form of a certain classical account of human life as part of a meaningful cosmic drama built around the sense—common to both Greek and Biblical perspectives—that human life moves toward the end or telos of a shared human existence in harmony with Nature or God. That proper existence or "good life," when achieved, is characterized by acquired human qualities or virtues such as courage, justice, or love. They are what "ethics" is all about, and the ethical life is constituted by its telos. Within such a teleological scheme of life there is no characteristic modern gap between "is" and "ought." Questions about how we ought to live are answered via insight into the meaningful current of existence, directed toward a shared human *Good* which we have an essential purpose to realize and enjoy.

Premodern outlooks permit “theodicy” or the resolution of human moral dilemmas and the problem of evil in terms of a larger justice. Cicero asserts that no one is able to “judge truly of things good and evil, save by knowledge of the whole plan of nature and also of the life of the gods” (De Finibus III, 73). The premodern sense of human existence is perhaps best stated by Plato: “Thine own being. . .fond man. . .for all its littleness, all its striving is ever directed toward the whole, but hast thou forgotten. . .it is not made for thee, but thou for it. . .thou seest not how in thine own case what is best for the whole proves also best for thyself. . .” (Laws 903c).

The ethical outlook of the modern age has emerged as something quite different. It is essentially anti-authoritarian and emancipatory. At the core of the modern outlook is an assertive willingness to sacrifice the consolations of theodicy for a heavy and perhaps one-sided stress on what it takes to be the goods of human freedom and dignity. Modern consciousness was fashioned by eliminating most larger moral and religious meanings from the universe so there would be no barrier to the full exercise of human freedom, in carrying out scientific investigation and in determining what ethics should be all about. The result is an “objectified” picture of reality to be mapped by empirical observation. This “disenchanted” world is correlated with what Charles Taylor (1975, pp. 8-9) terms a new kind of “self-defining identity.” Fighting through to this new sense of self “was accompanied by the sense of exhilaration and power, that the subject need no longer define his perfection or vice, his equilibrium or disharmony, in relation to an external order.” The horizon of human identity is now found within, which involves “a massive shift in self-experience,” one with which we are still trying to come to terms. Now human action and everyday life (and marriage and family life) come to be conceived less as playing a role in the meaningful patterns of a social and cosmic order and more in terms of instrumental action on the world to satisfy natural needs or individual preferences.

Beyond Objectivism and Relativism

In his widely read 1993 book *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, the noted American philosopher Richard Bernstein (1983) argues that not just philosophers and intellectuals but also everyday citizens in their practical life are searching for a way “beyond objectivism and relativism.” In a sense, we quest for certainty and discover that we can neither find it nor live without it. According to Bernstein, Descartes’ famous search at the beginning of the modern age for a foundation or Archimedean point for our knowledge is much more than just a device to solve metaphysical and epistemological problems. It is a quest for some fixed point, some stable rock upon which we can secure our lives against the vicissitudes of life and existential threats that constantly confront us as limited, finite creatures. The specter that hovers in the background of this quest is not just radical epistemological skepticism but “the dread of madness and chaos where nothing is fixed” (p. 18). With chilling clarity Descartes leads us to a grand and seductive Either/Or. Either there is some support for our being, a fixed foundation for our knowledge, or we cannot escape the forces of darkness that envelop us with madness, with intellectual and moral chaos. Bernstein terms this the “Cartesian anxiety.” *Either* we have a sure objectivism *or* we are cast into a chaotic relativism.

In Bernstein’s words (1983), “By ‘objectivism’ I mean the basic conviction that there is or must be some permanent, ahistorical matrix or framework to which we can ultimately appeal in determining the nature of rationality, knowledge, truth, reality, goodness, or rightness” (p. 8). An objectivist claims that there is (or must be) such a matrix and that the primary task of the philosopher is to discover what it is and to support his or her claims to have discovered it with the strongest possible reasons. Objectivism, like foundationalism, also involves the search for an

Archimedean point. The objectivist maintains that unless we can ground philosophy, knowledge, or language in a rigorous manner we cannot avoid radical skepticism.

“Relativism,” according to Bernstein (1983) not only denies the positive claims of objectivism but goes further.

(It) is the basic conviction that when we turn to the examination of those concepts that philosophers have taken to be the most fundamental—whether it is the concept of rationality, truth, reality, right, the good, or norms—we are forced to recognize that in the final analysis all such concepts must be understood as relative to a specific conceptual scheme, theoretical framework, paradigm, form of life, society, or culture. The relativist . . . believes that there is (or can be) a nonreducible plurality of such conceptual schemes. . . there is no substantive overarching framework or single metalanguage by which we can rationally adjudicate or univocally evaluate competing claims of alternative paradigms. (p. 8)

Of course, this sharp dichotomy between relativism and objectivism seems seriously distortive and misleading. Its intimidating premise, “Give me certainty or there will be chaos,” may need to be exposed, questioned, and overcome. We may need to exorcize the “Cartesian Anxiety” and liberate ourselves from its seductive appeal. In fact, hardly anyone today is an unalloyed objectivist or relativist. But few of us can articulate a credible alternative with which we are comfortable.

One can see this lack of clarity crop up again and again, it seems to me, in marriage and family studies. Many theorists and researchers would like to say that there is something worthwhile or good about committed marriages, at least for many people, and that they contribute to the good of children and the larger community. But their concern about arbitrary

authority or domination in any form leads them to be uncomfortable in characterizing these relationships as anything more than the mere conventions of one or another time or place. And when someone like George (2001) argues that the form of marriage he prefers is in fact grounded for all time in biology and natural law, it sounds to most of us like an unconvincing tale told from an utterly inaccessible god's-eye point of view.

Philosophical Hermeneutics

I believe that a strong case has been made by a number of philosophers (Gadamer, 1989; Ricoeur, 1992; Taylor, 1989) and interpretive social scientists (Fowers, 2005; Richardson, et al. 1999; Slife & Williams, 1995) that the school of thought called philosophical hermeneutics represents one of the most thoroughgoing and plausible attempts to overcome the objectivism/relativism dichotomy. Here I can only summarize some of the main tenets of the hermeneutic point of view. But I believe their relevance to rethinking marriage and family relationships and their goods will be apparent.

Charles Taylor (1995) argues that simply attacking foundationalist ambitions to secure an Archimedean point beyond all the vagaries and contingencies of ordinary life can lead to a reactive anti-foundationalism that is just as sterile and problematic. He suggests that if we dig deeper we find that the whole modern epistemological tradition makes an assumption that may be at the root of the problem. That is, we would never embrace foundationalist ambitions in the first place if we did not conceive of knowledge as the “inner depiction of an outer reality” or the “correct representation of an independent reality” (p. 2). In this view, everything from the truths of science to the possibility of reliable technologies depends on anchoring our beliefs securely in this independent reality. However, it seems that this representational view leads to hopeless dilemmas. For example, there is the question as to “how we can gain indubitable access to

realities *through* our mental representations that are at the same time *independent* of them” (Richardson and Fowers, 1998, p. 488). In other words, there seems to be no way to get beyond our context-bound and context-colored *interpretations* of events. Representationalism seems to lead us to vacillate endlessly between realism and skepticism, with many unfortunate consequences. As I hope will become clearer in this chapter and the discussion of Bakhtin and Leslie Baxter’s work in chapter nine, these interpretations are not, in a sense cannot be, purely relative. To be sure, there are better and worse interpretations in the various situations in living and thinking in which they are made, even though there are never final or certain interpretations arrived at by finite human agents.

