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*Folsom*

T H E    F A M I L Y

by

Joseph Kirk Folsom

A BOOK REVIEW

by

William J. Fallis

SOCIOLOGY 5

THE FAMILY

By

Joseph Kirk Folsom

John Wiley & Sons, Inc.  
1954 - \$4.00

A Review by William Fallis

With only pleasant recollections of Professor Folsom's book, Culture and Social Progress, textbook for Sociology 2, remaining in my mind, I decided to read his most recent work, The Family as parallel work in Sociology 5. That was sometime just prior to the Christmas holidays. When first I saw the volume, its 604 pages of 8- and 10-point type cast a foreboding shadow across all my anticipations of holidays and succeeding days. It was easily the largest book on the Sociology 5 reserve Shelf, yet the memory of the easy style of the other Folsom book and the fear that the other smaller volumes might be dry and difficult reading influenced my choice. Never, since starting the first chapter entitled, "The Family Pattern," have I regretted my choice. In fact, it seems hypocritical to use this book as a subject of parallel report, for it was so

interesting and entertaining. Usually, we expect "required reading" to be actually boresome, but in this respect, Dr. Joseph Kirk Folsom, professor of Sociology at Vassar College, has disappointed his readers.

Although I claim that the element noted above is highly important and commendable, yet I realize the pleasant reading matter alone will not admit any work in Sociology or in any other field into the Realm of Authority. Being a student of only two and one half years' sociological experience, however, I find it difficult to pass upon the intrinsic value of fact or inference except through the writings and opinions of those who know--or are supposed to know. For this reason I shall quote at various times throughout this brief review from, at least, two, more or less, authoritative sources.

The purpose of the book could not be better stated than Dr. Folsom has it in the first paragraph of the Preface: "This book aims to integrate the various scientific approaches to the study of family phenomena. It attempts to weave cultural anthropology, individual psychology, social psychology, history, sociology, economics, and psychiatry into a unitary science of the family." Just in passing I

would say that the author seems a trifle too ambitious, even though he modestly admits that the book is only "attempting" to achieve this goal. One must confess, however, that through Dr. Folsom's treatment of the subject matter the idea of a "unitary science of the family" is slightly more conceivable. For, as he claims in the Preface, "the treatment begins with the cultural approach, and this point of view governs throughout. The subject matter, however, is concerned predominantly with the modern changes and problems of the family. Primitive and historical family data are presented not as detached bodies of information to be acquired for their own sake, but mainly to establish those modes of thinking which increasingly characterize modern sociology." To many readers of the book, the cultural approach might not appear the normal one for Dr. Folsom to employ, but to me, having so recently read and studied his Culture and Social Progress, it would have seemed peculiar if he had adopted any other approach. The author would probably not agree that all things human and inter-human could be reduced to a cultural base, but at least he would say that many things which we have been explaining as instinctive, intuitive, "human nature" might be founded merely in particular cultures.

In 1933, I first heard of Bronislaw Malinowski's book, The Sexual Life of Savages in North-western Melanesia, but the real significance of the work did not dawn upon me until I read Folsom's Comparative Description of Family Patterns of Trobriands and America in the first chapter of his book. Of course, the information contained in such a comparison is invaluable, but the inferences which may be drawn from it are much more worthwhile in the study of such an institution as the family. Looking at that comparison, one may understand easily what Professor Folsom means when he says that our family pattern is not the result of "human nature" or is "ordained of God" or "fundamental truth." Rather is it the effect of many interdependent causes, which were previously, themselves, effects. Thus, Dr. Folsom sets forth his proof before actually declaring his argument.

In a convincing manner, then he uses the opening paragraphs of Chapter II to clinch the debate merely by presenting the obvious. He claims that, "races and peoples obviously differ in physical characteristics and temperament" and that these "inheritable differences have nothing to do with differences in customs, social organizations, values, or ways of

thinking." For, he goes further to explain:

"All of these latter characteristics are, like languages and material tools, external to man himself, they are parts of culture of civilization. Any known culture could be practiced by any known race or people. If Trobriand infants could be exchanged at birth for American infants, each would acquire as readily as he does not the habits, customs, beliefs, attitudes, and values of the society in which he is reared, just as he would acquire its language."

Mr. R. C. Foster, of the London Times, says this about Professor Tolson's book: "He has a gift for interesting organization and presentation of material. He makes some excellent differentiations between words often used loosely. The book will be valuable for its source material." Mr. Foster's criticism is particularly pertinent in regard to the differentiation of words. This characteristic is not especially in the Chapter entitled: Basic Definitions. Herein the author, discriminates between cultural and subcultural. He makes it so very clear that it is no more than right to include, here, his own words:

"If any given behavior or interaction, becomes standardized, if it is repeated or reduplicated by many persons, in other words, if it becomes a model for more or less wholesale imitation, then it is cultural. If on the other hand it is not generally imitated, but arises spontaneously on each occasion, independently of other occasions, it is subcultural.

"There are two ways in which a widespread trait or pattern of human behavior or interaction may arise. First, it may be produced independently in a great many places by the human body; structure and the structure of the environment because these conditions which produce it are similar in a great many places. Second, it may be produced by chance combinations of

circumstance in only one or a few places, but from there may spread by imitation to other places. If its origin be of the first type, we may call the trait subcultural; if of the second type, cultural."

The logic of Dr. Folsom is particularly entertaining here in the opening chapters of his book. The first presents the proof of the statement or argument which he states in the second chapter, and then the third and fourth chapters elaborate upon the inferences drawn from the major premise and manifest the propinquous relationship of modern sex problems and Professor Folsom's thesis.

