

The Brave New World of Same-Sex Marriage

A decisive moment in the triumph of technology over humanity.

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Advocates of same-sex marriage feel themselves to be riding the cresting wave of history, and justly so. The force with which an idea has taken hold that is unprecedented in human history and unthinkable until yesterday, the speed at which it is sweeping aside customary norms, legal precedent, and the remnants of traditional morality is nothing short of breathtaking. That it should have achieved this feat thanks largely to sentiment, fashion, and the brute power of a ubiquitous global media, with so little real thought about its profound effect upon human self-understanding or its far-reaching practical implications, is more astonishing still. Though its power seems inexorable, we would do well nevertheless to exercise perhaps the last reserve of real freedom still available to us—the freedom to think about the true meaning of things—lest we be deceived about what this moment

portends or caught unawares as it washes over us. For beneath the surface of this rising tide of ‘freedom and equality’ lies something very close to the brave new world of Aldous Huxley’s dystopian imagination.

To appreciate this, we must first understand that the sexual revolution is, at bottom, the technological revolution and its perpetual war against natural limits applied externally to the body and internally to our self-understanding. Just as feminism has as its practical outworking, if not its theoretical core, the technological conquest of the female body—“biology is not destiny,” so the saying goes—so too same-sex marriage has as *its* condition of possibility the technological mastery of procreation, without which it would have remained permanently unimaginable.

Opponents of same-sex marriage have not always perceived this clearly. They maintain that partisans of ‘marriage equality’ redefine marriage as an affective union which makes the birth and rearing of children incidental to its meaning, a result of the de-coupling of sex and procreation in the aftermath of The Pill. But this is only half true. Since married couples normally can and typically *do* have children, same-sex unions must retain in principle some form of the intrinsic connection between marriage, procreation and childrearing if they

are really to be counted as marriage and to be truly 'equal' in the eyes of society and the law. This can only be done by technological means. And so the argument for marriage as an affective union has been buttressed time and again in the courts by the claim that assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs), surrogacy, and the like eliminate any relevant difference between a married man and woman and a same-sex couple, from which it is but a short step to the conclusion that the state has an obligation to secure same-sex couples' rights and access to these technologies as a condition of their genuine equality.

Yet if this is true, it follows that no great weight attaches to natural motherhood and fatherhood and that being born to a father and mother is inessential to what it means to be human, or even to the meaning of childhood and family.

To accept same-sex unions as 'marriage' is thus to commit officially to the proposition that there is no meaningful difference between a married man and woman conceiving a child naturally, two women conceiving a child with the aid of donor semen and IVF, or two men employing a surrogate to have a child together, though in the latter cases only one of the legally recognized parents can (presently) contribute to the child's hereditary endowment and hope for a family resemblance. By recognizing same-sex 'marriages' the state also determines once and for all that ARTs are not merely a remedy for infertility but a normative form of

reproduction equivalent to natural procreation, and indeed it has been suggested in some cases that ARTs are an *improvement* upon nature. Yet if this is true, it follows that no great weight attaches to natural motherhood and fatherhood and that being born to a father and mother is inessential to what it means to be human, or even to the meaning of childhood and family. These are not fundamentally ‘natural’ phenomena integral to human identity and social welfare but mere accidents of biology overlaid with social conventions that can be replaced by ‘functionally equivalent’ roles without loss.

Why, after all, should a heterosexual woman be entitled to unlimited prenatal and neonatal benefits—when pregnancy is essentially a choice—while same-sex couples are denied access to the technology necessary to conceive children of their own?

Now the state’s presumption to *define* the family signals its triumph *over* the family as a natural institution that precedes and transcends it, and so as a consequence we can expect the state to intervene ever more deeply into the family’s life—in education, for instance. But it also makes the state an active *agent* in bringing the newly designed family about on equal terms with the natural family. This leads inexorably to the state’s promotion of a more extensive regime of ARTs on the one hand, as in the California law requiring insurance companies to pay for IVF treatments for same-sex couples or in the so-called Family Law recently defeated after massive

protest in France, and it implies, on the other hand, that pregnancy is merely an 'elective procedure' potentially subject to 'rationing' simply through bureaucratic adjustments to the schedule of health benefits. Why, after all, should a heterosexual woman be entitled to unlimited prenatal and neonatal benefits—when pregnancy is essentially a *choice*—while same-sex couples are denied access to the technology necessary to conceive children of their own? We are only just beginning to see this logic take practical effect, but as Nietzsche observed, great deeds take time.

To declare that there is no difference between conceiving a child through procreation in a marriage and through the technology necessitated by same-sex unions is to say something definitive about what a child and the human being are.

As troubling as this practical consequence is, more worrisome still is the fundamental anthropology—the philosophy of human nature—implicit in it. Of course, the state's imposition of a philosophy will be largely hidden by the fact that it is never actually stated and by the pretense that it is merely a neutral arbiter of rights, and most proponents of same-sex marriage would probably deny that they hold a philosophy of human nature other than the freedom to love whom one will and equality before the law. We can concede that people support 'marriage equality' for what seem to be compassionate and humane reasons. But we're talking about the *objective* logic of a position, its

presuppositions and its practical implications, not the *subjective* content of one's mind or the sincerity of one's motivations and beliefs. And to declare that there is no difference between conceiving a child through procreation in a marriage and through the technology necessitated by same-sex unions is to say something definitive about what a child and the human being are, even if this goes unrecognized. Indeed it is all the *more* definitive the more it goes unrecognized.