Taylor (1995) makes the additional point, very important but easy to overlook, that the representational outlook is as much a *moral* as it is an epistemological framework. He points out that this outlook fits closely with the common modern picture of the self as disembodied, atomistic, and “punctual.” This self is “distinguished. . .from [the] natural and social worlds, so that [its] identity is no longer to be defined in terms of what lies outside. . .in these worlds” (p. 7). The punctual self stands ready freely and rationally to treat both the outside world and itself instrumentally, to change them for the better or in accord with its wishes. Thus, the representational view seems to be a central strand in the cultural outlook or way of life in a post-traditional society. The punctual self “connects with. . .central moral and spiritual ideas of the modern age.” Thus, the modern ideal of “freedom as self-autonomy. . .is to be self-responsible, to rely on one’s [own] judgment, to find one’s purpose in oneself” (p. 8).

Hermeneutic philosophy is an effort to rethink this representational view of knowledge and its related ethical ideas in a fundamental way. Richardson & Fowers (1998) summarize some core hermeneutic ideas in the following way:

Hermeneutic philosophy. . . offers an interpretation of what humans seem to be like, so far as we can tell, or of what we seem to presuppose about our basic situation in everything that we do. To begin with, in this account, humans are “self-interpreting beings” (Taylor, 1985b). The *meanings* they work out in the business of living make them to a great extent what they are, in sharp contrast to the viewpoint that our behavior is determined by genetic and social influences to be described for us by a branch of natural science. Moreover, individual lives are “always ‘thrown’ into a familiar life-world from which they draw their possibilities of self-interpretation. Our own life-stories only make sense against the backdrop of possible story-lines opened by our historical culture” (Guignon, 1989, p. 109). Instead of thinking of the self as an object of any sort, hermeneutic thought follows Heidegger (1962, p. 426) in conceiving of human existence as a “happening” or a “becoming.” Individual lives have a temporal and narrative structure. They are a kind of unfolding “movement” that is “stretched along between birth and death.” In Guignon's (1993, p. 14) words, just as “events in a novel gain their meaning from what they seem to be pointing to in the long run. . . so our past lives and our present activities gain their meaning from a (perhaps tacit) sense of where our lives are going as a totality.”

What does it mean to participate in this kind of temporal and storied existence? We sometimes follow the path of abstraction and objectification and “hammer out” a knowledge of lawfulness or of repeated patterns in events that occur regardless of the everyday meanings these events have for us or the evaluations we make of them, including technical knowledge of reliable means to desired ends. But there is a more fundamental, ultimately *practical* kind of understanding which humans always and everywhere “hammer out” together, one that does not primarily mean comprehending

events mainly as “instances” of a general concept, rule, or law. In everyday life and in a more systematic way in the human sciences, people seek to understand the changeable *meanings* of events, texts, works of art, social reality and the actions of others in order to appreciate them and relate to them appropriately, along the story-lines of their living...this understanding or interpretation of meaning has a distinctive character.

Historical experience changes the meaning events can have for us, not because it alters our view of an independent object, but because history is a dialectical process in which both the object and our knowledge of it are continually transformed. Thus, for example, both the meaning of the American revolution and my lived understanding of freedom continue to be modified in the dialogue between them. (p.)

In addition, a key hermeneutic idea is that of “strong evaluations.” According to Heidegger (1962, p. 228), a fundamental feature of human social actors is that they *care* (cf., *sorge*) about whether their lives make sense and what they are adding up or amounting to. Indeed, they “just are the stands they take in living out their lives” (Guignon & Pereboom, 1995, p. 189).

Taylor (1985a, p. 3) develops this notion of care with the idea that humans do *not* simply desire particular outcomes or satisfactions in living. Rather, they always make “strong evaluations” (Taylor, 1985a, p. 3). Even if only tacitly or unconsciously, they evaluate the *quality* of their desires and motivations and the *worth* of the ends they seek in terms of how they fit in with their overall sense of a decent or worthwhile life. Humans never simply prefer or desire certain pleasures or results. They always, in addition, are building their lives around some notion of what is decent vs. indecent, noble vs. base, or deep vs. shallow—the terms vary widely across societies and eras. The claim is that this is not an

optional activity, but something that we seem to do as an inherent feature of human existence. It certainly does not mean that the ideals that inform their living are necessarily clear or refined or put into practice in a non-hypocritical way. It only means that, in some form, they cannot be dispensed with or completely evaded. (Richardson & Fowers, 1998, p. 491)

For many, the hermeneutic view raises a troubling question, especially from the point of view of modern rights-based individualism's concern about going as far as we can go in the detection of and the avoidance of any rationalization of dogmatism and domination in human affairs. After all, according to hermeneutics and other postmodern perspectives, there is "no possibility of stepping outside the flux of history to obtain a purely objective perspective" (Fowers, 2005, p. 31). So how can we detect subtle rationalizations of unjust or domineering relationships or social arrangements? First, in this view, our inescapable strong evaluations are always limited, perspectival, and subject to endless refinement as to what they are about and how they apply in practical life. After all, there are always tensions among our highest ideals and, therefore, no fully harmonious interpretations of them. Also, ever-new, unique, and unexpected challenges and dilemmas always require some reinterpretation of what our best values are all about or how they apply to these new situations.

Warnke (1987) summarizes the hermeneutic take on this process, one that never escapes being rooted in particular contexts of liking and striving, yet one that can still have a progressive, critical dimension. She writes,

Gadamer argues that an objectivity attained through scientific method is no more adequate than the prejudices it presupposes; but he also suggests that our prejudices are as much thresholds as limits, that they form perspectives from which a gradual

development of our knowledge becomes possible. To this extent, Gadamer's account of understanding retains a connection to the Enlightenment. To be sure, we can no longer hope to eradicate prejudice through method. Nor can we search for an objectivity that would lift us above historical variations and subjective interpretations. Nonetheless, in coming to an understanding with others we can learn how to amend some of our assumptions and, indeed, how to move to a richer, more developed understanding of the issues in question. (p. 4)

Or, in Gadamer's (1989) own words:

Coming to an understanding in conversation presupposes that the partners are ready for it and that they try to allow for the validity of what is alien and contrary to themselves. If this happens on a reciprocal basis and each of the partners, while holding to his own ground simultaneously weighs the counter-arguments, they can ultimately achieve a common language and a common judgment in an imperceptible and non-arbitrary transfer of viewpoints. (p. 347)

Richardson (2011) suggests that this kind of open-ended encounter and dialogue—not among different ideas about the right *means* for reaching pre-given ends but among more or less different moral visions as to what valued *ends* are most worth seeking—may have more power to bring to light underlying assumptions and tacit values, including ones that subtly violate our ideals of individual human rights and dignity. This process of encounter, raising consciousness, and critique may represent, he points out, an improvement on the approach of much modern psychology, which tends to blithely assume the correctness of some particular modern ideology.

In a chapter entitled “Individualism, Family Ideology, and Family Therapy,” Richardson, et al. (1999), cite Charles Taylor’s (1995b) discussion of the “diversity of goods” as a uniquely penetrating analysis of this issue. These authors summarize Taylor’s argument in this way:

Taylor. . .argues that every society and its members inescapably endorse a wide “diversity of goods” concerned with what is decent, excellent, worthy, or fulfilling in human life. The modern West has typically narrowed this domain to respect for human rights, equality, and procedural justice, claiming these principles are universal while viewing other questions about the good life as matters of purely personal preference. This approach reflects modern individualism’s characteristic strategy for harmonizing freedom with some sense of moral authority, namely keeping ethical principles purely formal in order to accommodate pluralism and undercut dogmatism. But it is a precarious scheme at best. It is a dissonant blend of universalism and relativism whose subjectivising of most values constantly threatens to undermine its own moral commitments to human dignity and rights as well. Taylor suggests that it is an inherent task of human life (and therefore of families) to somehow coordinate and honor a wider and more interesting diversity of goods. (p. 89)

Hermeneutics describes what it takes to be the search for understanding and ethical orientation in all areas of life. Perhaps there is no better characterization of that search than Alasdair MacIntyre’s (1984) description of it as a “quest,” a quest that is “not at all. . .a search for something already adequately characterized. . .but always an education both as to the character of that which is sought and in self-knowledge” (p. 219). It is an ongoing “leaning experience.”