"The Nature and Kinds of Love" seems to be the important feature of the third chapter. Here Mr. Norman Hines, writing in the American Journal of Sociology, January, 1935 has typified the style and content as having been written with dispassion and without sentimentality. Professor Folsom discusses the much-mooted subjects contained in this chapter as a mental robot might, with no prejudices or beliefs. He classifies the kinds of love behavior according to (1) goal, (2) overt reaction involved, (3) inner emotional reaction involved. The most interesting, and indeed the most valuable for the comparative sociologist, is the classification of love feelings,



or attitudes. To one having escaped adolescence so recently such vivisection of the adolescent mind and attitudes affords much enlightenment even though at the same time causing much mental embarrassment.

Continuing his thesis of the importance of the subcultural over the "instinctive" and so forth, Dr. Polson attempts to prove the family and five patterns of interaction as subcultural. In Chapter IV, he considers these five patterns to be "(1) the heterosexual relationship, (2) some degree of permanence of heterosexual relationship between two individuals, (3) some sexual avoidances, (4) mother-child love and to some extent other love relationships between members of family, and (5) the incest taboo."

Concerning the structure of the book we might say here that it is divided into six main divisions: The Family and Its Subcultural Basis, The Cultural History and Geography of the Family, Social Change and the Family, Family Problems and Mass Readjustments, Family Problems and Individual Adjustments, The Cultural Future. Part II, to which we come now in our review, is concerned with the cultural

history of the family, which is the practical content of the latter part of the course, Sociology 5. In fact, Professor Folsom, mentions Miss Willystine Goodsell as a principal authority on that branch of his study.

That division of the volume entitled: Social Change and the Family, contains some of the most important material and argument from the viewpoint of social psychiatry, according to Stuart A. Queen, reviewing the book in Survey, November, 1934. Mr. Queen writes: "The present year has seen the appearance of several worthwhile general books on the family. Among these first place clearly belongs to the volume by Professor Folsom. He has done an unusually successful job in welding together psychiatric and cultural approaches in his study of the family as an institution and as a matrix of personal relationships. . . The problems of the family are not deviations from the local mores but cultural lag. . . He points out the 'fallacy of remedy by "removing the cause" ' for every domestic condition and event is an integral part of a complex situation process." Within this section, also, is emphasized the importance of the effect of

mechanical invention, biological discoveries, and bio-sociological discoveries, such as those of Darwin, Pavlov, and Freud.

Multiplicity of statistics characterizes the fourth part of The Family and consequently; it is rendered less interesting but more scientific than the other five divisions. I found that a great portion of the information, statistics, and comment were very similar to that contained in Elliott and Merrill's Social Disorganization. Just in passing, I might add here, as mere worthless comment, that it seems that Elliott and Merrill may be considered as resembling the logico-experimental sociologists slightly more than does Folsom, who indulges, as Pareto would claim, in non-logico-experimental speculation. Within this division of the book we find such problems as: (1) controlling reproduction, (2) the economics of children and the home, (3) marriage and mate-finding, (4) divorce, (5) the love mores, discussed dispassionately. Mr. Norman Hines adds that Dr. Folsom's appraisals of these problems "lack the wishy-washy timidity" which characterizes so many writings of other moderns. Concerning these problems, the author

points out that "there is no solution completely within the framework of our traditional mores. . . . Each 'solution', when studied in detail, becomes in itself a problem."

"The remaining portions of this book in a sense constitute the applied or practical phases of the subject. . . . The chief practical application of sociology at the present day is social psychiatry. This is the treatment of the sufferings, or emotional ill health, of individuals, through the medium of social readjustments not in the whole culture, but in the primary group situations of these individuals we are treating." Thus read the opening statements of the division termed: Family Problems and Individual Adjustments. Herein Mr. Folsom takes the stand that even though our scientific knowledge of the family "should be powerless to deflect the more general course of change, nevertheless it has a real, practical value. If it cannot guide society, it can at least guide the individual. It can thereby reduce the individual suffering which attends social change. Perhaps that is all that is important."

Within the first two chapters of this section there is material presented that would lead us to agree with Mr. Norman Himes when he claims that

Professor Folsom's "entire approach is interactionist . . . psychiatric." Throughout the discussion of "disorganization and personality" one is impressed with the inevitable importance of social interaction, yet the influence of individuation and personality patterns is not depreciated. Under these headings various personal and interpersonal frustrations are discussed as well as marital roles. Sex education is discussed in one brief chapter as a follow-up on the chapter of Parent-child relations and a prelude for the final chapter--The Cultural Future.

This last division has been characterized by Mr. Norman Hines as "original and stimulating". From a very concise cultural history of the family and a summary of family problems, Dr. Folsom moves quickly to a discussion of the influence and value of liberalism as a panacea and concludes that the "future of the family depends on the general cultural ideology." It would be difficult for me to present in digested form the total content of this last chapter, therefore, we may present the substance of the matter by a quotation of the closing paragraph:

"If and when liberalism finally prevails, what will be the family pattern of the majority? In the writer's guess, it will embody monogamy; a fecundity nicely adjusted to population and eugenic needs through contraception; female labor which is more specialized and more evenly distributed through life than at present with somewhat more communalization of domestic services, but with the retention of just enough of the private home and of parental care to yield the maximum emotional values of the parent-child and the mate-mate relation. This majority pattern will prevail through a rational understanding of its inherent subcultural advantages, and not be surrounding itself with a halo of cultural sentiment or a protective armor of taboos. Maladjusted individuals will find relief and cure through easy mobility and through temporary vacations from their usual mode of life. Liberty and diversity will be used not to destroy but to protect and enrich the essential, subcultural, human values."

January 26, 1935  
William J. Fallis