


Parents—Navigators through the Symplegades

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to emphasize the decisive impact that the family has on a person's development, to record and interpret the reasons of the multiform overload of the parents today and its consequences in the family life—based on contemporary psychological views and research—as well as to suggest certain fundamental ways of supporting the family and the parents. More specifically, the suffocating and unbearable psychological pressure of the parents is to be approached with regard to the modification of the relationships, the interpersonal communication, the forms of symbiosis, the demographic state, the socio-economic and workplace conditions. This study endeavours to point out the notion that the diverse—social, economic, political and counseling—support of the family and the parents is imperative, not only for them to live up to their difficult and monumental role, but also to improve the state of their personal life so that they can bring to the world and mould happy children. Moreover, it aspires to provoke further examination and research conduct.

Keywords

Parents, Pressure, Overload, Child, Support

1. Introduction

In order for people—especially the underage—to reach a highly qualitative evaluation of the self, the world and the life, they need assistance: upbringing, education, rearing. The unconscious influence of nature is by no means enough. What is needed is—primarily—the deliberate, conscious, regular and methodical influence of the family environment, and then the wider social as well as intellectual and cultural environments. “In the beginning”, then, “be” the child, over whom all the eras—by and large—have learned with love and affection, devoting the most refined thoughts and noble emotions.

Furthermore, all the great thinkers have underlined the decisive effect the

family has on the edification of the young person, if the child is to bring forth their creative powers which are hidden within their soul. This is why the family, and to be precise, the parents are the ones to be charged with the grandest and, at the same time, the heaviest responsibility of guiding the new sprout. It is in the terrain of the family that the dawn of these creative forces is necessarily being forged, and these are the ones that the parents are called upon to direct and cultivate with dexterity and depth, ensuring the children's future vocational rehabilitation, intellectual constitution and moral integration. The children and the parents are the two columns on which all forms of life stand.

What is the current state of the life of the parents who, despite the controversial social procedures, the modification of relationships, the new forms of symbiosis, the reconstruction of the values, the abandonment of the traditions, are the ones who hold the key to the children's advancement? The parents endure multiform psychological pressure: time, rearing, their children's success at school, professional effectiveness, house management, spousal duties, distribution of the burdens, frequent lack of the necessities, threat of losing a work position, unforeseen events of an adverse nature, all of which overthrow the scheduled routine and lead to a turbulent psychological state. Consequently, the multifarious support of the family and the parents are deemed imperative in order to improve the situation of their personal life in order to bring to the world and mould happy children.

2. The Contribution of the Family Environment to the Development of the Child

2.1. Historical Retrospection

In the very beginning of scientific thinking, Heraclitus, approximately 500 BC, informed that “ψυχῆς πείρατα ἰὼν οὐκ ἄν ἐξεύροιο ...” (:you will not find the boundaries of soul by travelling in any direction, so deep is the measure of it) (Heraclitus, ca. 500 BCE/2003a; Dettling, 2002), before he noted: “παιδός ἢ βασιληῆ” (:the kingly power is a child's) (Heraclitus, ca. 500 BCE/2003b). But the one who, like an insightful psychographer entered the once sacred bastion of the human soul, is Plato, either ascertaining that “παιδός μηδὲν βέλτιον” (:nothing better than the child) (Plato, ca. 360 BCE/2008a; Merkle, 2008a) or underlining that if children do not receive the appropriate education,... “καταντᾶ ἀγριώτατον ὅποσα φύει γῆ” (:becomes the wildest beast of all the earth has given birth to) (Plato, ca.360 BCE/1926b). There are other times when he expresses views which are of everlasting educational value: “τῶν παιδῶν μαθήματα θαυμαστόν ἔχει τι μνημεῖον” (:children do not forget the lessons they are taught) (Plato, ca.360 BCE/2016c). It is not only Plato's texts; many more thinkers' works have become valuable milestones which show correct and safe paths for the children to be lead towards: “Ἐϋπλαστον καί ὑγρόν ἢ νεότης” (:youth is malleable and fluid) Plutarch cites in his work “The Education of Children”, which might very well be named “The Bible of Education” (Plutarch, ca. 45-120 AD/1927). Furthermore, Aristotle notes “ὁ παῖς ἀτελής” (:the child is incomplete) (Aristotle, ca. 350 BCE/2013a) and this is

