



What Is Marriage?: Man and Woman: A Defense

By Sherif Girgis, Ryan T Anderson, Robert P George

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Until yesterday, no society had seen marriage as anything other than a conjugal partnership: a male-female union. *What Is Marriage?* identifies and defends the reasons for this historic consensus and shows why redefining civil marriage is unnecessary, unreasonable, and contrary to the common good.

Originally published in the *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*, this book's core argument quickly became the year's most widely read essay on the most prominent scholarly network in the social sciences. Since then, it has been cited and debated by scholars and activists throughout the world as the most formidable defense of the tradition ever written. Now revamped, expanded, and vastly enhanced, *What Is Marriage?* stands poised to meet its moment as few books of this generation have.

Rhodes Scholar Sherif Girgis, Heritage Foundation Fellow Ryan T. Anderson, and Princeton Professor Robert P. George offer a devastating critique of the idea that equality requires redefining marriage. They show why both sides must first answer the question of what marriage really *is*. They defend the principle that marriage, as a comprehensive union of mind and body ordered to family life, unites a man and a woman as husband and wife, and they document the social value of applying this principle in law.

Most compellingly, they show that those who embrace same-sex civil marriage leave no firm ground--none--for not recognizing every relationship describable in polite English, including polyamorous sexual unions, and that enshrining their view would further erode the norms of marriage, and hence the common good.

Finally, *What Is Marriage?* decisively answers common objections: that the historic view is rooted in bigotry, like laws forbidding interracial marriage; that it is callous to people's needs; that it can't show the harm of recognizing same-sex couplings, or the point of recognizing infertile ones; and that it treats a mere "social construct" as if it were natural, or an unreasoned religious view as if it were rational.

If the marriage debate in America is decided soon, it will be with this book's help or despite its powerful arguments.

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Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #52075 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Encounter Books
- Published on: 2012-12-11
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.25" h x 5.75" w x .50" l, .55 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 152 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"*What Is Marriage?* There is *the* question. Thanks to these three eloquent authors for so cogently reminding us of that, and for showing us how reflective reason answers it."

-- **Cardinal Timothy Dolan**, *Archbishop of New York*

"This book brilliantly explains why the definition of marriage is so critical and why the strengthening of marriages is absolutely essential to our freedom and our future."

-- **Dr. Rick Warren**, Author of *The Purpose Driven Life* and Pastor of Saddleback Church

"A lot more is at stake in the marriage debate than the definition of a word, and this book reveals just how much. Its defense of marriage is philosophical and sociological, not theological, but people of all faiths will find it illuminating and edifying."

-- **Shaykh Hamza Yusuf**, Zaytuna College

"*What Is Marriage?* is the most insightful, eloquent, and influential defense of marriage as it has been historically and rightly understood. People of all traditions--and everyone who cares about the future of this central and sacred social institution--owe Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson, and Robert P. George an extraordinary debt."

-- **Meir Soloveichik**, Associate Rabbi at Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun and Director of the Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought at Yeshiva University

"With many countries on the verge of redefining a basic social institution, *What Is Marriage?* issues an urgent call for full deliberation of what is at stake. The authors make a compelling secular case for marriage as a partnership between a man and a woman, whose special status is based on society's interest in the nurture and education of children."

-- **Mary Ann Glendon**, Learned Hand Professor of Law, Harvard University

"What a joy to see this book by Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson, and Robert P. George, which presents the most philosophically astute and historically accurate defense of traditional marriage to date. It exposes the incoherence of attempts to radically redefine marriage by showing the inherent wisdom in what is our oldest social institution."

-- **David Novak**, J. Richard and Dorothy Shiff Chair in Jewish Studies, University of Toronto

About the Author

Sherif Girgis is a Ph.D. student in philosophy at Princeton University and a J.D. candidate at Yale Law School. After graduating Phi Beta Kappa and summa cum laude from Princeton, where he won prizes for best senior thesis in ethics and best thesis in philosophy, as well as the Dante Society of America's national Dante Prize, he obtained a B.Phil. in moral, political, and legal philosophy from the University of Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar.

Ryan T. Anderson is William E. Simon Fellow at the Heritage Foundation and the editor of *Public Discourse: Ethics, Law, and the Common Good*, the online journal of the Witherspoon Institute. A Phi Beta Kappa and magna cum laude graduate of Princeton University, he is a Ph.D. candidate in political philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. He has worked as assistant editor of *First Things* and was a

Journalism Fellow of the Phillips Foundation. His writings have appeared in the *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*, *First Things*, the *Weekly Standard*, *National Review*, the *New Atlantis*, and the *Claremont Review of Books*.

Robert P. George is a Visiting Professor at Harvard Law School and McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence and Director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions at Princeton University. He is a member of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, and previously served on the President's Council on Bioethics and as a presidential appointee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights. He is a former Judicial Fellow at the Supreme Court of the United States, where he received the Justice Tom C. Clark Award. He is a recipient of the United States Presidential Citizens Medal and the Honorific Medal for the Defense of Human Rights of the Republic of Poland.

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Chapter One: Comprehensive Union

For all the difficulty and ambiguity of making value judgments, the broadest outlines of the good life are plain to most of us. One man has a healthy body and a happy family, an enriching complement of hobbies and a keen sense for Bob Dylan. By day he teaches high-school seniors to savor the rhythm and wit of Chaucer's poetry; by night friends help him savor red Bordeaux. A second man is debilitated, depressed, desensitized and detached. It doesn't take a poet or a saint to see who is better off.

It is equally clear that there is nothing special about Dylan, Chaucer, or Bordeaux that gives the first man his advantage. There is no *single* good life, but a range of good lives: countless ways of blending the basic ingredients of human thriving. But the ingredients themselves—the most foundational ways in which we can thrive, what we call “basic human goods”—are more limited. They include only those conditions or activities that make us better off in themselves, whether or not they bring us other goods. It makes sense for us to want these for their *own* sake. Health, knowledge, play and aesthetic delight are a few examples, and another is friendship.

Yet another basic human good, we think, is marriage. A critical point here is that marriage and ordinary friendship do not simply offer different degrees of the same type of human good, like two checks written in different amounts. Nor are they simply varieties of the same good, like the enjoyment of a Matisse and the enjoyment of a Van Gogh. Each is its own kind of good, a way of thriving that is different in kind from the other. Hence, while spouses should be friends, what it takes to be a good friend is not just the same as what it takes to be a good spouse.

What, then, is distinctive about marriage? All sorts of practices are grafted onto marriage by law and custom, but what kind of relationship *must any* two people have to enjoy the specific good of marriage? This framing of the question, though unusual, should not seem mysterious; we could ask it just as well of other basic human goods.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Laura McLaughlin:

Here thing why this particular What Is Marriage?: Man and Woman: A Defense are different and trusted to be yours. First of all reading a book is good but it really depends in the content of it which is the content is as

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