

# The End of Marriage

Blithering Genius

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## 1 Modern Marriage

In the modern West, we have discarded the tradition of marriage without much thought. It has become a hollow, meaningless ritual. In the past, marriage was a life-long commitment and a license to have sex. Now it is just a ceremony.

Many people view the abandonment of traditional sexual morality as progress. They see no reason why we should follow archaic norms of sexual behavior. Those norms were justified with appeals to religious authority, not with rational arguments. Now that God is dead, or at least very ill, and we have the birth control pill, there is no reason to follow ancient traditions.

## 2 Traditional Marriage

However, just because traditional sexual morality was justified on religious grounds, that doesn't mean it was arbitrary or oppressive. Traditional sexual morality had very important functions. People did not understand those functions, so it was justified with appeals to religion. But it has a rational, pragmatic justification.

Traditional marriage had two aspects:

- Marriage was a contract between a man and a woman. Both sides consented to a relationship that involved more than just having sex or living together. The husband was expected to support his wife and children. The wife was expected to take on various duties in the home, including the care of children. The roles of husband and wife were complementary, balanced and created a functional family unit.
- Marriage was a license to have sex, and thus a license to reproduce. Traditional sexual morality required that sex be limited to marriage. Sex inside marriage was good. Sex outside marriage was bad. Marriage was the social regulation of reproduction.

Marriage was a socially enforced version of the sexual contract.

### **3 The Sexual Contract**

The sexual contract is an exchange relationship between a man and a woman. Each has rights and obligations in the relationship. There are risks of defection for both sides. The man could impregnate the woman and then abandon her. The woman could cheat on the man and deceive him into raising another man's children.

Our emotions work reasonably well to create male-female cooperation, but it becomes more difficult when we live in large societies. Even primitive societies have some form of marriage, but it becomes more important when people live among strangers. The same is true of other things, such as property rights. They are more important in large societies where strangers interact.

Marriage lowered the risk of defection for both sides in the sexual contract. It required men to stay with their wives and children. It required women to be sexually faithful to their husbands. By punishing defection on both sides, it helped to solve the prisoner's dilemma of sexual cooperation. It allowed for greater trust, and thus greater cooperation, between men and women.

See Game Theory and Society.

### **4 Marriage and the Sex Market**

By defining enforceable sexual property rights and contract rights, marriage also created an effective market. The market for casual sex is unbalanced. Men have a greater desire for sex, and so pussy is worth more than dick, to put it bluntly. By contrast, the marriage market is balanced. Both sides can credibly offer something of equal value to the other. The man offers a lifetime of support and protection. The woman offers her exclusive reproductive services and her work in the home. The trade is equal. In the marriage market, men and women were equals.

### **5 Marriage and Problems of Cooperation**

Just as there is a reproductive prisoner's dilemma between a man and a woman, there is a reproductive tragedy of the commons between the individual and the collective. If individuals are allowed to have children that they cannot support, society is burdened with the care of those children. Traditional marriage was a license to reproduce. To have children, a woman needed a husband, and usually a man had to be capable of supporting a wife and children before he could marry. Marriage protected society from the burden of fatherless children.

So, marriage solved two problems of cooperation: a prisoner's dilemma and a tragedy of the commons.

## **6 Marriage Was Eugenic**

Marriage was also eugenic. Productive men had the most value in the marriage market, so they could get the most fertile (young and beautiful) wives, and have the most children. The husband had the primary responsibility for the welfare of his wife and children. Even if society provided charity to the poor, men still had to be productive in order to get wives.

## **7 Marriage And Other Benefits**

Marriage had some other benefits for society and individuals. It gave men an incentive to be productive and build wealth, because that was their source of value in the marriage market. It reduced violent competition between men for women. It solved the problem of consent: a man and a woman gave consent to sex publicly, explicitly and verbally. It reduced sexually transmitted diseases.

## **8 The Consequences of Abandoning Traditional Marriage**

Traditions contain wisdom that has been learned over generations from experience. We should not simply throw away traditions without first trying to understand what they are for. Traditions often have very important functions that we are not aware of.

We threw away marriage, because we didn't understand what it was for. We mistook the symbols and rituals associated with marriage for marriage itself. We discarded the functional aspects of marriage and retained only the superficial rituals and symbols. The process of destroying marriage was called "sexual liberation".

We are now beginning to see the consequences of sexual liberation:

- A dysfunctional sexual market.
- The breakdown of long-term relationships and the family structure.
- An epidemic of single mothers on welfare.
- Dysgenic breeding patterns.
- Below replacement fertility.
- Declining male productivity.

We need a rational replacement for traditional marriage, one that is justified on rational, pragmatic grounds, not religious or mystical grounds. We need to create a new institution: a reproduction contract and license that resolves the conflicts between man and woman, individual and society.