The Evolution and Future Direction of Marriage
by
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Introduction

Statistics on marriage since the second half of the twentieth century have not been encouraging. Divorce rates are high. Marriage rates are low. Cohabitation and unwed motherhood have skyrocketed. Responses to the statistics run the usual gamut; in one camp there is a rallying cry for a renewed commitment to marriage, while in another there is a dismissal of marriage as an outdated institution the usefulness of which has been exhausted in the face of the increasing complexity of society and the demands placed on the individual. Clearly there are arguments to support both positions but many are based on the too-narrow view of personal experience or ideological orientation. The issue of marriage, and in particular the future of marriage, requires a much larger scope, one that explores the origin, evolution, and current state of marriage and one that considers the psychological and ethical dimensions of marriage as well. From this solid footing, one can explore the future possibilities and even preferred direction for an institution that, for better or worse, has long been expected to satisfy a wide range of needs from intimacy, affection, and sex to domestic stability, family, and economic partnership.

In this paper we trace the evolution of marriage from prehistoric to contemporary times. We then examine the main controversies and issues regarding modern marriage in the West. From there we turn to future possibilities connected with cultural and technological changes. Finally, we outline a vision of the preferable marriage of the future, one that is broad and general enough to accommodate the diverse modes of marriage that have emerged in contemporary times, but also one that is psychologically and ethically informed. We will outline a vision based on the notion of the mutual practice and pursuit of character virtues by both partners in the marriage.

Prehistory and Ancient and Early History

Marriage is essentially a monogamous arrangement and there is debate over the point in our evolutionary history at which we developed monogamy as a primary form of male-female bonding. Based upon fossil evidence and comparative biology, it is likely that mating behavior in our earliest hominid ancestors involved the most powerful and dominant males securing open sexual access to multiple female partners, who being significantly smaller than the males were generally compliant and submissive to the dominant male's wishes[1]. But as sexual dimorphism decreased in later hominids, relative equality and shared responsibilities between the sexes emerged, along with serial monogamy; we also saw the beginnings of romantic love.[2] There is debate though over the primary factors that originally brought our human ancestors together into

relatively monogamous and committed relationships. Shlain argues that it was a fundamental negotiation – the female exchanging sex and progeny for meat and protection provided by the male – that was the foundation of marriage among early humans. In fact, this pivotal social negotiation brought with it an enhanced level of future consciousness (making a long term commitment); social-cognitive evolution (assessing the deep intentions and character of another human being); and self-consciousness and self-control (the female no longer being automatically compliant to the male's overtures).[3] An alternative explanation, provided by Stephanie Coontz, is that the earliest marriages were arranged by the families, perhaps even the tribe, to cement social bonds and contribute to the economic viability of the group; different tribes may have arranged for marriages between its members to create social alliances. The original purpose of marriage was to produce reciprocal obligations and the interlocking of families. Hence, bonding was not a conscious and thoughtful choice, as in Shlain's interpretation, but a social arrangement forced upon the participants.[4] It is this social model and practice that would indeed become the "traditional marriage" in the millennia to follow.

Riane Eisler argues that our earliest civilizations centered around the worship of a mother goddess, though there was usually a male hunter or bull archetypal deity included as well. Eisler describes these goddess societies as partnership (or gylanic) societies where there was basic equality between the sexes.[5] There appears to have been relative social equality of the sexes in ancient Egypt, for example, where female goddesses had central positions of power.[6] So marriages, up to a certain point in our history, may have involved a relative equality and partnership of male and female, even if the marriages were arranged by parents, family, and the tribe.

By 5000 BCE, however, the rise of urban centers and the emergence of agriculture and farming resulted in a strict division of labor along gender lines. The institution of rigid sexual codes of behavior and the establishment of permanent monogamy as the norm went hand in hand with a decline in women's rights. By 1000 BCE, with the eclipse of the mother goddess, patriarchy emerged as the dominant social system establishing a double standard which viewed women as "chattel". As the main purpose of marriage was procreation, abortions and extra-marital sex were not tolerated.[7] In ancient Greece, while we do see some examples of romantic love coupled with marital fidelity with Homer's Hector and Andromache, and Odysseus and Penelope, the darker side of marriage and the relations between the sexes, such as that presented in Greek tragedy, far outweighs such tender views. Thus, when Plato talks about love, his focus is on love between older and younger men, not something strongly connected with marriage. Marriage, in the ancient world, was a social arrangement for consolidating status and resources.[8]

Patriarchy was clearly reinforced in both Judaism and early Christianity. Under Christianity marriage became the sacrament of matrimony, further buttressing monogamy and lending doctrinal authority to the ban on divorce. By the time of St. Augustine sexuality, especially when associated with women, came to be seen as evil, thus justifying greater controls on women's freedom.