The result of this quest, at any given point of time, is a kind of “dialogic understanding” (Warnke, 1987). Thus, Charles Taylor (2002) argues that in everyday life and even in social science theory and research, “understanding a text or event which comes to us out of our history should be construed, not on the model of the ‘scientific’ grasp of an object, but rather on the model of speech-partners who come to an understanding” (p. 126). The goal of this process is “being able in some way to function together with the partner” (p. 128). There are two sides of this endeavor. On one side, we harbor self-defining beliefs and values concerning things we care about greatly in this dialogue; we even have a “deep identity investment,” sometimes in “distorted images we cherish of others” (p. 141). But on the other side, since our ideals and our images of others and events are always partial or distorted in some way, we need not just compromise or go-along-to-get-along with others, but to *learn* from the past, others, or other cultures. Thus, we are greatly *dependent* on these also quite imperfect others in the most sensitive and important matters. This is a most challenging and often exacting process that may involve a deeply personal and sometimes painful “identity cost” (p. 141).

Weak and Strong Relationality

Slife (2004) sheds additional, valuable light on a hermeneutic and dialogical perspective by clarifying how it is centered on a certain notion of relationality, namely “strong relationality.” Slife argues that the individualism and instrumentalism that inform most theories and interpretations of research findings in psychology presuppose a model of what he terms “weak relationality” or “interaction” that takes the form of reciprocal exchanges of influence or information “between essentially self-contained organisms” (p. 158). Weak relational viewpoints abstract individuals out from shifting, value-laden, often unpredictably emotional everyday contexts of living and construe relationships among them in “thin,” “timeless,” relatively

impersonal or mainly contractual terms. Modern rights-based individualism or liberal individualism characterizes human relationships, for the most part, in a weak relational fashion. This approach has some obvious ethical virtues and benefits, as when individuals are considered equal before the law regardless (one hopes) of gender, social or economic status, sexual orientation, and religious or political affiliation. However, by itself, it encourages a depersonalizing and alienating picture of human life and living. Plainly, a strict empirical science seeking to uncover the general and unchangeable laws of human behavior depends on viewing individuals as decontextualized social atoms (Taylor's "punctual selves") with mainly weak relational ties and interactions. Many, of course, feel that this approach tends to throw out the baby with the bathwater and does a great deal of violence to lived experience.

By contrast, according to Slife (2004), in strong or "ontological" relationality, relationships are "not just the interactions of what was originally nonrelational." Rather, they are "relational all the way down." Thus each person is "first and always a nexus of relations." In fact, in this view all things "have a shared being and a mutual constitution" (p. 59). A strong relational picture of things reflected in the work of the communication theorists Baxter and Montgomery (1996), discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. They draw on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin in arguing that we should not speak about "communication in relationships" so much as about "relationships as dialogues." They quote Bakhtin, who wrote, "I achieve self-consciousness, I become myself only by revealing myself to another, through another and with another's help." They add that "the self of [Bakhtin's] dialogism is a *relation* between self and other, a simultaneity of sameness and difference out of which knowing becomes possible" (p. 3).

Slife (2004) argues, I believe, that we have to choose ultimately between an "abstractionist" and a "strong relational" ontology of the human realm. Of course, he agrees we

can abstract and objectify individuals, temporarily, for many useful and worthwhile purposes. I would not want a brain surgeon distracted with thoughts of any actual or potential emotional connection between us as he or she goes about their work. Slife only suggests that a relational ontology characterizes realities and relationships that are more enduring and fundamental.

Perhaps the virtue associated most prominently with the weak relational view is tolerance, the refusal to judge people as deficient or perverse merely because they are different. Slife (2004) argues that this kind of tolerance, although a moral good, by itself tends to slide into a debilitating relativism, a tolerance of (or attempt to tolerate) *all* differences within relationships or a community that deprives them of one of their most precious assets, namely the ability to engage in meaningful dialogue about things that matter to them. He suggests that a “relativist” actually “‘tolerates’ differences as if they are [inherently] problematic. A relationist, by contrast, views community differences as a source of strength and connection that should be actively *engaged* rather than merely *tolerated*” (p. 171).

Relativistic viewpoints and modern ideologies of expressive and utilitarian individualism that make tolerance primary are concerned above all to protect individuals from unjust intrusion, condemnation, or domination by others. Slife (2004) indicates that the primary means (not necessarily the only one) for the protection of individuals in relationships or communities with strong relational ties lies, quite simply, in “loving relations, or what Aristotle called friendship” (p. 174). We might say that mature love and friendship, which require real effort to cultivate and should not be confused with merely sentimental, convenient, or advantageous positive feelings for another, go beyond tolerance in several ways. They motivate us to a greater degree to perceive others in their uniqueness and difference because, as Slife suggests, such differences are invaluable in meaningful dialogue. Our dependence on their insights and points of view to see

things more clearly teaches us respect, humility, and caution in coming to judgment. We desire to protect and assist them because, in a sense, we need them because we share with them a real commitment to discern and “do the right thing.” We do not need them out of slavish dependency or because they just happen to serve our private ends.

Virtue Ethics

A number of theoretical psychologists who draw on hermeneutic and dialogical perspectives in their work (Fowers, 2005; Richardson, 2011; Frie, 2010 and others) have argued that the influential field of moral philosophy called *virtue ethics* contains valuable resources for describing human agency and practices. Virtue ethics illuminates and helps us characterize and interpret aspects of social and ethical life in more specific terms than the broad dynamics outlined by hermeneutic thought and Bakhtin provide. It thus seems virtue ethics has exceptional potential for elucidating marriage and its goods in today’s world.

By far the most extensive treatment of virtue ethics in psychology to date is Blaine Fowers (2005) book *Virtue and Psychology: Pursuing Excellence in Ordinary Practices*. Fowers stresses that the focus for Aristotle and virtue ethics in general on the pursuit of worthwhile aims in ordinary life provides a needed alternative to contemporary talk about “values,” which are typically conceptualized as an internal, personal possession. Virtues or moral excellences are inseparable from “concrete activity” (p. 41) and “are embodied” (p. 67). In addition, in Taylor’s (1985) words, they “cannot be conceived as a set of individual actions, but are essentially modes of social relation, of mutual action” (p. 36).

We are not used to thinking in such terms. To illustrate, Richardson (2011) gives some specific examples of such activity: “questioning someone’s political or religious beliefs in a respectful manner; cultivating the kind of loyal friendship that goes beyond mutual enjoyment

and benefits; inspiring students to want to learn; exercising leadership among colleagues or in an organization that brings out the best in people; winning someone's trust without flattery or deceit; learning to write well; setting firm limits on a child while causing a minimum of guilt or discouragement, and forgiving someone in a wholehearted manner when at all possible."

Fowers (2005) argues that the virtue perspective offers a distinctive view of "emotional experience." The Romantic tradition, so influential in modern psychology and psychotherapy, construes it as "spontaneous experiences that are beyond our control and rise naturally out of our inner nature," giving us "to distinguish between loving and cruel impulses and oddly makes us out to be hapless victims of them, whatever they are." By contrast, cognitive therapy and psychology, informed by the Enlightenment, "extols rationality over emotionality, sees affective life as largely secondary to patterns of thought and behavior," meaning that "emotions are to be regulated [and managed] rather than "reverentially received and interpreted" (p. 44). This would seem to make a one-sided instrumental control orientation the last word in human relations. Virtue ethics give us a needed third alternative, one that really makes a great deal of common sense, it seems to me. It holds that emotions reveal "the kind of person one is" (Fowers, 2005, p. 44) and reflect the current state of one's "character strengths" (p. 9) or excellences in living. Character development involves gently schooling one's emotions "so that they are consistent with acting well" (p. 66) and make up an important part of the experience of whatever an individual or community understands as the best kind of life.

