Western civilization is shuddering under a tidal wave of activism in favor of same-sex marriage. Here is a careful response to their most compelling arguments.

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America is entangled in the most heated battle of the culture wars to date. Many consider it a Waterloo. State supreme courts and city governments, senators and congressmen, community leaders, celebrities, and even clergy all have mounted a powerful offensive in support of gay "marriage." What follows is a point-by-point reply to those who are demanding this revision of civilization.

Same-Sex Marriage and Civil Rights

"We're being denied the same rights as heterosexuals. This is unconstitutional discrimination."

There are two complaints here. First, homosexuals don't have the same legal liberties heterosexuals have. Second, homosexual couples don't have the same legal benefits as married couples.

The first charge is simply false. Any homosexual can marry in any state of the Union and receive every one of the privileges and benefits of state-sanctioned matrimony. He just cannot marry someone of the same sex. These are rights and restrictions all citizens share equally.

I realize that for homosexuals this is a profoundly unsatisfying response, but it is a legitimate one, nonetheless.

Let me illustrate. Smith and Jones both qualify to vote in America where they are citizens. Neither is allowed to vote in France. Jones, however, has no interest in U.S. politics; he's partial to European concerns. Would Jones have a case if he complained, "Smith gets to vote [in California], but I don't get to vote [in France]. That's unequal protection under the law. He has a right I don't have." No, both have the same rights and the same restrictions. There is no legal inequality, only an inequality of desire, but that is not the state's concern.

The marriage licensing law applies to each citizen in the same way; everyone is treated exactly alike. Homosexuals want the right to do something no one, straight or gay, has the right to do: wed someone of the same sex. Denying them that right is not a violation of the equal protection clause.

The second complaint is more substantial. It's true that homosexual couples do not have the same legal benefits as married heterosexuals regarding taxation, family leave, health care, hospital visitation, inheritance, etc. However, no other non-marital relationships between
individuals—non-gay brothers, a pair of spinsters, college roommates, fraternity brothers—share those benefits, either. Why should they?

If homosexual couples face "unequal protection" in this area, so does every other pair of unmarried citizens who have deep, loving commitments to each other. Why should gays get preferential treatment just because they are sexually involved?

The government gives special benefits to marriages and not to others for good reason. It’s not because they involve long-term, loving, committed relationships. Many others qualify there. It’s because they involve children. Inheritance rights flow naturally to progeny. Tax relief for families eases the financial burden children make on paychecks. Insurance policies reflect the unique relationship between a wage earner and his or her dependents (if Mom stays home to care for kids, she—and they—are still covered).

These circumstances, inherent to families, simply are not intrinsic to other relationships, as a rule, including homosexual ones. There is no obligation for government to give every human coupling the same entitlements simply to "stabilize" the relationship. The unique benefits of marriage fit its unique purpose. Marriage is not meant to be a shortcut to group insurance rates or tax relief. It’s meant to build families.

Peter Sprigg of the Family Research Council sums the issue up nicely:

"Gay citizens" already have the same right to marry as anyone else—else to the same restrictions. No one may marry a close blood relative, a child, a person who is already married, or a person of the same sex. However much those restrictions may disappoint the incestuous, pedophiles, polygamists, and homosexuals, the issue is not discrimination. It is the nature of marriage itself.

"They said the same thing about interracial marriage."

This challenge has great rhetorical force, but it is a silly objection.

Consider two men, one rich and one poor, seeking to withdraw money from their bank. The rich man is denied because his account is empty. However, on closer inspection, a clerk discovers an error, corrects it, and releases the cash. Next in line, the poor man is denied for the same reason: insufficient funds. "That's the same thing you said about the last guy," he snaps. "Yes," the clerk replies. "We made a mistake with his account, but not with yours. You're broke."

In the same way, it simply is not relevant that the same objection has been used to deny both interracial and homosexual marriage. It's only relevant if the circumstances are the same, regardless of the objection. They are not.

Same-sex marriage and interracial marriage have nothing in common. There is no difference between a black and a white human being because skin color is morally trivial. There is an enormous difference, however, between a man and a woman. Ethnicity has no bearing on marriage. Sex is fundamental to marriage.

This approach won't work to justify polygamous or incestuous unions ("In the past people wouldn't allow interracial marriages, either."). It is equally ineffectual here. The objection may be the same, but the circumstances are entirely different.

"We shouldn't be denied the freedom to love who we want."

Columnist Ellen Goodman writes, "The state is on shaky ground when it tries to criminalize sexual relations of the consensual living arrangements of adults." In San Francisco, a giddy
newly "married" lesbian celebrates, "Now we're not second-class citizens; now we can have a loving relationship like every other married couple we know." Another opines, "Anybody who is in love and wants to spend the rest of their life together should be able to do it." [emphasis added in all]

These remarks reflect a common misconception: Same—sex marriage will secure new liberties for homosexuals that have eluded them thus far. This will not happen because no personal liberty is being denied them. Gay couples can already do everything married people do--express love, set up housekeeping, share home ownership, have sex, raise children, commingle property, receive inheritance, and spend the rest of their lives together. It’s not criminal to do any of these things.