While women's rights did rise and fall throughout the Middle Ages in Europe under the pressure of different cultural norms, economic demands and social status, it was the spread of urbanization toward the end of the Medieval period that opened up a greater variety of occupations for women thus affording them greater social power. This notwithstanding, women were not considered "free and lawful" persons at any time in this period. Reflecting the increasing secularization that accompanied urbanization, however, marriage evolved into a civil contract as well as a religious institution and, in general, divorce rates remained low throughout the Middle Ages. There remained, though, a deep conceptual gulf between love and marriage and marriages by and large continued to be arranged and controlled by families or even extended communities.[9]

Modern History

In *The Way We Never Were*, Stephanie Coontz argues that the concept of the "traditional marriage" is, to some degree, a myth. Marriage has changed and evolved, reflective of changes in cultural values and the basic challenges of life. Yet, marriage is generally a human universal across the globe and throughout history, with some set of enforced rights and obligations associated with it.

Moving into the eighteenth century, a real shift in marriage took place, one that reflected a general social-cultural shift in human values and philosophy. The modern Western philosophy of individualism and self-determination probably goes back to the eleventh or twelfth century, but it was with the emergence of the European Enlightenment that freedom, autonomy, and individual rights became the dominant social ideals of the day, impacting all aspects of human life, including marriage. Increasingly, marriage came to be seen as a mutual choice of the couple entering into it, a choice based on love. No longer simply, or primarily, an economic arrangement between families, the expectations of marriage also changed; love, romance and companionship became important considerations as well.

During the Victorian Era, the ideal of love reached new heights, and for the first time in Western history love and marriage were not mutually exclusive. Yet, ironically, it was a love disassociated from sex, at least on the social surface. The ideal woman found her fulfillment in the dual roles of wife and mother; she was seen as pure, asexual and morally superior (a real shift from the earlier view of the female as morally and spiritually inferior, a suspect being controlled by her lusts). This unrealistic picture of the woman reflected the sexual repressiveness which was, as Freud observed, a key characteristic of the Victorian era. As a major institution of the day, the Victorian marriage perpetuated, if not reinforced, the perceived differences between men and women and locked both into narrowly defined roles in marriage and in life.

The increased emphasis on love as the primary reason for getting married brought with it consequences not entirely unanticipated: the divorce rate shot up. Social commentators of the early twentieth century saw this shift in emphasis toward love and individual choice, and away from social and family control, as a threat to an institution that was, by all conventional standards, in an increasingly precarious position.

The social critics had reason to be alarmed. In the early decades of the twentieth century, with more women working and realizing both economic power and freedom, divorce rates continued to rise. Dating replaced courting, gender segregation in social settings broke down, self-expression was increasingly accepted and encouraged, and by the 1920s the original modern sexual revolution was in full force. The sexual repressiveness of the Victorian era gave way to a new sexual liberalism; sex outside of marriage became more acceptable and sexual attraction became a key defining criterion for getting married. The party was just starting though when it came to a grinding halt. With the Great Depression and then the Second World War, freedom and self-expression as pivotal values took a back seat to social responsibility as the key defining virtue. Divorce rates consequently declined again.

The 1950s was the culmination of the modern individualistic and romantic vision of marriage. Marriage rates surged and marital stability became the norm. There was a relatively clear division of labor between the husband, identified as the breadwinner, and the wife, in the role of homemaker. Buoyed by the unprecedented economic growth of the post war years, the nuclear family came into its own. Marital love and family life were strongly connected with self-fulfillment, and devotion to one's spouse was the top priority. Yet, underneath the idealized vision of marriage and family, such as that portrayed in popular television representations,[10] other darker realities simmered; alcoholism and drug abuse, teen pregnancy, psychological problems and sexual and physical abuse, though kept out of view, reflected the high cost of conforming to the rigid roles prescribed for both men and women.