Fowers (2005) places an exposition of what he terms "internal goods" at the heart of his account of virtue ethics. In my view, nothing seems more helpful than this idea for rethinking marriage, as I will try to explicate in the next chapter. External goods such as wealth, power, and prestige, or simple pleasures, comforts, and satisfactions are sought as the desired effect or

payoff of some action or activity, and are thought to be the acquired possession of individuals. Typically, their supply is limited and thus often become objects of competition among individuals. Internal goods, however, are qualitatively different. They involve a more singular kind of purpose and are found meaningful in a different way from external goods. One can “[attain] internal goods only by acting in the ways that embody those goods” (p. 65), whether spending unstructured time with a child or friend, or deliberating carefully about a tough ethical decision. The point is that this activity is felt to be good and is appreciated or enjoyed *for its own sake*, not just to reach another outcome or end-result. Fowers notes that Aristotle believed it was possible to attain what Aristotle termed a “virtuous” character, one who “knows how to act well and does so gladly,” and who “wants to act for the best and generally experiences harmony between desire and duty” (pp. 71 ff.) This is an important idea: the mature individual can reach the moment or point—with requisite effort, of course—whereby they experience their action with little tension between desire and duty. Fowers calls this acting “wholeheartedly” in the pursuit of internal goods.

In the sphere of moral excellence or the pursuit of internal goods, according to Fowers (2005), means are not separable from ends. To make this distinction and its importance clear, he borrows from the philosopher Guignon (1993) the distinction between “means-end” and “constituent-end” social practices or types of interpersonal behavior. Means-end practices are a largely instrumental activity aimed at what we have called external goods. In “constituent-end” social practices, by contrast, the whole activity, more or less excellent, “is undertaken for the sake of being such and such: I run as a part of being a healthy person, or I help someone for the sake of being a good friend” (p. 230). Fowers (2005) argues that, as a result, internal goods have, in his words, a certain “primacy” (p. 69) in human life. Fowers states that “people in reasonably

coherent societies are always guided by a more or less shared understanding of what is good” (p. 92). This means, we are always contextualized in and shaped at our core by some cultural tradition or traditions, with its own characteristic “strong evaluations” and privileged internal goods that shape its practices, reflection, and emotional experience.

Lastly, I want to mention what Fowers (2005) and virtue ethicists speak of as the “love of what is good.” I think it would be best to just quote several of Fowers’ sentences on this topic. He suggests that a primary source of living a meaningful, coherent life is found in learning to love what is good.

Virtue ethics suggests that a proper recognition of what is good naturally inspires a desire to act in the service of that good. Individuals of character are spontaneously drawn to the good, and this concept of moral attraction encourages the best kind of desires and feelings. For example, good scientists act honestly out of love for truth; good therapists persevere with difficult clients because they value human flourishing. . . .When individuals are involved in pursuing something that they genuinely love, they experience pleasure in its pursuit and in their progress toward their goal. . . .When a good is dear to one, one spontaneously wants to pursue it because one sees it as valuable, enjoys its pursuit, and can act wholeheartedly. (p. 46)

The short version of how this applies to the question of marriage and its goods would be something to the effect that marriage partners remain loyal, committed, and trusting in that relationship, when that is possible, because they see it as valuable, enjoy its pursuit, and can act wholeheartedly therein.

Chapter 9: Sustainable Marriage for the 21st Century

The contemporary conversation about marriage's role and place in Western culture is essentially a debate about its goods. Aside from those who make a case for marriage based on its supposed instrumental benefits, namely that "married people are happier, healthier, and better off financially" (Gallagher, 2000), the debate is primarily about *who* marriage should be for, which then begs the question as to what it is. Browning and Marquardt (2006), for example, argue that the idea of *kin altruism*—the notion from evolutionary psychology that the man and woman who gives life to the infant are the ones naturally most suited to care for it—tilts the scale in favor of making marriage available only to heterosexual men and women because it is manifestly in society's best interests to have the "natural" parents raise their "natural" children. They would be the ones most invested in their offspring's care, insofar as they recognize their offspring as "part of themselves" (p. 36). This view asserts that "it should be the *intention of law* to honor kin altruism in its understanding of marriage," because "the good of marriage—whether seen as a philosophically conceived intrinsic good or a religious sacrament or covenant—is crucially preserved by the mutual investment of kin altruism" (p. 41).

This conception of the marital good clashes with journalist Jonathan Rauch's (2004) argument that marriage should be available as a social and personal good for *everyone*, heterosexuals and homosexuals alike. Rauch is representative of those who stress marriage's primary good as a socially sanctioned institution that should support any two consenting adults desiring to commit themselves to a lifetime of taking care of one another and sharing an intimate bond of mutual love. As Browning and Marquardt (2006) see it, however, this postmodern view of marriage's good marginalizes the heretofore "classical" understanding and, consequently, "the

heavy-duty generative purposes of the large majority of married couples is set aside and replaced with the idea of marriage as a sexual and affectionate friendship” (p. 43).

The point of the matter is that regardless of one’s worldview or perspective some “strong evaluation” or notion of the good, however inarticulate, is simply inescapable. Our basic challenge, therefore, is to articulate those goods strong enough to sustain marriage in our time, especially in the face of ever new challenges and opportunities.

In order to re-think marriage as both a social and personal good in post-traditional and postmodern western culture, with goods strong enough to sustain it, marriage needs to be re-envisioned along lines developed in the previous chapter. So what are the crucial goods that can make marriage come alive for all who care about it? To be sure, the constraints of traditionalist norms, the subjectivist bias of instrumental or calculative reason and the ideologies of personal fulfillment make this seem almost impossible. In this dissertation, we are finally in a position to articulate some goods outside ourselves that may make some claim upon our most fervent loyalties.

Relational Dialectical Theory

To re-envision marriage in light of hermeneutic and dialogical perspectives, we now turn to a fresh approach found in communications theory. There are quite a few scholars and theorists, in departments of communications and other disciplines in universities around the country who study interpersonal relationships and communication as their specialty. Their highly original and creative work, in my opinion, certainly qualifies as a branch of social science, even though one has the impression that mainstream clinical, social, and personality psychologists consult their work much less than they read, critique, and make use of mainstream social science findings. Many of these scholars adopt, in effect, what was termed in the last chapter a strongly

relational, ontological outlook that draws on such perspectives as Gadamer's hermeneutics, Bakhtin's dialogism, and Taylor's hermeneutic philosophy (Anderson, Baxter, & Cissna, 2004; Dragon and Duck, 2005; Duck, 2010; Hinde, 1997). Most notably, Leslie Baxter, a communications researcher and theorist, has pioneered a dialogical approach to communication in interpersonal relationships, called *relational dialectics theory* (RDT), that has some novel implications for the study of marriage (Baxter, 2004; Baxter, 2011; Baxter and Montgomery, 1996). Baxter (2004) considers RDT a "sensitizing" theory, "not a hypothetico-deductive theory of axiomatic propositions whose goal is prediction, explanation, and control" (p.17). It consists of a set of basic concepts and theoretical principles "that can be brought to bear in analyzing communicative life" (p. 7).

RDT functions as a heuristic for sensitizing people to how they actually construct the meaning of their relationships through language use. The focus is not on individual subjective meaning, but on how relationship identities are formed through the struggle of often contradictory *discourses*. By discourse, Baxter (2011) means any system of meaning, perspective, or ideology that is given "voice" by speakers' utterances in dialogue. "RDT's core theoretical principle is that meaning in the moment is not simply the result of isolated, unitary discourses but instead is the result of the interplay of competing discourses" (p.2).

RDT is inspired by the scholarly work of the Russian cultural theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), who spent much of his life in hiding from Leninist and Stalinist regimes. He developed complex, multistranded ideas of dialogue (termed "dialogism" by Holquist, 2002) over and against what he considered to be overly fixed or objectivistic systems of thought prominent in his time, such as structuralism, positivism, Marxism, and Russian formalist literary theory.