the reason they need guidance, while in his “Ρητορική” (:Rhetoric), he says that “οἱ νέοι εἰσὶ τὸ ἔαρ τῆς πόλεως” (:the young are the springtime of the city) (Aristotle, ca. 350 BCE/2018b; Henry-Huthmacher, 2002: p. 7), a view which is in agreement with Demades’: “οἱ νέοι εἰσὶ ἔαρ τοῦ δήμου” (:the young are the springtime of the deme) (Demades, Licurgo, & Dinarco, 1954). All the later intellectuals—philosophers, educators and psychologists—have been influenced by those views. I will only refer to a single example, that of John Chrysostom who refers to Plutarch’s “The Education of Children” as “Ἐγκόλιον Ἀγωγῆς” (:textbook of education) and writes: “Χαλεπὸν ἢ νεότης· ὅτι εὐέξαπτον, εὐόργισθον, εὐόλισθον καὶ σφοδροτέρου δεῖται χαλινού” (:Youth is a difficult age. It is unstable, easily misled, prone to fall, and needs strong restraint) (Charonis & Lanara, 1994).

However, everyone, whether an expert or otherwise, sees the child as the living hope of the family and the society, as the holy innocence of life (o, sancta simplicitas!), as the ultimate potential of improvement of the human race: “One can expect the children to become rational beings; but only by those who already are—Lord in Heaven!” (Kierkegaard, 1843/1956) ponders Socrates of Danes, as was the cognomen of the father of Existentialism, Depth Psychology and Apophatic Theology, Sören Kierkegaard (1813-1855) (Papyrus-Larousse Britannica, 1996: pp. 25-30). Petrarch, mimicking Aristotle and Demades, will name the child the “Dawn of Youth” and the “Springtime Youth of life”, and exclaims: “Oh, Springtime, Youth of the year! And oh, Youth, Springtime of life”! (Voreas, 1935)

In this adhesion of analyses and thought, one last excerpt will be mentioned. It is from the notorious book of the great German poet-philosopher and true philhellene Friedrich Hölderlin, who holds the cognomen of “Hyperion oder der Eremit in Griechenland” (:Hyperion or the Hermit of Greece). Fortunate are the parents who have studied it: his contemplation on the family and the child is immense. His pedagogical commandments are plenty and profound. His notifications towards the parents, and especially towards the often indifferent society and indolent community are highly significant. Here is a brief excerpt from Hölderlin’s work: “Peace of childhood! heavenly peace! how often I stand still before you in loving contemplation and attempt to fathom you! [...] Yes, the child is a divine being so long as it has not been dipped into the chameleon colours of men. The child is wholly what it is, and that is why it is so beautiful. The compulsion of the law and fate does not touch it; in the child is only freedom. In the child is peace; it is not yet at odds with itself. Wealth is in the child; it knows not its heart, not the destitution of life. It is immortal, for it knows nothing of death. But this men cannot bear. The divine must become like one of them [...] and before nature drives it out of its paradise, men coax and drag it out into the field of the curse, so that it, like them, shall slave away in the sweat of its brow. But beautiful, too, is the rime of awakening, so long as we are not awakened at an untimely moment.” (Hölderlin, 1797-1799/1982).

2.2. Contemporary Psychological Views

The importance of the family for the course of the child in life and their future is

immeasurable. This is because the family is the catapult with which the “children as living arrows are sent forth”, as Khalil Gibran very accurately observed in his wonderful work “The Prophet” (Gibran, 1923). This “sending forth” of the children will happen either towards their smooth development and progress or towards disaster.

There is absolutely nothing that can replace the family. All the children who have “lost” their parents, mostly during their infancy, they have developed and demonstrated a particular mentality and behaviour, known as hospitalism, as institutional cowardice. This cowardice, the institutional syndrome (Vorria, 1998), the timid and subordinate behaviour which occasionally digresses into ruthless aggressiveness, cruelty and violence, accompanies these children for life. Their conduct seems completely contradictory: sometimes they are obedient and impressively disciplined frequently exhibiting a “waxy”, weak willpower, while other times they are obdurate, undisciplined and rampant, completely embarrassing the environment where they live due to their unbalanced reactions and incomprehensible demonstrations.

As they grow up, the children tend to listen to the voice of their family environment every step of the way. This is why it is so important and quite justifiably so: the family, the home is the natural, social, intellectual and cultural nest during the beginning of their life—the first and pivotal nest for the progress of every human being. There will be smooth development and progress, when the parents, among the other qualities and psychological characteristics they need to have or learn, also have the ability of the happy and optimistic communication, immense patience and sobriety, control over their own temper, warm-heartedness, undiminished interest in their child’s feelings and needs. This life long influence becomes obvious even in the nostos, the cataclysmic nostalgia, the desire of going back, the profound inner satisfaction of the expatriate, of the eternal Ulysses to see, even the “καπνόν ἀποθρόσκοντα” (:rising smoke) (Homer, ca. 8th century BCE/2018), soaring from the paternal hearth!