The 1960s Cultural Revolution, Divorce, and the Decline of Marriage

Just as the 1950s vision of marriage was the culmination of modern social and philosophical trends centering around freedom, choice and the centrality of love, the 1960s witnessed the culmination of other trends instigated by many of the same modern ideas, but with an increased emphasis on freedom and individual rights for everyone. Economic and technological factors also came into play. As more and more women went into full time jobs, often involving long term career aspirations, their economic power increased; consequently, their sense of personal identity transcended the singular and limiting image of the housewife. The rise of modern feminism, highlighting the autonomy and equality of women, also contributed to their empowerment. During this same time, males, too, expressed increasing discontent with the straight-jacket stereotyping of men as breadwinners and, in step with women, acted on their desire for more freedom in determining their destiny. Overall, there was a cultural rebellion against conformity – against rigid socially sanctioned roles - and a rise in the philosophy of being "uncommitted" as an expression of increased individual freedom. Part of the rejection against conformity and tradition involved a rejection of religious authority and a secularization of values. Postmodernism and relativism further undercut the moral authority of the church, family, and central social institutions; values were increasingly seen as unique and personal choices. How could one

judge what was right and wrong regarding love, sex, and marriage? The sexual revolution of the 1960s which strongly opposed the idea that sex outside of marriage was sinful, for either males or females, enjoyed a real technological boost with the introduction of the pill, which allowed women increased sexual freedom. The, perhaps, not surprising result of all of this freedom was a decoupling of sex and love. In retrospect, some critics have seen the 1960s as an era of narcissism, unconstrained hedonism, irresponsibility, and rampant immorality; the era triggered a dramatic rise again in divorce, a corresponding rise in co-habitation, and a return to the pattern of serial marriage or serial monogamy, which had been much more prevalent in ancient times.[11]

One may interpret the social transformation of the 1960s as a moral collapse or one may view it as a moral evolution, with social mores moving from an authoritarian form of ethics (rules being provided by authorities and universalized social norms) to an individualistic or humanitarian ethics (ethical decisions being determined by individual considerations and choices). Similarly, one could ask whether marriage as an institution began to fall apart in the 1960s or whether it began a new stage in its evolution. Although marriage was supposed to be an individual choice based on love, there was still considerable social pressure in the 1950s to get married and stay married; marriage was for better or worse. In the 1960s, individual choice became more important, more powerful and social sanctions and rules and regulations less important. Women especially realized greater equality; if marriage was going to work it had to be a partnership of equals. All of this points toward moral evolution rather than moral collapse. From contemporary complexity and chaos theory we know that the collapse or disintegration of a system may not be an indication of imminent death, but rather impending evolution; a system has to fall apart – experience some significant chaos – so it can come back together in a transformed and more evolved way. This, we contend, is what happened in the 1960s and 1970s.

Contemporary Trends, Issues, and Debates on Marriage

In 1970 Alvin Toffler announced in *Future Shock* "the death of permanence" and the emergence of "the disposable society" and indeed these expressions seemed to fit modern marriage. Marriage was no longer permanent and spouses clearly seemed to have become disposable. Not only was sex decoupled from love or marriage, and living together decoupled from marriage, but reproduction and childbirth were increasingly disconnected from marriage as well. The out of wedlock birthrate climbed in the 1970s and 1980s along with the divorce rate.[12]

Although divorce rates have leveled off in the last decade, there is still a general concern at a global level over the contemporary crisis in marriage. As Coontz notes, there are numerous and often conflicting explanations and interpretations of the crisis but there is a widespread belief that marriage is in danger. One issue already raised is whether we are observing a decline (perhaps even extinction) or whether we are watching an evolution. Given the moral issues that emerged in the 1960s, such as women's rights and equality and increasing

freedom of choice regarding love, marriage, and gender roles, it could be argued that we are witnessing a moral evolution in the institution of marriage; things are getting better, not worse. Although it has been argued that marriage should be abolished, perhaps what in fact is happening is that it is being redefined.

Throughout the ages, the meaning and function of marriage have evolved beginning with the economic and social cementing of families and tribes, to the religious sacrament and the legally sanctioned contract, and most recently, the personal covenant based on love and devotion. More recently, coincident with the presumed crisis in marriage, the institution has further diversified. In contemporary times, we find delayed marriages (frequently preceded by co-habitation), serial marriages, single-parent households (sometimes in the aftermath of divorce), blended families and step parents, and co-habitation. But also we find, again breaking out of various social and religious constraints, gay marriages and inter-cultural and inter-racial marriages. Part of the concern over marriage as a tradition is based upon a negative reaction to the diversification and loosening up of constraints in marriages and human bonding. As Coontz points out though, none of these newer forms is really new; all the various arrangements have been tried before, in fact, frequently tried before. What we see now with the emphasis on freedom, equal rights, and non-traditional or non-authoritarian ethics, is a flowering and proliferation of all the forms simultaneously. And of special note, there has been a steady increase in solitary living among adults; marriage is no longer seen as an absolute – as the pivotal event in one's adult life - a requirement that everyone must participate in.[13]