As Bakhtin was critical of the Hegelian conception of dialectics, the mention of the word dialectical in RDT should not conjure up any notion of Hegel's synthetic unity as the inevitable outcome of dialogue. Whereas Hegel sought to abstract pure concepts of mind away from their situated particulars and show how they manifest in determinate and systematic processes towards ever higher syntheses, Bakhtin saw dialogue as the essentially "unfinalizable" interaction between integrating (centripetal) and disintegrating (centrifugal) forces. Persons in dialogue engage in the fluid, open-ended interplay of "living words" that interpenetrate one another and thereby constitute and change one another.

By comparing RDT to family systems theory, the significance of this distinction may be made more clear. Systems theory focuses on maintaining "equilibrium." All parts of the system work together interdependently to keep balance; whenever something outside the system interrupts its purposeful functioning, or something within fails to function properly, the system falls off center and is destabilized. By contrast, Baxter (2004) argues that "relational dialectics, like dialogism more generally, displaces the notion of a center with a focus on ongoing dialogic flux. There is no center, only the between" (p.18). Unlike systems theory which privileges balance, relational dialectics theorizes a state of perpetual change and, the idea of balance actually suggests a state of *non*-dialogue.

In *Relationships as Dialogues*, Baxter (2004) summarizes five elements of relational dialogue as she gleans them from Bakhtin. These elements provide a framework for seeing the dominant theoretical lenses that characterize scholarly research on interpersonal and family communication in a different light. They challenge some of the taken-for-granted assumptions that appear in mainstream scholarship; assumptions such as the bias against uncertainty, the

illusion of the monadic individual actor, the inattention to power, and the illusion of relationships as self-contained, private entities.

First, Baxter (2004) asserts that we form relationship identities through a *constitutive process*. This process is at odds with the modern idea that imagines the individual as a self-contained, singular entity, or monadic self, who must then find ways to communicate effectively with other pre-formed individuals who have their own attitudes, preferences, and beliefs. Baxter (2011) discusses how most current approaches to interpersonal communication derive from the “discourse of individualism”—that which we earlier explored as the disguised ideology of the modern, enlightenment worldview (p. 55). Baxter asserts, “The monadic actor is a social construct that is produced from within a discourse of individualism, and it is reified as natural in mainstream U.S. communicative practices” (p. 13). In this dominant discourse of the Western identity, each Self is positioned in opposition to the Other. As Sampson (1993) puts it,

The more the other is involved in the life of the person, the less the person is involved in his or her own life....Others are posited as potential thieves of one’s personhood. The more others take priority, the less priority exists for the individual. (pp. 33-34)

Personhood, as privately owned, consists of its own cognitions, personality traits, motivations, and emotions. Interpersonal communication in relationships from this perspective “functions to express self’s attitudes and beliefs, to transmit those attitudes and beliefs to others so that self is understood, and to influence other’s attitudes, beliefs, and actions so that they are conformable to those of the self” (p. 3). Communication is basically a mutual instrumental activity of two monadic selves.

However, when meaning is seen to be located “between” selves, that is, in the interplay between competing discourses, then the individual is decentered and, from the dialogical

perspective, “the selves in communication are not preformed, autonomous entities but instead are constituted in communication” (2011, p. 12).

The constitutive perspective thinks in terms, not of “communication *in* relationships,” as if relationships have an existence apart from communication, but “relationships in communication.” Bakhtin’s dialogism recognizes that “the very capacity to have consciousness is based on otherness,” or more precisely, “I achieve self-consciousness, I become myself only by revealing myself to another, through another and with another’s help. . . .Cutting myself off, isolating oneself, closing oneself off, those are the basic reasons for loss of self” (Todorov, 1984). The dialogical self is, by definition, a relational self whereby self and other occupy the exact time and space during interaction in a dance between similarity and difference. The dialogical self is “always under construction through interaction with others who are different from oneself. The parties’ various horizons of discursive seeing are brought into play with and against one another, and selves are shaped out of this discursive interpenetration” (2011, p. 11).

RDT sheds light on how the mainstream, nonconstitutive approaches that still dominate marital research and theory construe the close relationship in ways Bakhtin might call “monological.” For example, the prototypical view of how close relationships develop, a view which informs popular social exchange theories like Kelley’s interdependence theory, “frames the formation, maintenance, and disengagement of relationships as the coordination of individual cost/benefit decision making between the two parties” (2004, p. 4). To the extent that the individuals in the dyad can trust that the benefits will outweigh the costs, then they become exceedingly vulnerable, even dependent, and increasingly engage in “self-disclosure” that creates more closeness. Accordingly, intimacy and trust develops as each reveals and shares his or her preformed self to the other.

An alternative way to view this interaction, according to RDT, is to see that relationships get close not mainly because preformed selves are revealed but because these selves are constituted, or *authored*, in the process of their interaction. As Anderson, Baxter, & Cissna (2004) succinctly put it, “Relationships are close to the extent that they enable selves to become” (p. 110). However, it must be noted, *becoming* in this sense has no invariant, stage-like, or predetermined telos or goal towards which it progresses.

The second element of dialogue, *dialectical flux*, elaborates on this idea that change is indeterminate and open-ended. Once one is sensitized to the fact that social life in pluralistic society is ridden with contradictions, rivalries between competing goods or discourses, then one can understand how Bakhtin could speak of the centripetal forces of unity, homogeneity, and centrality, and the centrifugal forces of difference, dispersion, and decentering. Social life, as such, becomes the dialogue shaped in the dialectical tensions between these forces. As Bakhtin (1981) expresses it, “Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The processes of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance” (p. 272).

Over and against the grand narratives in the social science discourse of autonomy and connectedness, certainty and uncertainty, openness and non-expression, Bakhtin challenges conventional ideas of what it means to be in a good relationship. For example, the conventional notion of a close relationship, as seen in terms of the discourse of individualism, envisions individuals trading in some portion of their autonomy for “interdependence.” As long as partners remain autonomous, there is distance or noncloseness. Yet once partners become “close,” i.e., interdependent, then the goal of development is to reduce the uncertainty and vulnerability that their quasi-dependent state has engendered. Therefore, as discussed in chapter 6, “trust” develops

to the degree that uncertainty is overcome, and it is self-disclosure and openness that communicate such trust.

Baxter (2004), however, considers these approaches *monologic* because they ignore the “dynamic interplay of these centripetal discourses with their centrifugal counterparts” (p. 8). That is, according to RDT, relating to others is just that, “a complex knot of contradictory interplays” or “competing discourses.” As she puts it, “At a minimum, relationships are dialogues of integration with and against separation, certainty with and against uncertainty, and openness with and against nonexpression” (p. 8). In other words,

Relationships are built as much on the discourse of separation as on the discourse of integration; interactional uncertainty, novelty, and spontaneity can be heard alongside certainty and stability; nonexpression is as necessary as expression. These pairs of polarities are contradictions in the dialectical sense of unified opposites. (p. 8)

The nature of dialectical flux is that, to call a popular phrase into service, “it is what it is.” Like jazz music, dialogical interaction involves a complex interplay between the *givens* and the ongoing *new*. Once this alternative view, or discourse, is seen in such terms, then one becomes more sensitive to how the conventional approaches simply cannot account for the complexity of relational development envisioned by RDT. Instead of the assumption that individuals in a marriage or close relationship should be seeking more integration, more self-disclosure, more certainty, RDT opens up the alternative possibility that partners should become more sensitive to the fact that relational development may not proceed along such a linear, neat path.

By the time we turn to Baxter’s (2004) third element in this framework, i.e., *the aesthetic moment*, we should be sufficiently sensitive to what is at stake in this alternative vision for how

relationships, most especially marriage, are formed and developed. Granted that social life, according to Baxter, is a messy interweaving of opposing discourses, the question arises as to how to make sense of all this in terms of marriage. It becomes clear that the dialogical self's relationship identity is not an a priori given, but a task to be accomplished jointly. And given that partners essentially make one another by their interaction, the question thus arises as to who they want to become as a partnering unity, a question that presupposes some notion of the good.