Underlying the technological conquest of human biology, whether in its gay or feminist form, is a dualism which bi-furcates the person into a meaningless mechanical body made of malleable 'stuff' and the affective or technological will that presides over it. The person as an integrated *whole* falls through the chasm. This is the foundation of the now orthodox distinction between 'sex' which is 'merely biological' and 'gender' which is socially constructed, as well as the increasingly pervasive (and relentlessly promoted) idea that freedom means our self-creation of both. Technological dominance over procreation imposes this bi-furcated anthropology upon parents and children alike, and codifying it implicitly makes this anthropology the law of the land.

To declare same-sex unions marriage and their technological 'reproduction' normative is essentially to reconceive the child not as a person but as an *artifact*. It is to deny that he is his own being with

inviolable dignity who cannot be manipulated or controlled; since it was a process of manipulation and control that brought him into being in the first place.

To declare same-sex unions marriage and their technological 'reproduction' normative is essentially to reconceive the child not as a person but as an *artifact*. It is to deny that he is *essentially* the natural fruit of a love inscribed into his parents' flesh; since love is now a mere emotion with no bearing on the meaning of the body, which has been relegated to the sub-personal realm of 'mere biology.' It is to deny that his *being from* his parents and having a lineage is deeply constitutive of his humanity or his personal identity; since the very notion of 'lineage' is confused by these new artificial combinations and since 'mother' and 'father' are merely names affixed to a social function which can be performed in creative new ways. And it is to deny that he is his own being with inviolable dignity who cannot be manipulated or controlled; since it was a process of manipulation and control that brought him into being in the first place. The technological dominance of procreation asserts, contrary to the child's true nature and to his parents' unquestionable love for him, that a child is essentially a product of human making, an assemblage of parts outside of parts that are the parts of no real whole, whose meaning and purpose, as with all artifacts, reside not in itself but in the designs of its maker.

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The deep anthropological assumptions inherent in the push for same-sex marriage, in other words, are those of synthetic biology and the new eugenics, which promise to ‘seize control of our own evolution’ through bioengineering. Celebrity biologists such as Gregory Stock, Lee Silver, and J. Craig Venter, tireless evangelists (and sometimes powerful financiers) of this post-human future, have gleefully celebrated this possibility as the ‘inadvertent spin-off’ of the expertise acquired through ARTs and the increasing frequency of their use. Inadvertent as a matter of intention, perhaps—nobody really means to usher in the brave new world—but not as a matter of logic, for it is fated by the reduction of nature to artifice. This fate is almost certainly our future in any event—it has been a long time coming—and same-sex ‘marriage’ is more its symptom than its cause. But the arrival of same-sex marriage will nevertheless hasten this fate in at least three ways: by irreversibly codifying this artificial anthropology and officially sanctioning ‘families’ that call for ever more ‘creative’ application of ARTs, thus making it all but impossible to regulate the ‘wild west’ that is the present fertility industry; by catalyzing new agendas for research; and by creating markets for new bioengineered ‘products’—children with two ‘biological’ fathers or mothers, for instance—that would otherwise be unthinkable and unnecessary. And of

course an outlook that embraces these developments has no non-moralistic basis for resisting the full gamut of new eugenical practices already in the pipeline such as embryo selection, cryopreservation, 'baby farming,' three-parent 'composite' babies, defective embryos and chimeras manufactured for research, and various germline manipulations and transgenic enhancements. There is no 'ought' to be had from this sort of 'is' save one: the 'ought' of the technological imperative.

Thus what seems at first glance to be the latest step in the forward march of freedom turns out, on closer inspection, to be a decisive moment in the triumph of technology over the human being, though these aren't really the opposites that they appear to be. When freedom is understood as limitless possibility and is elevated to the highest good, it is inevitable that anything that would define us prior to our choosing—even our own bodies—will eventually be regarded as an obstacle to be overcome. We then become *both* protagonists *and* victims, though not all of us in equal measure. The Craig Venters of the world, making their fortunes by imposing their designs on subsequent generations, will be more the former than the latter; while the women farming out their wombs in the Third World and the newly assembled children of many parents and none, who will have no say in what we have made of them, will be more the latter than the former.

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of its dignity through eugenics had as its necessary counterpart the plastic soul deprived of its human inheritance and emptied of its capacity for truly human thoughts, feeling, and experiences.

This triumph of technology over the human person will not be merely technological. It will be internal as well as external, 'spiritual' as well as material. Huxley understood this with great clarity and C.S. Lewis with even greater clarity, though the gulf between them is otherwise infinite. They saw that the plastic body emptied of its dignity through eugenics had as its necessary counterpart the plastic soul deprived of its human inheritance and emptied of its capacity for truly human thoughts, feeling, and experiences. This process too, which is even harder to see than it is to understand, is already well underway.

A culture that accepts such deep violence at the origins of life will have every incentive *not to think* about the profound questions of human existence that for so long animated Western culture—they cut too close to the heart—and so education, even now scarcely distinguishable from ignorance, will largely consist in learning not to ask them. And people who have come to understand themselves as artifacts will be *unable to think* deeply about them because there will be no depths to think about. For they will have already reduced reality to an assemblage of superficial 'facts' and truth to an arrangement (or re-arrangement) of the facts. And so they will have already reduced thinking to

some technique for assembling or manipulating data and things such as sociology, engineering, or journalism, that light minded empiricism which is the predominant form of rationality in our age. (This reduction of reason underlies recent court decisions denying that arguments for the exclusivity of natural marriage meet even the minimum standard of a rational basis.)

Thus deprived of the desire or even the capacity to think about the true meaning of things, and unable to perceive the loss, people will not merely be *susceptible* to manipulation by sentimental platitudes and sophistic arguments—‘People shouldn’t be discriminated against based on who they are or who they love’—they will be *eager* for it. For in the brave new world, ‘true’ is just another word for ‘feasible’ and freedom is learning to love what you’ve got to do anyway.

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