There has been a conservative backlash to the perceived collapse of traditional marriage (but again the traditional marriage through most of history was not the 1950s nuclear family but the socially arranged marriage). Conservative voices see the decline of marriage as responsible for all our present social ills and these voices wish to strongly reassert the value of marriage, even creating codes of conduct for how to practice or live a marriage. The conservative concept of the traditional marriage though is usually associated with a patriarchal system. Philosophical or moral arguments aside, one perspective on this issue recently put forward is that the patriarchal model will eventually reassert its dominant position in society because people who follow this model are significantly out-reproducing more liberal groups who support more diverse and egalitarian options in love and marriage.

However marriage is defined, the conservative voice has marshaled an array of statistics to support its position on the value of marriage. Interestingly, these positive benefits associated with marriage are also used by more liberal groups, such as gays, as solid reasons for supporting marriage and, in particular, in their case, for demanding the right to marry. Relative to living alone or even in co-habitation, marriage is associated with enhanced mental and physical health, increased longevity, a significant increase in wealth and higher incomes, more personal happiness, higher quality and more frequent sex, greater safety, more peace and contentment, and lower alcohol and drug abuse.[14]

To further complicate the picture, it is ironical, given the concerns over the collapse of marriage, that the business of marriage, as well as divorce, is

booming; the "bridal-industrial complex" generates more revenue than the entertainment industry. People keep getting married and getting divorced and getting married again, spending big bucks on the whole process.

Underneath all the fear and concern over the present condition of marriage, it could be argued that what we are seeing is a "marriage renaissance." More than ever, individuals marry out of choice and mutual consent; they marry for love rather than to participate in a socially sanctioned and reinforced institution; and they marry for mutual benefit and fulfillment. The real value in marriage is marriage itself – the creation of a loving partnership becomes the primary reason to marry. As Coontz observes, our moral standards and personal expectations regarding marriage have actually increased in recent times, making marriage both more fulfilling if it works and more fragile, given the powerful expectations and individual responsibility involved in preserving it.[15]

The Future Possibilities of Love, Sex, and Marriage

If the general historical trends in marriage and bonding have been toward greater individual determination, greater diversity of options and roles, and greater rights within the marriage setting, then what might the future hold for marriage? In Robert Sawyer's *The Neanderthal Parallax*, we encounter the interesting possibility, within an alternative culture, of a triadic conception of marriage, that is, of everyone being bisexual and having both a female and a male mate.[16] Clearly our own cultural evolution could open up new forms of marriage. In fact the future of marriage is connected with the future of culture, because it has been general cultural trends in the past that have impacted changes in marriage. As one example, globalization is exposing individual cultures to a diversity of practices and options from other cultures; as cultures mix and create new versions and syntheses of different practices, marriage should diversify even further. Of course, it is possible for there to be cultural regressions or historical oscillations, such as tribal marriages or marriages created within matriarchal societies. Increasing freedom and diversification can instigate counter-reactions emphasizing responsibility, constraint, and uniformity; this can be seen in the recent conservative push back toward "traditional marriages." As another example, the increasingly frenetic, fast-paced, and present-oriented modern way of life which imposes multiple and scattered obligations on all individuals could further erode the capacity of humans to form intimate, solid, and long term commitments with each other. Relationships could become increasingly short-term and superficial.

Technology will also influence marriage and sex in the future as it has in the past. In the near future technology will open up all kinds of strange, even outlandish possibilities (relative to our primitive perspective). Transhumanists envision improvement of the species through technology, through the transcendence of our current limitations. Given such a scenario, one can only imagine how what would constitute a fulfilling relationship with another would evolve as well. What would be the romantic or sexual ideals of a technologically

enhanced or transformed human species? How could we use technology to transform the human psyche to create deeper and more fulfilling marriages?