It may now be apparent, in the light of RDT, that the modern social science conception of “two becoming one” implicates a monological approach to balancing one's essential autonomy and some desire for connectedness. This becomes a contractual trade-off between two of modernity's prized goods—freedom and belonging. At best, one hopes for the strong goods of equilibrium, justice, balance, mutuality. Or, perhaps even better, one hopes for a romantic passion powerful enough to collapse individual differences into unity, which is often understood as the merging of soul mates against all odds. In any case, partners search for some kind of dependable certainty on which they can hang their hat, even if, according to Bakhtin, this becomes a totalizing monologue that calcifies into a deadening security at the expense of surprise or creative newness. At worst, one of the partners, more “dependent” than the other, may be subordinated to his or her partner's arbitrary desires. In this view, each other's essential differences constitute threats to the well-being of each. Unity is gained by privileging a central voice or by imposing a finalized ideal to which both partners assent. Regardless, each of these approaches appear exceedingly fragile and thin.

What, then, does relationship development look like in terms of RDT? More directly, how and to what ends do partners co-create a beautiful and good partnership in which neither simply “agrees to disagree” nor dominates the other? Baxter (2004) says that, to Bakhtin,

aesthetic wholeness accomplishes a “momentary sense of unity through a profound respect for the disparate voices in dialogue” (p. 12). Their differences become *gifts* when these are seen as one’s “surplus,” i.e., an excess of seeing that only enriches and completes the other. The idea here is to reach that aesthetic height described by Dewey's (2005) work in aesthetics: a powerful feeling of completion or consummation, a dynamic sense of unity in which “every successive part flows freely without seam and without unfilled blanks, into what ensues” (p. 37).

Baxter (2004) thus describes aesthetic moments as those that "create momentary consummation, completion, and wholeness" (p. 12). Otherwise stated, “When engaged in aesthetic dialogue, parties strive to identify with and understand the other as completely as they can, but they don't stop there; in addition to empathy, parties complete one another by contributing their unique surplus of seeing” (ibid).

There is always a "totality" about another individual that we can never exhaust. So, for Baxter (2004) the aesthetic moment is so compelling because in the meeting of two persons on a very lofty level, in other words, in the meeting of two infinities, while there may never be a complete meeting of totality to totality, there can be moments, even if fleeting, in which the two parties are utterly and profoundly identical in a way which preserves their individuality. She adds, “An aesthetic experience captures participants in the flow of the moment, evoking a feeling that extends beyond mere judgments of means-end utility, efficiency, or success to include a deeply felt appreciation or realization of wholeness or completion of something” (p. 14).

Perhaps now we can now better appreciate how Baxter’s (2004) notion of the aesthetic moment enables the development of a dialogical relationship. In their constitutive interactions, partners “craft” their relationship identity by drawing from “the stockpile of shared time-space

experiences that a pair constructs through their joint interaction events over time” (p. 4). In this way, they are able to remember key moments of felt completion between them, “accent” especially meaningful or transformative “turning points,” and perhaps attend less to disintegrating experiences. The nonconstitutive approach, by contrast, understands the development of a close relationship as the product of partners’ capacity to mutually satisfy one another’s emotional, psychological, and physical needs, something that depends heavily on partner compatibility. In this view, intimacy is thought to develop and the relationship progresses when each partner’s preformed self matches well with the other, and they are seen to share “similar styles of communication, attitudes and values, personality dispositions, habits and interests, and background experiences” (p. 4).

While it is obvious that any close relationship necessitates some degree of similarity between parties in order to sustain their coordinated interaction, Baxter (2004) explains how this happens in terms of what she refers to as *chronotopic similarity*. Chronotopic similarity emerges between partners over time as they interpret and construct the meaning of their everyday lives, both mundane and more significant moments, in ways that give them a sense of who they are as a couple. In reflecting together upon their interactive experiences, “relationship parties change over time; for example, they acquire more experience, develop more (or less) patience, more (or less) empathy for others, and so forth” (p. 5).

Baxter (2004) emphasizes, however, that RDT presupposes that the business of relating is as much about *differences* as similarities. Whereas many marriage researchers and theorists have tended to frame difference in terms of problematic conflict that requires management or resolution, relational dialectics and dialogism generally see difference between parties “as the basis of the excess of seeing and essential to the construction of selves and relationships” (p. 5).

The “excess of seeing” simply means that partners can see in the other what the other cannot see in him or herself, or as Bakhtin himself puts it, “my excess is your lack, and vice versa. If we wish to overcome this lack, we try to see what is there *together*. We must share each other’s excess in order to overcome our mutual lack” (Bakhtin, Holquist, & Liapunov, 1990, p. xxvi). We might say, “only as a partner can human beings be perceived in their existing wholeness” (Buber & Friedman, 1988).

From the perspective of Relational Dialectics, relationships like marriage are made as partners open to and engage one another in all their *givenness* and then “go with their givens,” as it were, to co-create partly new meanings through their joint interpretations in dialogue, and so improvise new ways of thinking and acting together that draw out more of the relationship’s untapped potential. Partners learn who they are, in effect, within “webs of interlocution” that help them to orient their sense of self in relation to each other (Taylor, 1989, p. 56).

The fourth element of dialogue that Baxter (2004) develops from Bakhtin is the *utterance*. An utterance, she says, “does not refer to the individualized speech act of an autonomous speaker” (p. 14). Instead, as Bakhtin conceived it, an utterance exists only at “the boundary between consciousnesses” (Bakhtin, Holquist, & Emerson, 1986, p. 14). It may be viewed as a “link in a chain,” a link bounded by both the preceding links and the links that follow (*ibid*). Baxter (2011) elaborates,

Just as sociocultural life is deeply relational, so relating is a deeply sociocultural process. Traces of sociocultural discourses lurk in every utterance voiced by relationship parties—whether in joint conversations with their relational partner, in conversations with third parties . . . or in the inner dialogues of intrapersonal communication in a speaker’s mind. (p. 9)

Take any utterance that occurs in the course of some particular marriage, for example. As an utterance, we see the degree to which it has been shaped by many forces: the sociocultural meanings of the marital discourse itself, the social norms and expectations that frame it in a particular space and time, and the specific experiences, situations, and events that call forth specific linguistic actions from each partner. While the utterance is shaped by these practices, it in turn shapes them. To be sure, every linguistic action or utterance is “shaped by the context of the preceding utterance and simultaneously provides the context for the following utterance: an utterance is therefore not only contextually shaped but is also context-modifying” (Titscher et al., 2000, p.118). Each and every utterance, that is, does something that compels a response of one kind or another. Or, as Baxter (2004) explains, “Each utterance is a piece of language that communicates some meaning that the other responds to in turn” (p.14).

For Bakhtin, this process, broadly understood as the process of inner and outer verbal life, goes on continuously, knowing neither beginning nor end: “The outwardly actualized utterance is an island rising from the boundless sea of inner speech; the dimensions and forms of this island are determined by the particular situation of the utterance and its audience” (Dentith, 1995, p. 138). Meaning in this sense is realized only in the process of active, responsive, and indeed creative understanding between speech partners.

Meaning does not reside in the word or in the soul of the speaker or in the soul of the listener. Meaning is the effect of interaction between speaker and listener produced via the material of a particular sound complex. It is like an electric spark that occurs only when two different terminals are hooked together. (Bizzell, 1990)

As Bakhtin phrases it: “A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning” (Clark and Holquist, 1984, p. 234).