Homosexuals can even have a wedding. Yes, it's done all the time. Entire cottage industries have sprung up from Hollywood to the Big Apple serving the needs--from wedding cakes to honeymoons--of same-sex lovers looking to tie the knot.

Gay marriage grants no new freedom, and denying marriage licenses to homosexuals does not restrict any liberty. Nothing stops anyone--of any age, race, gender, class, or sexual preference--from making lifelong loving commitments to each other, pledging their troth until death do them part. They may lack certain entitlements, but not freedoms.

Denying marriage doesn't restrict anyone. It merely withholds social approval from a lifestyle and set of behaviors that homosexuals have complete freedom to pursue without it. A marriage license doesn't give liberty; it gives respect.

And respect is precisely what homosexual activists long for, as one newly licensed lesbian spouse makes clear: "It was a moving experience after a truly lifelong commitment, to have a government entity say, 'Your relationship is valid and important in the eyes of the law.'" Another admits, "This is about other people recognizing what we have already recognized with each other for a long time." And another: "I didn't start out feeling this way, but that piece of paper, it's just so important I can't even put it into words. It's so important to have society support you….It's about society saying you're recognized as a couple."

Ironically, heterosexuals have been living together for years enjoying every liberty of matrimony without the "piece of paper." Suddenly that meaningless piece of paper means everything to homosexuals. Why? Not because it confers liberty, but because it confers legitimacy. Note this telling passage from Time magazine’s "Will Gay Marriage be Legal?"

Ultimately, of course, the battle for gay marriage has always been about more than winning the second-driver discount at the Avis counter. In fact, the individual who has done most to push same-sex marriage--a brilliant 43-year-old lawyer-activist named Evan Wolfson--doesn’t even have a boyfriend. He and the others who brought the marriage lawsuits of the past decade want nothing less than full social equality, total validation--not just the right to inherit a mother-in-law's Cadillac. As Andrew Sullivan, the (also persistently single) intellectual force behind gay marriage, has written, "Including homosexuals within marriage would be a means of conferring the highest form social approval imaginable." [emphasis added]

Same-sex marriage is not about civil rights. It’s about validation and social respect. It is a radical attempt at civil engineering using government muscle to strong-arm the people into accommodating a lifestyle many find deeply offensive, contrary to nature, socially destructive, and morally repugnant. Columnist Jeff Jacoby summed it up this way in The Boston Globe:

The marriage radicals…have not been deprived of the right to marry—only of the right to insist that a single-sex union is a "marriage." They cloak their demands in the language of civil rights
because it sounds so much better than the truth: They don't want to accept or reject marriage on the same terms that it is available to everyone else. They want it on entirely new terms. They want it to be given a meaning it has never before had, and they prefer that it be done undemocratically--by judicial fiat, for example, or by mayors flouting the law. Whatever else that may be, it isn't civil rights.

The Meaning of Marriage

The controversy about same-sex marriage churns principally around the definition of marriage. Activists deny the traditional view, that marriage is about children. Instead, marriage is an ever changing, socially-constructed institution constantly being redefined by society. There is no essential connection with children. Rather, at the core of the enterprise are two people in love.

"Marriage is about love."

Understandably, love is a predominant theme in discussions about marriage. "As long as people love each other," one person asserted, "it shouldn't matter whether they are the same sex. What's important in marriage is love."

Initially, this seems hard to deny. In our culture, love is often the immediate motivation for marriage. On reflection, though, it's clear that love and marriage don't always go together. In fact, they seldom do.

If marriage were about love, then billions of people in the history of the world who thought they were married were not. Most marriages have been arranged. Love may percolate later, but only as a result of marriage, not the reason for it.

Further, if love were the sine qua non of marriage, no "for better or for worse" promises would be needed at the altar. Vows aren't meant to sustain love; they are meant to sustain the union when love wanes. A pledge keeps a family intact not for love, but for the sake of children.

The state doesn't care if the bride and groom love each other. There are no questions about a couple’s affections when granting a license. No proof of passion is required. Why? Because marriage isn't about love.

Yes, love may be the reason some people get married, but it isn't the reason for marriage. It may be a constituent of marriage, but it isn't the purpose of marriage. Something else is.

"Marriage is constantly being redefined."

The definition of marriage has not been in flux in the way people suggest. In fact, marriage itself has not been redefined at all. Because there have been variations on the theme does not mean there has been no theme. From the dawn of civilization marriage has always been between men and women.

There have been changes. Historically some have been denied marriage (e.g., the young, the genetically aberrant, and interracial couples). Others were allowed to marry more than once, either consecutively (divorce and remarriage), or concurrently (polygamy). Spousal rights have altered and traditions have evolved. But marriage has still been marriage. And spouses have always been male and female.