One can envision virtual spouses with both partners marrying and living in virtual reality, perhaps in addition to or in place of a marriage in "normal" reality. (This to some degree is happening already on interactive Web sites such as *Second Life*.) In Charles Stross's *Accelerando* characters experience multiple identity pathways with multiple partners through downloading their conscious minds into a computer-supported virtual reality. One can imagine sex and marriage with robots.[17] Marriage could be totally de-coupled from both reproduction and parenting. We may enhance, modify, or enrich upon the sexes; who is to say that two sexes are sufficient, especially if sex is disconnected from reproduction. Biotechnology may provide the means for switching back and forth between the sexes so that each partner can be male or female at different times. (This possibility is examined in Ursula LeGuin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*.)[18] Biotechnology, specifically cloning, could offer the option of marrying yourself – of forming a solipsistic marriage with a cloned version of you of the opposite sex. But then, one could just as easily have a homosexual marriage with another version of you of the same sex. Though it involves time travel as an added element, in David Gerrold's *The Man Who Folded Himself*, the main character, through looping through time, becomes his daughter, his son, his mother, his father, and his wife.[19] If, as Ray Kurzweil and others have predicted, we are able in the future to download our minds into a computer, then the traditional barrier of separate bodies could be overcome and distinct minds could engage in a type of conscious fusion where the two really become one. In such a scenario of computer-supported conscious personalities, marriages could become "eternal" if our conscious minds could be indefinitely supported through advanced technology. As for our physical limitations, both nanotechnology and virtual reality will provide the opportunity for multiple bodies, freely chosen transforming bodies. Based on similar technological powers, it could become possible to re-create conscious minds from the past and reincarnate them in genetically reconstituted bodies; thus people could opt for marriages with famous people from the past. An example of this is Dan Simmons's *The Fall of Hyperion*, where one of the main characters bonds with a reincarnated John Keats.[20] If indeed we travel into outer space and contact other forms of intelligence, given our increasing biotechnological powers we may marry or sexually bond with members of other species. This idea has been quite popular in science fiction; Spock's parents in *Star Trek* are two different species, human and Vulcan, but even earlier in the genre, Philip Jose Farmer achieved great notoriety for envisioning graphic sex and intimate bonding of humans and aliens in *Flesh* and *Strange Relations*.[21]

Partnership and the Preferable Marriage for the Future

Though the possibilities for the future of marriage may be endless, at this point we want to consider what may be the preferable direction for marriage in the more recognizable future. We will suggest a conceptual framework based on

the idea of character virtues, in essence, an ethical framework for the preferable direction for marriage. This vision should be broad and flexible enough to accommodate many diverse possibilities, yet it should be psychologically and historically informed. A "preferable marriage" identifies and describes an ideal partnership or relationship in a way analogous to describing an ideal or preferable individual; it is based on identifying a set of values and character virtues.

We will begin with Riane Eisler's theory of two basic forms of social organization as a way to elucidate the concept of partnership. Eisler distinguishes between dominator and partnership societies. A dominator society has a hierarchical power structure wherein some members have more power and thus rule over others in the group who have less power and are subordinate. Eisler argues that for most of human history males have occupied a position of domination over women, both in the general public sphere and in interpersonal relationships. Generally, marriages have been patriarchal. Further, Eisler contends that in male dominator societies, sex was vilified (frequently associated with the temptress nature of the woman who can not control her erotic impulses); further, violence was eroticized; sexual violence was socially acceptable, if not under certain circumstances condoned. Finally, male dominator societies adopt a mind-body dualism, clearly separating bodily desires (such as sex) from higher mental (and/or spiritual) realities. The body is base; the mind or spirit is elevated.

Eisler contends, however, that prior to the emergence of dominator societies, many societies operated within a partnership mentality under a central female deity, a mother goddess. (In contrast, male dominator societies invariably had a male god at the top of the hierarchy ruling over humanity.) In partnership societies (as well as the marriage relationships within such societies) there was equality of the sexes. Whereas dominator societies motivated the subordinate (women) through fear and pain, in partnership societies, individuals were motivated by pleasure to realize social cohesion. Sexuality was sacred rather than base; hence there was a rejection of mind-body dualism and the ideal partnership was a collaboration for mutual benefit.[22]

As a starting point in defining a preferable marriage, partnerships should be founded on equality, on equal power and recognition of the two individual entities, who are both motivated toward collaboration and mutual gain. The core of the relationship should be built upon the desire for pleasure (something positive) rather than the desire to avoid pain (something negative). This distinction corresponds with Neal Miller's psychological distinction between approach and avoidance motivation.[23] Although there is clearly an element of unpleasantness and pain in any human relationship, the primary and psychologically healthy reason for creating and staying in a relationship should be because it is pleasurable, desirable, and positive; the primary reason should not be to avoid something aversive. Also, in keeping with the modern trend toward human rights and equality and the ethics behind it, the ideal partnership and marriage of the future should be founded upon equality, rather than dominance and subordination.

