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Privatize marriage [1]

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I've written for PoliticsHome today about why the whole debate over same-sex marriage misses the point [3] . Why are we even having a discussion about which groups of people should be allowed to 'marry' others, I ask, when marriage has historically been a private institution that had nothing to do with the state?

> *Removing the need to get a state licence for 'marriage' would allow consenting adults to sign whatever contract they want and call it marriage. People would be free to draw up contracts tailor-made for them, or to take one of the one-size-fits-all 'marriage contracts' that would inevitably be offered by private firms.*
>
> *This rather simple step would make the whole marriage debate redundant. Any pair of consenting adults ? gay, bisexual, straight, transsexual, or anything else ? could agree to a contract that suits them and hold a marriage ceremony wherever would have them. (I say a pair, but there is no reason that three or four or more consenting adults should not be allowed to share their lives with each other in a private marriage, if they want.)*
>
> *Of course, they would be free to hold whatever ceremony they wanted to around the contract signing. Marrying couples could hold unique weddings that reflected their own values and passions, instead of having to sign their contracts in a state registry office. It would be up to individual churches to decide for themselves whether or not they want to be involved ? some probably would, and some probably would not.*

So long as marriage is a state institution, it should be available to people in as many different kinds of relationships as possible. But there is something deeply unpleasant about a world where every kind of private relationship has to be approved in the court of public opinion before it is granted the same legal status as 'acceptable' relationships. We are fortunate to live in a fairly tolerant era where things like gay marriage are becoming accepted by the majority, but this is an insufficient safeguard.

Taking marriage out of the hands of the state would end the tyranny of the majority over people's private relationships. It's vital that we push politics out of our private lives. As I say in my post, love is too important to leave up to the state.

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