

The New Pair

by Ferdinand Fellmann

The times when we considered separation from our partner as the height of autonomy are over. For younger people in urban areas, the freedom of being single still has its allure. But the exclusive relationship, either as a pair or even as a married pair, has regained its attraction. Obviously, the traditional roles, the economically dependent woman who stands by the side of the 'strong man', no longer represent the pair bond. Both partners now have their own career and their own, often differing, political convictions; yet in the public realm they appear together and demonstrate their preference for being together. As the "couple-look" becomes a common component of society as shown by Barack Obama and Michelle, the perfect symbol of the *New Pair*, the following questions become increasingly urgent: What holds the New Pair together? Is the relationship merely a matter of convenience and can it be terminated at any time? What contribution does intimacy make to the pair bond when sexuality at the present time is treated by both genders as relatively uncomplicated and inconsequential? And finally, is the rehabilitation of the pair contingent on their desire to have children, which promises many young people a piece of authentic life in this cold risk-society? These questions are not merely relevant to psychology but are fundamental for philosophical anthropology. To understand human nature it is indispensable to look at the differences between sexes and the mating systems. Getting to the evolutionary bottom of these questions is a valuable endeavor because it shows that the pair is an integral component of the human world. It will never be obsolete, but must continually be re-programmed.

Despite the introduction of marriage 'for love' in Romanticism, the civil marriage remained, until the late 20th century, internally influenced from the division of labor and bound to the dominating sexual morals of the patriarchy. It is thus not surprising that marriage and family would be perceived as shackles with the progressive emancipation of woman and her newly found equality in the workplace. Since both partners now stand economically on their own feet and woman's self-confidence is no longer inferior to man's, the pair bond is relieved of external factors and can be experienced entirely as a site of affection. Whether or not home life is really so free and harmonic, as it appears outwardly, can be doubted. Daily

quarrels are all too familiar: each stands for the fulfillment of his or her own desires and intimacy is transformed into a matter of negotiation. However, despite all of the disadvantages, which could well be phenomena resulting from the transition itself, one thing is for sure: the New Pair stands for love that is for love's sake. Current external factors are still in play, but they do not constitute the deeper motivation for pair-bonding. This is due to the polarity of genders. Despite the widespread fear of inequality that leads many intellectuals to deny that differences between men and women exist, the difference makes the pair essential, at least as a permanent yearning. That most continue to yearn for the New Pair relationship, even after a painful separation, is empirical confirmation of the essential nature of the pair.

In the sexual revolution of 1968, and in particular with the introduction of the birth control pill, sexuality migrated from marriage (where it often had a dreary, joyless existence) to free love. Sex without commitment or consequences, as it was celebrated by Erica Jong in her *Fear of Flying*, constituted the highest form of individual autonomy. But that was only for a short time. With the removal of taboos, sex became an article of consumption that could never bring about the satisfaction promised in the advertisement. It became increasingly clear to young men and women that new partners brought variety but no real emotional enrichment. These disillusioning experiences lead to a rehabilitation of the committed pair relationship. The New Pair moves far away from free love, yet without returning to the compulsory marriage of former times. Both partners have learned to act out their sexual needs and erotic desires within the committed relationship. The pair itself is, in no way, in shackles; contrarily, it is a stimulant for unanticipated satisfaction. Instead of repeating again and again the common rituals of fleeting encounters, the long-term relationship offers a space for an intensely experienced, multi-faceted sexuality. Curiosity and fear, desire and pain, and surprise and disappointment make up the ambivalence of normal sexuality, experienced by man and woman together in the pair. Each recognizes in the reflection of their partner previously unknown personality traits and feels confirmed in his or her own individuality. Personal identity, when formed from the decision to take a life partner, is a prerequisite for values such as fidelity and solidarity; these values paradoxically prove subversive in western open societies. These values immunize one against the repression of social structures and make one resistant to the seduction of the hidden

persuaders in the consumer marketplace. We have thus arrived in a time in which the New Pair has become a site of civil resistance.

It sounds paradoxical: the pair-bond as the source of personal autonomy. This apparent contradiction is resolved if one takes into consideration that autonomy is more than mere moodiness and obstinacy. 'My way' leads to an end only if it can be followed by someone else; if not, it leads to autistic solipsism. When a man and a woman interact intimately each partner feels good for being accepted in his or her entire individuality. And that is not all. To the polarity of the sexes belong more than two: the common child. Evolution has laid this in the genetic cradle of man and woman. This biological radical was not always present in the mind of modern man. During the sexual revolution of 1968, children were perceived as troublemakers. Not only by men, but also by women, both of them intent on discovering their own body as an erogenous zone. For the 'new woman' the desire to have children signified her subjection to biology, which she had used every means possible to overcome. It is not surprising then that a *Letter to an Unborn Child* attained cult status for feminists.

Despite the momentary win for feelings of self-worth that came from the sexual revolution, the desire for children cannot be suppressed in the long-term. And the alternative, to prove autonomy as a single mother, was also not ideal. The burdens of the fatherless child are too heavy, especially for the children of divorced parents. The way is again free for the return to the pair with children, where man and woman mutually realize their desire for a child. The common decision for a child is emotional and an enormous gain for both. The emancipated woman can connect sexuality and pregnancy and experience eroticism, and the man profits from this expansion of Eros, far beyond the act of conception. The father experiences the phases of the pregnancy and birth as part of himself and is now free to express his caring emotions, previously only entitled to the mother. This continues in the common raising of the child; the ideal of a generative sexuality between the parents appears to become a reality. What could be a more creative way of life than being in a loving pair with equal partners and experiencing a close connection with your children, in which everyone's needs are fulfilled?

Obviously, the New Pair, as every other form of life, also has its dangers, and they should not be concealed. The intense emotionality, which also involves the children, can lead to the elimination of two important differences: the difference between man and woman and the difference

between parents and children. Empathy and mutual understanding strongly bind those involved together, but differences also have a social function that is all too often underestimated. As the polarity of the gender brings together the parents, the parental authority marks the limits which are necessary for the development of the child. It is thus detrimental for both sides if parents discuss their emotional needs too intimately with the children. A type of teddy-bear love emerges that leads to the adult's infantilization and the self over-estimation of the child. To avoid this, differences must be maintained and enacted. Without differences no society can develop the social dynamic needed in order to deal with the challenges of the times. Here, philosophical anthropology should remember that the modern denial of differences in nature robs humans of the very foundations of humanity.

References

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