A second key idea in defining the ideal marriage is the Yin-yang or reciprocity model of reality. The Yin-yang depicts reality as interdependencies and complementarities. Yin and yang are co-dependent. Within such a model, the notion of absolute independence makes no sense. A human relationship is a state of interdependence; both extreme dependence and independence are seen as dysfunctional. Yin and yang also complete each other; neither is fully realized without the other. For humans, full individuality is realized in the context of the other. And when yin and yang are combined together, we get the Tao, a synergistic emergence and co-creation; something new emerges that transcends the parts.[24]

We propose that reality – including human reality – consists of interdependent open systems. No man (or woman) is an island, and as interactive, interdependent social beings, we only realize ourselves fully through relationships with others. An ideal marriage is a reciprocity of interdependent human beings, each giving and receiving from the other. Reciprocity can also be compared to the concepts of justice and fairness; hence, an ideal marriage embodies justice (as opposed to an unjust lopsided human relationship) and consequently equality. The ideal marriage should be seen as a vehicle toward self-realization and a vehicle for emergent co-creation. We come together to create something that neither of us could create on our own.

We believe it would be a mistake to rigidly stereotype each member of a marriage as possessing certain traits and necessarily carrying certain responsibilities; historically humans have reacted against such social constraints. What is important is that the areas of strength complement and support each other, regardless of who possesses which qualities. Specifically regarding marriages of men and women, it would be a mistake to view the two sexes as locked into certain distinctive characteristics and abilities. The theory of male-female differences has been used throughout history to subjugate women, based as it is upon the presumed differences between males and females, and the presumed superiority of stereotypical male characteristics over stereotypical female characteristics.

This is not to deny that there may not be general statistical differences between men and women.[25] But highlighting the differences between the sexes has a variety of negative consequences. It ignores or minimizes the huge array of commonalities between men and women. (The commonalities and statistical overlap outweigh the differences.[26]) Seeing the "other" as very different from oneself interferes with finding common bonds. Highlighting differences limits our expectations of the other; it sets up barriers and creates an "us" versus "them" mindset. Further, it limits modes of interaction and intimacy; we don't look for or expect to have common interests, passions, and desires. As noted above, emphasizing irreconcilable differences can create and support an atmosphere of inequality. If one accepts the common sexual stereotypes, it limits one's own individual expression and development; it blinds each of us to opportunities for self-development. Accepting sexual stereotypes of ourselves creates a false sense of security and worth; each human should create self-worth and self-identity through his or her own individual accomplishments, not by identifying with

a group. Finally, psychological studies reveal that as women and men age, they show a convergence of ideals and aspirations and, in general, women and men of any age tend to agree on fundamental values.

We have considered the issue of stereotyping at length because in adopting the Yin-yang model of human relationships we do not mean to assume that women possess one set of qualities (yin qualities such as passivity and nurturance) and men possess a different set of qualities (yang qualities such as activism and detachment). Both men and women can possess either set of qualities in a relationship. The ideal is to realize complementarities, completeness, and balance, but to do so in a context of freedom rather than socially enforced gender rigidity.

In this context, the two members in the relationship need not be a male and a female; there is absolutely no reason we can see why two women or two men could not realize the same level of interdependency, complementarity, intimacy, and resonance of common values and aspirations as a woman and a man. Although at this point in time, members of the same sex can not, through any simple means, co-create a biological offspring, future biotechnological advances will almost certainly get around this roadblock. Furthermore, co-creation in a marriage should not be limited to making babies together. With the general population living longer, a sustainable and quality marriage must go beyond raising children as its core function. Just as sex goes beyond reproduction – couples make love to realize intimacy – marriage goes beyond raising children.

Returning to Riane Eisler, we would like to next consider the spiritual dimension to an ideal marriage. We distinguish between religion and spirituality, and further we distinguish between spirituality and believing in some particular metaphysical scheme or conception of God. One can be an atheist and spiritual if one has a sense of transcendence and a sense of higher morality and values. Quoting Eisler:

> "Spirituality has become the word of the hour. But what is spirituality? … spirituality means feeling at one with that which we call the divine. But when I think of the divine I... think of our own most evolved qualities: our profound human capacity for empathy, for love, our striving for justice, our hunger for beauty, our yearning to create… spiritual means being ethical and, in the true sense of the word, moral."[27]

