

The Piety of Common Sense and the Common Sense of Piety: A Sensible-Reaction to the Idea of Same-Sex Marriage

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Abstract

The potential societal impacts of same-sex marriage are considered in light of Giambattista Vico's new scholarship and her critique of modernity. Marriage, as the universal foundation of the human being and of society, should be protected from radical changes that encourage the disintegration of society and the redefinition of the human being. Those who would have us ignore sex and gender differences seek an abstraction of human beings that is characteristic of modern reason's aggressive assault on nature. We recall the pre-rational foundations of reason to temper our thinking and to recognize and appreciate the imaginative and rational foundations of human beings and society, including marriage. To abandon it is, for Vic, the essence of impiety, which makes us a revival of man, in whom desires rule uninfluenced by reason, but the reason is their servant. The abstract re-conceptualization of life brings us to a new and cruel barbarism.

Keywords: Giambattista Vico; Same-sex marriage; Census communis; Imaginative universals; The barbarism of reflection; Sex and gender

Introduction

This article is an appeal to common sense, once considered an American virtue, as it can be applied to current considerations of the same-sex marriage competition. Specifically, I argue that all societies, including our own, are bound together by a basic or basic common sense of a few select things. Each society builds on these few universal foundations with its own particular mythic and social constructions. When any society begins to lose sight of these original human foundations and instead relies on new shared conceptions of its world based solely on abstract instrumental reason, it not only risks creating social and political errors—ones we can live with if they are not right. More importantly, when such mistakes completely separate us from our basic common sense of human society, we risk losing that very society. We can't live with that, at least not together. In other words, no policy or legislation, no constitution, and no bill of rights can bind people who are determined to become unbound by the loss of the basic common sense for which they were first constituted as human beings. I write with the hope that we Americans—humanity's "last best hope"—are not yet so determined.

In defense of human sociability, I turn to the philosophy of Giambattista Vico. What does a relatively obscure early 18th-century Italian strangulation have to do with us? Perhaps everything, if we heed and heed his call to fidelity to the universal foundations of human society. As Vico explains his discovery of the above feelings, which naturally bind us together in a common sense of things, the world, and ourselves. America's particular mythic sensibilities of its liberal-republican founding, civil religion, Manifest Destiny, sense of closeness, and exceptionalism have revealed their continued vitality in recent times in the immediate aftermath of the twin terrorist attacks in New York on September 11, 2001. However, Vico's philosophy seeks deeper social foundations, than such a diverse and unique national feeling, and finds the more universal foundations of society and of human beings themselves. Our society and humanity, he found, are intimately congruent. Vico's philosophy of history sees our development through three ages of human beings, each characterized by its own particular stage in the development of human thought. Our mental worlds and historical ages coincide in their being and becoming, they evolve together. The first age, the age of nature and the gods, is the age of origin, myth, and religion. The second age is the age of heroes, in which our still mythical sensibilities are oriented toward human action instead of the natural forces and powers of the gods. Finally, the third age appears, the age of man, in which we are completely absorbed in the human world, which understands and is governed by reason [2]. In this age, reason is increasingly separated from the pre-rational basis of thought from which it originates, so that human thought becomes independent of its origin, context, and ultimately of human beings themselves—artificial intelligence is only one of the latter. example of such independence. Martin Heidegger and Ernst Cassirer, each in their own way primarily in outlining the nature and dangers of our modern technological world, in which thought is limited by the limits of efficiency and means, while end and morality, even human beings themselves, are of our modern "science" [3]. Vico's culprit here is Descartes and it is the Cartesian reason, the foundations of his New Science, he also warns against their loss and the demise of modern society, implicitly already in his time with the advent of modern instrumental reason [1]. As we move from our shared sensibility of the world and our belonging in it to abstract conceptualizations of ourselves, our relationships, and our institutions, we dissolve the bonds that bind us. We think without feeling. The modern reason, divorced from original or impulsive human feeling, is like an acid that slowly corrupts and eventually dissolves our sociability—by favoring our efficient, technical, and instrumental calculations above all else. We drive wedges into each other in forms like the abstract civil rights we prefer. Finally, the absolute abstraction of mind from matter that Vico fights against. Now it is the first age, the emergence of human beings in the beginnings of language and the beginning of societies, a mystery to which Vico devoted his entire adult life. Seemingly lost in the mists of time, it is the mystery itself, rather unraveling it and clearing its mists from our mind's eye, that is Vico's greatest discovery, which lies at the heart of his New Science. It is this discovery that finally empowers him to create this science, to move from reverence for ancient wisdom and rhetoric to modern science as such. In this, Vico gives us the keys to self-knowledge, humanity, society, its origin and its historical course [4].

While others, along with Vico, account for the origin of human beings in the emergence of language, myth, and society together in a simultaneous and symbiotic relationship, it is Vico who discovers in this emergence what he calls "imaginative universals." This is the very genesis of everything that arises as a human being. Every society, says Vico, emerges into a

religious and mythic being with the same three imaginative universals—they are integral to the human being in their origins as the feelings we share and from which language and myth together emerge. The origin of our language and our sociability comes from or out of this shared sensitivity to the world around us.

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