

*Think*  
*new things*  
*Make*  
*new connections*

## **MODERN FAMILY: WHAT IS IT FOR, WHAT ARE ITS PROSPECTS AND WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIETIES AND STATES?**

**4-6 October, 2018**

The family is at the heart of both the health of individuals and the health of societies. If something goes wrong in a family, it is a major and often expensive challenge for either the individual or society to fix. Shifts in technology, the economy, globalisation and culture are changing the nature of families with both positive and negative implications. This Ditchley Foundation conference will bring together a diverse group of thinkers, campaigners, experts, technologists, business leaders and politicians, in order to explore what we want from the institution of the family and how it is both being shaped by, and shaping modern life in a selective range of countries and cultures.

The concept of family has always been contested. In traditional societies “family” has often meant a bigger grouping, with the decision maker on family issues perhaps a chieftain or a priest. Focus on the value of the individual’s inner identity as opposed to the that of the collective leads naturally to challenges to the traditional order, starting with the emancipation of women. Acceptance of primacy of the rights of the individual has now gone further in many societies with legalisation – and rapid normalisation - of single sex relationships and marriages, challenging the conception that a nuclear family means male and female biological parents and their children.

As these changes roll through our societies at speed, what is that we should celebrate and incentivise through our culture, laws and tax system? Examples might include:

- A celebration of romantic love between a couple?
- The supportive union of couples of all sorts to give stability and a nurturing home to children?
- A means to provide care for parents and ageing aunts and uncles in later life?
- The legal institution of marriage because of the extra stability and permanence this tends to give to families of all kinds?

If we want more lasting marriages because they are good for both the individuals and the society, then what are the policy, educational and formational tools available to societies and states?

Different societies’ conception of families, relationships and marriage are moving apart but are now also connected by rapid global travel, migration and the Internet. How do we handle our differences in a connected world, for example on the role of women in families, when men and women are seen as equals in some societies and not in others? Or where new institutions like gay marriage are celebrated in some societies and considered immoral and illegal in others? What impact will this have on relations between states and their championing of different value systems? How do we resolve fundamental differences of view within the populations of single societies, when some members believe in a God-given and immutable definition of the family and others see it as an evolving social institution?

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What is the potential role of technology in shaping and healing families? Has technology, for example social media, made our families stronger or weaker and how can we emphasise the positive effects? Is mobile technology atomising our families or does it mean that we spend more time together and more time connected, even if we are looking at different things? Can technology bring parents and children together or must it always drive them apart? How will increasing automation in the home, and eventually robotics, affect family life?

Are there any signs that the family is losing its centrality in modern life? Are friendship and shared interest groups now the real communities, with people united by interests and preference rather than by accident of birth? Or are these groups just a modern secular version of the church orders and other bands of brothers and sisters of the past?

Is the concept of family and romantic love beginning to lose its exclusivity and singularity with individuals more comfortable in floating between different kinds of families and relationships? Is this all bad for both the individuals and their children? Should we be seeking to incentivise stability and continuity or adapting society to deal with individuals' appetite for change?