A deeper look would confirm how disastrous and tragic is the psychic homelessness. It equals the abuse of the infantile soul, a psychic tumour, the source of which is the inappropriate, abusive family surrounding: an environment of friction between the parents, threats, swear words, conflicts, disharmony, an upsetting climate of rejection and no emotional warmth, which will infuse the child’s psyche with the gloom, the melancholy, the pessimism, the anxiety, the neurosis or the psychosis, the complex, the uncertainty, the insecurity, the lack of confidence.

With regards to the above, “...In certain families, the children have never had the chance to know the affection or the approval of their parents in any form. Parental rejection, which is conceptually defined as the lack or the severe deprivation of any emotional warmth, affection of parental love towards the children, is found in the opposing edge of the dimension of emotional warmth. There are three main forms: 1) hostility and aggressiveness, 2) indifference and neglect, and 3) what I call ‘undifferentiated rejection’. Hostility and indifference are esoteric, psychological emotions of the person. Hostility refers to emotions of anger,

displeasure, hatred and malice or resentment towards the child. Indifference, on the other hand, is just the lack of interest or true concern for the child. Aggressiveness and neglect, in the majority of cases, constitute the behavioural demonstration of these esoteric emotional situations. The term ‘aggressiveness’ refers to behaviours that aim to the physical or psychological damage of the other, of the self, or (symbolically) of an object. Aggressiveness is divided, as far as behaviour is concerned, into physical and verbal forms. Behaviours of physical aggressiveness include, among others, beatings, biting, pushing, shaking, pinching, scratching, scalding, burning, bondage and so on. Behaviours of verbal aggressiveness, on the other hand, include practices such as sarcasm, undermining, swear words, making a scapegoat of the child, disparaging and every other inconsiderate, malignant and cruel words which might be spoken to the child or concerning the child” (Rohner, 2017a).

The first and foremost, that is of the greatest importance, deduction is that the family as an institution is the solid foundation of life. “It is certain that, for many centuries and for the majority of the peoples, family and marriage played an integral part in the person’s life” (Goodwin, 2016a). Especially the parents are the high-performance, valuable porters of the society. Without the parents, neither can the society function nor a future be seen.

The second, though not of lesser importance, deduction is that the first duty of the family, i.e. of the parents as well as the school is to send—by all accounts—healthy children out to life. “Societies are defined by the manner in which they invest on their younger members” (Bigner & Gerhardt, 2021).

3. Groundbreaking Socio-Economic Changes and the Family Life

3.1. The Institution of Marriage

The family and the school are the two institutions that have bravely resisted and withheld rather effectively against the many and various controversial changes of the times. Nowadays, however, when those changes—what with the technological and financial revolutions—have become seismic, they have affected the family profoundly as they have radically altered people’s way of life (*modus vivendi*), starting from the narthex of the family which is the marriage.

According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ΕΛΣΤΑΤ)¹, the evidence on the progress of the demographic rates concerning the events of natural movement, such as births, deaths, marriages and relationship agreements of the population which

¹The Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) is an independent Authority enjoying operational independence, as well as administrative and financial autonomy. It is not subject to the control of governmental bodies or other administrative authority. Its operation is subject to the control of the Hellenic Parliament and governed by the provisions of the Law 3832/2010 “Hellenic Statistical System Establishment of the Hellenic Statistical Authority as an independent Authority”. ELSTAT produce statistics that are useful—relevant—for public policy, the economy, and more broadly the life of the people. (<https://www.statistics.gr/en/mission>)

The website <https://www.statistics.gr/en/statistics/-/publication/SPO03/> cites the full long-term research and comparative data of ELSTAT, from where I drew the details relevant to my study’s subject matter.

inhabited Greece during 2020, coming from the Registry Offices of the City Governments, is that the number of marriages in 2020 came up to 31.475 (11.935 religious and 19.540 civil), noting a decrease of 33.2% in relation to 2019 during which there were 47.137 (23.278 religious and 23.859 civil). The relationship agreements in 2020 came up to 8.986, presenting an increase of 13.4% since 2019 when the number of them was 7.924. It is worth mentioning indicatively that the number of marriages in 2009 was 59.212 (34.375 religious and 24.837 civil), the number of the relationship agreements was 161 and in 1991 the number of marriages was 65.568 (59.710 religious και 5.858 civil) (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2020).