To say something has changed is to say some core thing has remained the same. When an old curtain is changed into a work smock, or an irresponsible bachelor becomes a conscientious dad, something stays the same, the cloth and the man, in these two cases.
In the midst of these obvious changes in marriage, what feature remains the same? What is the essential core that makes marriage distinct from any other relationship? In spite of the variations, spouses have always been male and female. Why? What is unique about this human pairing?

"Not all marriages have children."

Initially it is easy to resist any suggestion that "marriage" and "family" are essentially connected with "offspring." Clearly, not all families have children. Some marriages are barren, by choice or by design.

This proves nothing, though. Books are written by authors to be read, even if large ones are used as doorstops or discarded ones help ignite campfires. The fact that many lie unread and covered with dust, or piled atop coffee tables for decorative effect doesn’t mean they were not destined for higher purpose.

In the same way, the natural tie of marriage to procreation is not nullified because in some individual cases children are not intended or even possible. Marriage still is what it is even if its essential purpose is never actualized. The exceptions prove the rule, they don’t nullify it. Marriage is intrinsically about and for children.

Ironically, heterosexuals and homosexuals alike confirmed this while lining up to wed at city halls on Valentines day. "After seven years and the birth of a baby," the L.A. Times reported, "Robert Manzo and Anna Parker decided to make their union official for 9-month-old Kyle, who they believe should have the legal protection that a marriage gives to a family."

More than 300 miles away, Kathy Palmer-Lohan stood in line in San Francisco with her partner, Laura, who was seven months pregnant. "We’re having kids," Palmer-Lohan said, "and [marriage] gives some formality to the relationship and the family structure."

"Marriage is a social construction we can redefine as we please."

What is marriage? There are only two possible kinds of answers to this question: Either marriage and family have a fixed, natural purpose (a natural "teleology") or they do not. If not, marriage is some kind of social construction, an invention of culture like knickers or bow ties, fashions that change with the times. Marriages defined by convention can be anything culture defines them to be. No particular detail is essential.

It is not possible, however, that marriage is a social construction. Here’s why.

Columnist Dennis Prager has observed, "Every higher civilization has defined marriage as an institution joining members of the opposite sex." I agree with Prager’s position on marriage, though I take exception with one of his words.

I don’t think marriage has been defined by cultures. Rather, I think it has been described by them. The difference in terms is significant. If marriage is defined by culture, then it is merely a construction that culture is free to change when it desires. The definition may have been stable for millennia, yet it is still a convention and therefore subject to alteration. This is, in fact, the argument of the those in favor of gay marriage.

The truth is, it is not culture that constructs marriages or the families that marriages begin. Rather, it is the other way around: Marriage and family construct culture. As the building blocks of civilization, families are logically prior to society as the parts are prior to the whole. Bricks aren’t the result of the building because the building is made up of bricks. You must have the first before you can get the second.
Societies are large groups of families. Since families are constituent of culture, cultures cannot define them. They merely observe their parts, as it were, and acknowledge what they have discovered. Society then enacts laws not to create marriage and families according to arbitrary convention, but to protect that which already exists, being essential to the whole.

Why has civilization always characterized families as a union of men and women? Because men and women are the natural source of the children that allow civilized culture to persist. This is the only understanding that makes sense of the definition, structure, legitimacy, identity, and government entitlements of marriage. This alone answers our question, "What is marriage?"

Marriage begins a family. Families are the building blocks of cultures. Families—and therefore marriages—are logically prior to culture.

If the definition of marriage is established by nature, then we have no liberty to redefine it. In fact, marriage itself wouldn’t change at all even if we did. Philosopher Francis Beckwith has wryly observed, "Just because you can eat an ashtray doesn’t make it food." Linguistic tricks can’t change what nature has already determined something to be. Neither ashtrays nor same-sex marriage provide the nourishment intended by food or families, respectively.

The fact that same-sex couples can legally adopt changes nothing. This, too, subverts the purpose of marriage by robbing families (and children) of a vital ingredient: mothers and fathers. By licensing same-sex marriage, society declares by law that two men or two women are equally suited to raise a child, that mothers and fathers contribute nothing unique to healthy child-rearing. This is self-evidently false. Moms and dads are not interchangeable.

Marriage begins a family. The purpose of family is to produce the next generation. Therefore, family is designed by nature for children. This description alone is consistent with our deepest intuitions, which is why every culture since the birth of time has recognized this. No other characterization fits what societies have been doing for millennia.

Families may fail to produce children, either by choice or by accident, but they are about children, nonetheless. That’s why marriages have always been between men and women; they are the only ones, in the natural state, who have kids.

Government has no interest in affirming any other kind of relationship. It privileges and sustains marriage in order to protect the future of civilization.

Same-sex marriage is radically revisionist. It severs family from its roots, eviscerates marriage of any normative content, and robs children of a mother and a father. This must not happen.

Homosexuality is broadly tolerated in this country. Gays are allowed to pursue their "lifestyles" without reprisal, even to the point of forming committed, monogamous unions. They may not be universally respected or admired, but they have the liberty to live as they choose. This is all they have the right to demand.

For the Kingdom,

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