Since every utterance is by definition an unprecedented experience, the listener's response has to *take a stance* towards its meaning, one way or another. Partners learn something of who they are becoming in the process. A process like this lies at the heart of Gadamer's (1989) hermeneutics. For Gadamer, this kind of experience constitutes a truly creative learning event:

[This is] an experience that in a sense cannot be repeated and serves to negate our previous views. Indeed, what we learn through experience in this sense involves such a radical transformation of our views that we cannot go back to them to re-experience the experience of their negation. What we experience is the error or partiality of our previous views and we experience this in such a way that we are now too experienced or sophisticated to re-live the experience of believing in them. (Warnke, 1987, p. 26)

Along these lines, then, the process of becoming married, or of developing a relational identity, involves partly overturning all that was known before. Each is never really whom the other imagines him or her to be. In effect, "a true learning experience leads to the recognition that that which one previously took as the 'truth' of the object under study is precisely that: simply that which one took as its 'truth' and not its truth at all" (p. 26).

Unlike the monological discourse that occurs in individualistic conceptions of communication or when only one or just a few voices dominate the conversation, dialogical discourse involves a parallel distribution of knowledge that spreads out in "neural-net fashion" (Rumelhart, 1991). This sense of dialogue allows the discourse to "adapt readily enough to the demands imposed by the ever-changing context of the environment" (Kintsch, 1988). In hermeneutical dialogue, discourse comprehension may not be reduced to either inner-

psychological or outer-social constructivism, as in both cases those offering the presuppositions operative in those worlds are not obviously parties to the foundational conversation at hand.

Baxter's (2004) fifth element of dialogue is what she calls in one place *critical sensibility* and more recently terms "struggles of normative evaluation" (Baxter, 2011). This explores continuity and change in the meanings of the relationship of the past vs. the relationship of the present. At some point in time,

The interplay of competing discourses runs the risk of falling into an unequal discursive playing field such that all but one monologic, authoritative discourse is silenced. If a discourse assumes an overly authoritative voice, meaning can calcify because alternative meanings are denied or suppressed. A totalizing monologue takes place. By contrast, dialogically expansive talk promotes the interaction of competing discourses that become dialogically creative and struggle to achieve a shared normative evaluation. (2011, p. 6)

Part of this creative dialogue, according to Baxter (2011), involves the "proximal-not-yet-spoken, in that it is concerned with the Other's response to a speaker's utterance, thereby effecting what is actually spoken." It also involves, however, a distal-not-yet-spoken that "focuses on the anticipated normative evaluation to be provided by a possible future listener who is not physically present when the utterance is voiced" (p. 113). Bakhtin refers to this so-called third person as the *superaddressee*, who,

represents a perception that what one utters in the moment could be subject to later (re)evaluation. Whereas the proximal listener, Bakhtin's second speaker, is one's immediate conversational partner, this third party—not in an arithmetic sense but in some imagined "metaphysical distance or in distant historical time"—is the anticipated evaluation of one's utterance by outsiders: "God, absolute truth, the court of

dispassionate human conscience, the people, the court of history...and so forth” [in Bakhtin’s words]. (pp. 113-114)

Baxter (2011) notes that the conception of the superaddressee brings us back to the notion of the “utterance chain” or cultural discourses and reminds us that “notions of the conventional and the ideal are, of course, embedded in a culture’s discourses.” Thus, Morson and Emerson (1990) assert that, for Bakhtin,

Whatever else an utterance may do—refer, perform, question, command—it always evaluates. Voloshinov insists that ‘no utterance can be put together without value judgment. Every utterance is above all an *evaluative orientation*’...Bakhtin agrees, and takes one further step: evaluation always has ethical import. (p. 134)

Clearly, Bakhtin and Baxter see the ethical dimension of creative discourse as including a dethroning of monological, hegemonic discourse of all types. In Baxter’s (2004) words, “Dialogue is the obligation to critique dominant voices” (p. 16). This sense of dialogue is prominent in Bakhtin’s work on the medieval carnival. The carnival sense of the world is characterized by “mockery of all serious, ‘closed’ attitudes about the world, and it also celebrates ‘discrowning,’ that is, inverting top and bottom in any given structure” (Morson and Emerson, 1990, p. 443). Bakhtin and Baxter have something more in mind than either the carnivalesque or what political theorists call “negative liberty,” the main principle of rights-based individualism. They are pointing towards shared ethical values of a more substantive sort.

At this point, we arrive at one of the most important and difficult questions concerning Baxter and Bakhtin’s view of interpersonal relationships and what chapter 8 referred to as “strong relationality” in general. The question is, what is this evaluative orientation or ethical import? Richardson (2011) argues that a number of Bakhtin scholars acknowledge that an

interplay of ideologies and ethical values is an integral part of creative discourses but never clarify that or how this interplay gets resolved, except perhaps by power, arbitrary choice, or some sort of ironic, postmodern play that itself entirely lacks Bakhtin's "ethical import." These authors appreciate that Bakhtin accords equal weight to centrifugal and centripetal forces in communication, but have little to say about centripetal forces or how they bring about an at least temporary genuine unity among discourse partners. Baxter (2004, 2011), following Bakhtin, takes the reality of such temporary unity or genuine agreement quite seriously and gives it a central place in RDT. She writes that from a dialogic perspective, "unity needs to be conceptualized as authoring," and stresses the importance of "how it is that such discursive opposites as separation and integration can complete, enhance, and enable one another at the same time that they limit or constrain one another" (2004, pp. 8-9).

Baxter (2004) acknowledges, however, that relational dialectical theory and research have just begun to address this dialogic sense of unity. In her recent book, Baxter (2011) offers additional critiques of "the discourse of individualism," "individualistic subjectivism," and "possessive individualism," but presents little additional theory concerning the nature of unity. In several places, though, she indicates the direction her thought is taking on this subject. For example, she mentions two studies in her program of research that explore the clash of opposing ideologies. One of these (Bridge and Baxter, 1992) explored the conflict between "caring and individuating norms of friendship" over and against impersonal norms of neutrality and the rejection of all favoritism in the workplace. The second study (Baxter and Braithwaite, 2002) "found that two opposing ideologies of marriage—utilitarian/expressive individualism and moral/social community [Bellah, et al., 1985]—'authored' one another among a sample of long-term couples who had renewed their marital vows." This study found that "love between

partners, a prominent feature of the ideology of utilitarian/expressive individualism, was perceived to be nourished through a key feature of the moral/community ideology—the security and support afforded by the communal web of friends and family that surrounded the couple.” Baxter concludes, “additional work is needed on how unity and opposition are both enacted in interaction.” Otherwise, she states, we miss the centripetal half of the “centripetal-centrifugal flux” (p. 9).

It seems to me that Baxter (2004, 2011) and RDT are focusing on unity and centripetal forces in communication in a way that gets past the conventional distinction between self-focused and other-focused orientations in interpersonal relationships. She is beginning to make distinctions among ideologies that parallel the distinction between internal vs. external goods, weak vs. strong types of relationality, and means-end vs. constitutive end social practices discussed in the previous chapter. In any case, I suggest that non-monological, non-hegemonic unity and joint authoring can only be explicated adequately in these terms. Such joint authoring can be difficult and arduous. But when successful, partners to the relationship arrive at a shared appreciation and enjoyment of so-called internal goods that are valued for their own sake, as opposed to any advantages or benefits they afford an individual, and are meaningful to partners in a way that is no longer subject to any cost-benefit analysis or sharp tension between autonomy and connectedness. To a significant degree, partners can act as one, relatively self-forgetfully, in the pursuit of goods pertaining to such things as the quality of their relationship, the care and raising of children, the service of others in the wider community, and the cultivation of any sort of spiritual life to which they might incline. Only in this context, at least temporarily, can difference and unity make their peace with one another, without one being sacrificed to the other.