The “great mystery of marriage” (Moffatt, 2010a) is now in a state of bankruptcy. “An increase of the individual values and a respective fall of the religious impact (plus the greater pluralism in the religious influences) seem to undermine the commitment to weddings which will last for a whole life” (Goodwin, 2016b). The new age ideas or rather the crisis of ideas, the scorn for foundational rules and values, the abandonment of tradition and particularly the financial changes have outflanked the moral codes and forced new forms of symbiosis: the relationship between a young man and woman is “companionate” and “corporate”, undoubtedly spousal (:husband and wife) and cohabitant, but not a “marriage”. Marriage does not favour unemployment or the empty pocket, therefore the young people do not dare to proceed to it. Even the “brave ones” who do take that step, if the religious and moral code has weakened and lost every influence on them, they proceed to a civil ceremony at the registry, in a secular climate and do not vow mutual faith but, as if it were merely business, they sign a contract as, which they are free to cancel at any time. Every formality of the holy rites is absent, as well as every inspiring psalm, every exaltation of the soul under the ambient music, every lachrymose emotion; “everything happens superficially, flat, bland, almost nihilistic” (Durant, 1972).

3.2. Childlessness and the Demographic Problem

Life loses its creative fibre much further, when the spouses do not bear children. It is very possible then for their marriage to become a union that deteriorates, being cut from the essence of life. There is no root to support it, no connective bond (i.e. children) to strengthen it. This way, though, the union is separated from childbearing, leading to two painful results, the necrosis of the institution of marriage and the aggravation of the demographic problem². Childlessness

²Under the instruction of “Konrad-Adenauer Institution”, the publishing house Herder published a very interesting work entitled “Leise Revolutionen-Familien im Zeitalter der Modernisierung” (: Silent Revolutions: Families in the time of modernisation), 2002 Freiburg i. B., p.p.191. This book contains studies of specialists such as R. Hettlage (Familienleben heute), B. Siegel (Keine Zeit für Kinder), W. E. Fthenakis (Entwicklung der Vaterschaft), W. Dettling (Vater, Mutter, Kind- und Beruf), Cl. Solzbacher (Kindheit in der Wissensgesellschaft), J. Borchert (Neue Ansätze für ein gerechtere Familien Politik), Chr. Henry-Huthmacher with a brilliant Introduction (Einführung). In 2008, a highly interesting work entitled “Eltern unter Druck” (Parents under pressure) came to prominence by M. Bochar and Chr. Henry-Huthmacher. It is the excellent scholarly endeavour of Tanja Merkle and Carsten Wippermann (publishing house: Lucius-Lucius, 2008). Both of these studies were pivotal for my present paper.

being the blow, the dissolution or the necrosis of the marriage entails the absence of motherhood or fatherhood, the unfulfillment of the spouses' calling as members of society, as individuals of the species and the incompleteness of their own self since they will be deprived of the immense joy of childbearing; children are the continuity and immortality of life.

The exacerbation of the demographic problem is fast and its deterioration dramatic due to the decrease in the birth rate. According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ΕΛΣΤΑΤ)¹, in 2020, the births in Greece came up to 84.767 (43.534 boys and 41.233 girls), presenting an increase of 1,2% in relation to 2019 which was 83.763 (42.945 boys and 40.818 girls). However, it needs to be pointed out that indicatively, the births of the living children were 114.766 in 2010 and in 1990 were 102.229! (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2020)

The happy voices of the children in the neighbourhoods become scarce, they almost fade directly proportionally to the undermining of the once primary role of the family and the refusal or the weakness of the state to support the parents. Correspondingly, "Population ageing is a phenomenon that affects almost every developed country in the world, with both the number and proportion of older people growing across the globe. This transformation is likely to have a considerable impact on most aspects of society and the economy, including housing, healthcare and social protection, labour markets, the demand for goods and services, macroeconomic and fiscal sustainability, family structures and intergenerational ties" (Eurostat, 2020).

3.3. The Overload of the Parents

The parents, nowadays, especially in Greece, are forced to daily navigate through the Symplegades in their attempt to meet the ever-increasing and unbearably pressing obligations. As a rule, the family environment and the workplace are mostly incompatible. "More and more young people make their choices in relation to the family, depending on their priorities in the work field (Brough & O' Driscoll, 2005)" (Kounenou, 2010).

When the demands of the professional department are inflexible, then the cases of child neglect are impressive. "One of the main isolated signs of neglect is the lack of availability on the part of the parent both in practical and psychological level. The lack of availability in a practical level is simple: there is no physical presence of the mother or/and the father. The child is alone and there is no one to look after them. The psychological lack of availability is less obvious. It is possible that there is physical presence of the mother or the father, however the parents do not allow the child to be in contact with them psychologically. The parents do not respond to the child nor do they interact with them. They pay no attention to the child when they need them and ask for their help" (Rohner, 2017b; Tylka, 2017).