We would add to this description of spirituality the concept of transcendence, that a person (or a couple) aspires to something higher than themselves (the theist realizes this in the belief in God). Plato found transcendence in the contemplation of "eternal forms"; naturalists may find transcendence in the worship of nature, even the deification of it as a "mother goddess"; scientists can find it in epistemic awe and wonder at the cosmos, at existence; writers like Csikszentmihalyi and John Stewart argue that contributing to human evolution should become a central goal in people's lives, and this is

another avenue to transcendence. In fact, to return to the topic of children, clearly raising children is a form of transcendence. In general, bequeathing something positive to the future of humanity is transcendence. We include spirituality, in agreement with Eisler, as a core feature of an ideal marriage because, just as an individual must realize transcendence and go beyond self-serving ends, a couple must go beyond themselves and serve some greater good as well. Marriages are social units within the broader context of human society; an ideal marriage should contribute to the quality and evolution of humanity as a whole.[28]

But, regarding the connection of spirituality and marriage, and again using Eisler as our inspiration, we also wish to underscore both the sacred quality of marriage and the sacred quality of sexuality. Quoting Eisler:

"Candles, music, flowers and wine - these we all know are the stuff of romance, of sex and of love. But candles, flowers, music and wine are also the stuff of religious ritual, of our most sacred rites. Why is there this striking, though seldom noted, commonality? Is it just accidental that passion is the word we use for both sexual and mystical experiences?"

Sexuality in ancient times was seen as sacred because of its connection to reproduction; it is the primordial act of biological creation. Yet, sexuality has evolved beyond reproduction; it has become an art and a revelation in beauty, an expression of love and intimacy, a source of intense interpersonal pleasure, and an exceedingly complex (at least in principle) interaction between humans involving a vast array of embellishments and enrichments. As Eisler notes, at an ontological level it is a seeking of oneness. Sexuality is both a cause and a result of human passion and a marriage without passion is dead. Sexuality brings to the foreground the validity and value of the Romantic vision of the meaning and quality of life. In the Christian West, sex was vilified, and as Eisler points out, it was connected with sin. In the sexual revolutions of the 1920s and the 1960s, this association of sex with the sinful was rejected, but swinging with the great pendulum of extremes in the opposite direction, sex was trivialized and disconnected from love, intimacy, and personal commitment. Sex and sexuality are both powerful and sacred, as the ancient Greeks who worshipped Eros intuited. Eisler turns, or re-turns sexuality from something immoral into something sacred and reaffirms it as an expression of high morality. Sexuality is a deep form of intimacy and a virtue to be cultivated in a marriage. And in rejection of dualism, sex is not simply physical but mental and emotional as well.[29]

Marriage should also be seen as a sacred covenant. Marriage embodies a cluster of virtues connected with this covenant between individuals. There is fidelity, trust, loyalty, friendship, commitment, and honesty to name some of the core virtues. These virtues need not be associated with a particular religion, but they underscore the high importance we should place upon the bonding together of two individuals. It is a covenant that should not be treated lightly by either those involved in it or outsiders to the marriage. Seeing marriage as sacred elevates its importance; just as sex has been trivialized, so has marriage. The

contemporary renaissance in marriage is a re-assertion of the high significance we should accord this interpersonal reality. It is unquestionably the strongest, deepest connection that two human beings can enter into in their lives.

Helen Fisher, in her book, *Why We Love*, describes some of the most common bits of advice marriage counselors give to couples who come into see them.[30] We are going to summarize these points; the list provides a good introduction into the next section on virtues and the preferable marriage for the future. Many of the items on the list align with the virtues we will subsequently discuss.

To realize a sustainable and romantic marriage, couples should:

- Commit and Never Give Up
- Listen – Ask Questions – Give Answers – Identify Needs – Argue Constructively
- Appreciate – Accept – Respect
- Stay Attractive – Grow Intellectually
- Practice Honesty and Trust
- Provide for both Space and Togetherness
- Compromise
- Say "No" to Adultery
- Cultivate Romance Everyday – Date
- Cultivate Variety – Have multiple Common Interests
- Exercise Humor
- Never Threaten to Leave
- Forget the Past
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The Virtues of Marriage

We have identified nine clusters of key virtues that form the core of our theory of the preferable marriage for the future. We have already examined some of these virtues.

- Sexuality, Romance, and Passion

We see sexuality, romance, and passion as a moral virtue. It is an area of human excellence, something that can be cultivated and developed, and individuals can be better or worse at it. In resonance with the philosophy of Romanticism, passion is critical to a fulfilling and meaningful life, and this is especially true regarding marriage. Sexuality and romance are spiritual – involving body and mind – and produce a unity of spirit and feeling between individuals.