The Goods of Marriage in a Post-Traditional, Postmodern Culture

In authoring this dissertation, I had four broad aims. The first was to sketch a history of marriage that identified the ethical ideals and moral goods associated with a number of the prominent epochs and civilizations prior to modern times. Typically, these ideals and goods were given moral force and found to be convincing and meaningful because they were grounded in some understanding of God, the metaphysical telos of life, or natural law. In addition, I've tried to describe how the link between the institutions of marriage and family and such transcendent realities has been severed in modern culture. Even if some individuals adhere or think they adhere to traditional beliefs of this sort, they do so in a modern pluralistic context that inevitably relativizes and weakens them as compelling ideals, partly by drawing them into the individualistic values and pursuits in a post-traditional world where they no longer fit.

Second, I've tried to describe how many people in our current society experience a seemingly irresolvable dilemma. Namely, they are drawn to some of these traditional ideals but also find them riddled with elements of inequality, irrational authority, and unjust domination that make them quite unacceptable in a society that, at its best, will not compromise on its core principles of the equal dignity and moral worth of every individual. I have argued that most of the ways that marriage theorists, social scientists, and cultural critics propose for overcoming or coping with this dilemma have turned out to be inadequate. So called authority-oriented solutions cut so much against the grain of our core liberal values that even their adherents seem unable to consistently implement them in practice, leading them to an even more insistent dogmatism or to despair. However, what broadly have been described as "liberal individualist" approaches to rethinking marriage typically center on a balance of interests or an equilibration of autonomy and connectedness that turns out to be fraught with tension and unable to nurture the kind of

commitment and loyalty needed for resolving inevitable sharp conflicts. Also, at times, these approaches keep many couples from enjoying the kind of deep communion that many seek.

Third, I have argued that hermeneutic and dialogical approaches to understanding human action may offer resources for making some real headway in resolving these dilemmas. Among these resources are Gadamer and Taylor's hermeneutics, Bakhtin's dialogism, Baxter's relational dialectical theory, and notions from the field of virtue ethics such as internal vs. external goods and instrumental vs. constituent-ends practices explored recently by Blaine Fowers (2005) and other theoretical psychologists. These views complement one another and suggest what might be a credible way "beyond objectivism and relativism" (Bernstein, 1983) that allows us to affirm certain internal or substantive goods of marriage and family life that carry real weight but also might be found acceptable in a post-traditional world. In my view, there is nothing about this framework for conceiving such goods or the goods themselves that prevents us from wholeheartedly affirming the moral worth of gay and lesbian marriages and families, accepting no-fault divorce as a sometimes necessary legal practice, and fully respecting the lifestyle choices of individuals who choose to live constructively outside the framework of marriage. If these substantive goods of marriage and family life are genuine and thereby compelling, many will be drawn to pursue them and the larger community will certainly benefit.

Fourth, throughout this document, I have tried to say a few things in relatively concrete terms about what these marital and family goods look like or how they might be conceptualized. There are a number of limitations concerning the extent to which this may be possible at present. If I am right, we are just beginning to sketch a framework of ideas in which it might be possible to talk about these goods in a way that do not either lapse into moralism or paper over the problem with well-meaning but vague terms like "healthy marriages." Also, much of the

articulation of these goods will necessarily take place in the context of diverse cultural traditions that, even if they share a commitment to core liberal values, will be colored by their particular concerns and interests. This does not mean that different articulations are entirely relative, only that they are tied like all of our goals and ideals to particular contexts in living. Different understandings arising from different contexts do not necessarily have to limit us, at all. Open and honest dialogue across communities and traditions, appreciating what Jonathan Sacks (2001) calls “the dignity of difference,” will only be enriching.

Nevertheless, I would like to conclude the dissertation with some remarks about what I see as some general features of marital goods of the sort that many of us might embrace. To begin with, I suggest that there are three broad conceptions or models of marriage readily available today, none of which are helpful in rethinking the goods of marriage in some kind of credible fashion. The first is the authority-oriented pattern for marriage that incorporates rigidities and injustices simply unacceptable to a modern critical sensibility. Second is the modern conception of marriage as a balance between autonomy and connectedness that tries to honor the rights of individuals but fails to illuminate the trust, vulnerability, and sense of shared purpose that are essential for resolving serious differences and experiencing deep mutuality or union. Third is an intense form of that deep longing for union with a “soul mate” that often resembles mere infatuation more than any sort of mature love. De Rougemont (1983) described this condition as all Eros, no Agape. It paradoxically blends losing oneself in adoration of the other with near total self-absorption, provides few resources for dealing with difference and threat in relationships, and never lasts for very long.

Perspectives on interpersonal and marital relationships made available to us by hermeneutic philosophy, conceptions of weak and strong relationality, virtue ethics, and

relational dialectical theory, among others, make it possible to begin to rethink marriage and its goods in more promising terms. For example, Slife's (2004) reflections on strong relationality make it crystal clear that modern individualism's attempt to cordon the individual off and protect him or her from unjust intrusions and domineering influences is in many ways impossible and self-defeating. We are not free-standing individuals with mainly "thin" or only contractual ties with others. Each person is "first and always a nexus of relations" who have "a shared being and a mutual constitution." We should be able to rethink what we mean by personal responsibility and the capacity to defend oneself and others against injustices in this context, without cutting individuals off from indispensable "others" in order to save them from various abuses. Slife drives home the point that in an inescapably strong relational world it makes sense to welcome differences with others and see them as a source of strength and connection in a valuable new way. A marriage is strengthened and enriched when partners lower their defenses, exercise patience, and expect the unexpected in the form of insights or aid from the other, rather than remaining constantly wary of possible harm. The achievement and enjoyment of this kind of relationship is a rich marital good.

Another marital good may be seen as creatively making genuinely new meaning together in the face of ever new challenges and opportunities. Baxter (2004) refers to this as the joint construction of "aesthetic moments." Hermeneutic thinkers conceptualize this as a shared "learning experience." Appeals to fixed or traditional authority in a manner Bakhtin would call monological, or to a conception of natural law that claims to supersede one's own best judgment at the moment, illegitimately truncate or hamper this indispensable creative process. Such creative activity or shared learning experience should be conceptualized as an "internal good" (Fowers, 2005), something worthwhile in its own right rather than a means to any other kind of

outcome or satisfaction. There is no reason to fear that it will dilute marital commitment or encourage merely self-interested pursuits, as authority-oriented marriage protagonists imply.

An important marital good, for those who are capable of and inclined to pursue it, is of course childbearing and childrearing. From the authority-oriented perspective, this activity is prescribed as an essential duty that may have to brutally override personal inclination or pleasure. From a therapeutic-contractual point of view, it is difficult to make sense of the dedication and sacrifices that childrearing involves. However, thinking of childrearing as an internal good that entails joint creativity and shared learning experiences puts the care of children and commitment to their welfare on a different footing. It conceptualizes childrearing, following Aristotle, as a morally excellent or virtuous activity upon which a particular, very real kind of pleasure and satisfaction supervene, although they are qualitatively different from the kinds of pleasures that are pursued directly in instrumental or means-end human action.

For the mature individual who is willing to make the effort to cultivate such excellences, the intrinsic rewards of this activity and the pursuit of other internal marital goods provides a strong basis for sustaining marital commitment and loyalty. Neither the intimidating majesty or the punitive power of a purely external authority—ultimately only an external good—is needed to this end. Moreover, there is no reason to deny that the full pursuit and enjoyment of these goods, with all the benefits they afford the larger society in terms of well-brought up and responsible citizens, cannot be undertaken by gay and lesbian couples and families. I would suggest that “kin altruism” (Browning and Marquardt, 2006) and the idea that natural biological parents are required for enduring family bonds is actually a more inferior basis than these sorts of internal goods give for cultivating authentic altruism.

I conclude that rethinking marriage in these terms offers a promising way of sustaining marriage “beyond objectivism and relativism,” in a way that fully honors our best ideals of the equal moral worth of every person but bridges the troubling gap between self and other that has bedeviled so much contemporary moral philosophy and social science.

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