The children are left to the mercy of the mass media and the corrosive influence this has on them. They drop out of school or they do not study adequately

and their nutrition is unsuitable or incorrect—trusting in the quality of the “fast-food”. The deep, tender and affectionate conversation and communication between the parents and the children becomes problematic, if not impossible, when we know for a fact that “the emotional environment of the family is shaped in relation to the quality of the communication” (Tantaros, 2011). The attendance and participation in the children’s extra-curricular cultural activities—together with one parent at least—is also difficult.

It is then incontestable that the demands, the ones relevant to the role of the parent, exceed the paternal or maternal skills and endurance. The psychological pressure on the parents is multiform, suffocating and unbearable and their overload is undeniable.

More extensively: The face of the family has, nowadays, changed. The problems in the relationships between parents and children but also between husband and wife are numerous and hard to resolve. The old form of family which consisted of many members as well as the strict hierarchy is slowly becoming extinct. The lifelong loyalty and love between the parents is no longer a rule. The occasionally abysmal disagreements of the parents injure the children’s souls, the paternal home is not a hospitable space anymore and it is now inhabited by tensions and quarrels. The parents crumble as role-models and the painful experiences make the children “grow” untimely. The values are demolished, the children become self-reliant, and the dark and sketchy routes are already open. But even when the family life, as most usually happens, is smooth and the parental bonds are unbroken, the psychological pressure in all its forms does not cease. How could the psychological pressure of the parents be lifted off their shoulders when their financial situation does not permit them to meet their needs?

The financial insufficiency feeds more forms of psychological pressure, such as: The educational pressure, the parents’ anxiety over their children’s success in school, when they actually consider the public educational system unreliable. Therefore, they are obliged to send their children to private schools and institutions or they resort to home tutorials—even when their financial resources do not allow it. The responsibility of the correct upbringing and rearing of the children constitutes a particularly heavy kind of psychological pressure, as it is linked to many new forms of freedom which favour the distancing from the moral and religious way, glorify licentiousness and deride values such as discipline, obedience, respect and the collective family spirit for being outdated and backwards. The psychological pressure due to the lack of the required time is especially intense and it results from the multiplication of parental duties, as the parents strive to accommodate family and professional obligations and respond to both effectively. Furthermore, it becomes a crushing burden to manage their house, distribute the burdens and obligations as spouses and face the frequent lack of the necessities for preservation (Merkle & Wipperman, 2008b; Parker & Wang, 2013; Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018).

However, the most menacing forms of psychological pressure on the parents is destitution, unemployment, the possible loss of employment, all of which emanate the uncertainty and gravely endangers the whole direction of the family. Then, there are the illnesses, the accidents and the unforeseen events of adverse nature, those events that become the source of psychological pressure which are not at all negligible, for they thwart the scheduled routine and have, by extension, a painful impact on the parents' mental life.

Psychological research in Greece, especially in the case of women in fact, discovered the excessive, hoarding and accumulating emotions of the respondents, the intense feeling—ambivalence and petulance-, the feeling of frustration of expectations, the dilemmas and the hardships they are confronted with, in the agonizing effort to juggle their professional, family and personal life. “With prowess, sacrifice, resourcefulness and patience—much like the traditional Greek housewives—these women carry through with the demands of everyday life, experiencing in their constant struggle for survival much frustration: invalidation regarding their own scientific object of vocation, but also the high prestige of the profession and the affluence which comes with it” (Thanopoulou & Tsigkanou, 2016).

Concisely, therefore, parents need serious support: Financial assistance, especially for the families who have many children. Bold social measures, regarding their studies for instance. An aid for the improvement of their educational knowledge and relationships, involving scientifically organized “Parenting Schools”, since “if a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit” (Moffatt, 2010b). Restoration, reinstatement and re-introduction in schools and texts those values which, while they are the forgers of the child's morality, they have been scorned and ostracised, as well as reinforcement of the humane education, which is a man-shaping force, the creator of ethos and the sculptor of spirit and soul.

4. Conclusion

The belittlement of the values, the demographic state, the changes in the professional field and the automation of critical departments of life hem the parents in, who are the key to the children's existence, rearing and rehabilitation: the advancement and introduction to the mystery of life is the parents' work.

If one desires to help the children, it can only be done by improving the parents' situation so that they can meet the demands of their challenging but monumental charge. If the child's interest is the epicentre of the family politics and life, then awareness concerning the parents' needs is necessary. How they “make ends meet”, how they manage. After all, the child's success and happiness are closely related to the joy or the comfort the parents feel from the respective state of their family and personal life.

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