- Love and Compassion (Gratitude, Forgiveness, Respect, Art of Partnership)

Love coupled with compassion is one of psychologist Martin Seligman's six key character virtues associated with "authentic happiness." Gratitude, forgiveness, and respect are important sub-virtues that contribute to love and

support compassionate feelings towards others. As Erik Fromm argued, love is an art – it is an area of excellence – it is something one learns to do well. Although we may have spontaneous and simple feelings of love, higher love needs cultivation and practice.[31]

- **Transcendence (Identification of Higher Ideal) and Spirituality (Away from Self-Centeredness)**
  Transcendence and spirituality were discussed above.

- **Honesty and Truth**
  Intimacy can not be realized without honesty and truth. Honesty appears on Fisher's list.

- **Fidelity, Loyalty, and Mutual Trust**
  Trust also appears on Fisher's list, as well as commitment, which is closely connected with loyalty. Fidelity underscores the sacred quality of sexuality, especially within marriage; it is an expression of a promise of exclusive commitment and togetherness. Adultery destroys marriages and destroys trust; it destroys the self-esteem of those who participate in it. Contrary to the philosophy of being "uncommitted" popular in the 1960s, our argument is that both the sustainability and the quality of marriage clearly depend upon commitment.

- **Justice, Equality, and Reciprocity (Mutual Gratification)**
  The importance of these virtues was discussed above.

- **Self-Efficacy – Coupled Responsibility – Co-Creativity - Hope and Optimism**
  Without a sense of self-responsibility, and in this case mutual responsibility, and a belief in self-efficacy, none of the other virtues will be cultivated. Virtues are accomplishments and require the belief in one's capacity to improve oneself and one's life.[32] Correspondingly, a married couple needs to believe in its capacity *as a couple* to improve their relationship and their lives. Hope and optimism about the promise of the marriage are absolutely necessary; without these qualities the marriage clearly will not flourish or realize excellence. The marriage will become depressed.

- **Courage and Faith**
  Courage is one of Seligman's key virtues. It is important for married couples, as well as individuals. Faith is necessary for optimism. Faith is the belief in something even though one isn't certain. Hence, all beliefs about the future, including the future of one's marriage, involve an element of faith. Faith therefore requires courage, the courage of belief and commitment in the face of uncertainty.

- **Wisdom – Past (Deep) Learning Applied to Betterment of Future**

Wisdom is another one of Seligman's key virtues and identified by Erik Erikson as the highest human virtue.[33] Although we generally think in terms of wise individuals, we can also imagine wise couples. Wise couples learn and consequently grow. Just as the individual self of the future must be more dynamical and evolutionary, so must the ideal married couple. The couple grows or dies. Wise couples apply what they have learned to improving their lives today and tomorrow. Wise couples have heightened past consciousness and future consciousness. Hence, on this last virtue we would disagree with the item on Fisher's list "Forget the past." As Santayana said, "those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it." The ideal married couple for the future is reflective, assimilating the lessons of the past and applying these lessons to their ongoing evolutionary transformation.

Wisdom, as a virtue, does not entail always having all the answers to the challenges of life; it involves the capacity to learn from mistakes.[34] The same would be true for the ideal married couple; learning from mistakes, rather than being perfect. But also, not giving up or throwing in the towel when mistakes happen. Frequently, modern marriages crumble when problems emerge; there is no tenacity in the marriage. The couple would become wiser if the couple reflected on the problems, blunders, and difficulties and learned from these negative experiences. In the end the marriage would be strengthened.

Summary and Conclusion

To realize an ideal marriage is not an easy task, but then, as Spinoza noted, "All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare." It is important though to envision what kind of marriage would realize the highest levels of human happiness, creativity, and self-expression, and one that would resonate with the contemporary and future world. Further, in this regard, it is important to learn from history what the evolutionary trajectory of marriage has been, from a socially arranged bonding frequently involving a patriarchal system of control and relatively divorced from love and passion, to a freely chosen covenant and partnership of equals based on sexual attraction, love, and the aspiration for co-creation. The evolution of marriage is a moral evolution in many ways paralleling the moral evolution of human cultures around the world. In this regard, we should envision the marriage of the future as a further moral evolution. Identifying those key virtues, which bring human happiness and both individual and collective fulfillment, will give us a sense of direction for what to aspire toward.

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