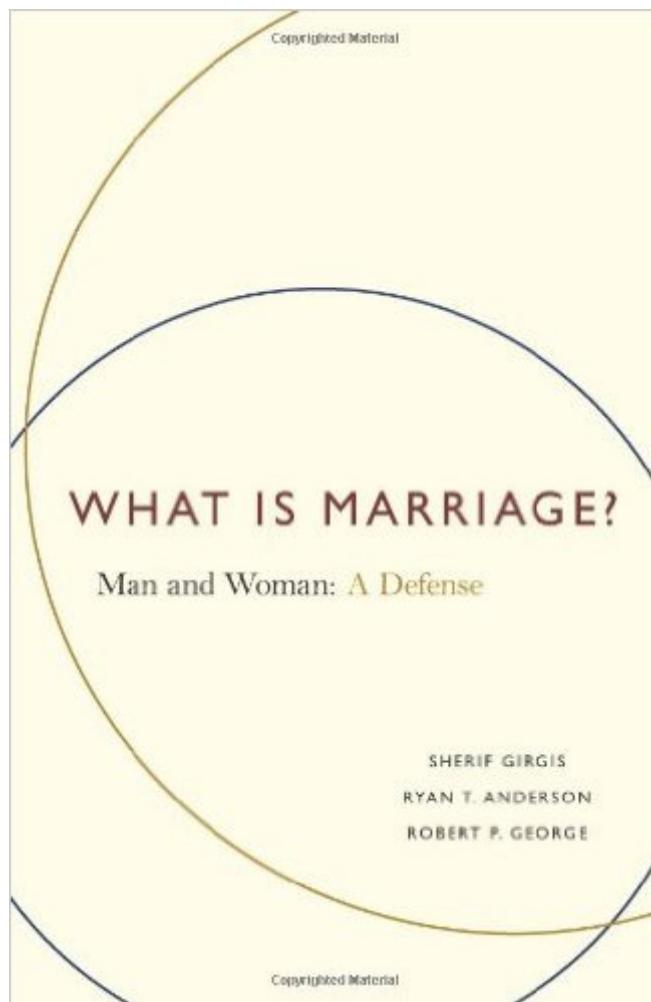


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What Is Marriage?: Man And Woman: A Defense



Synopsis

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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Customer Reviews

MY BACKGROUNDFirst, I should say a bit about my own background. I graduated from Princeton University in June 2012. During my senior year at Princeton, I took both of Professor Robert George's (one of the book's co-authors) courses, "Constitutional Interpretation" and "Civil Liberties." Before I took these classes, I was a pro-life libertarian, similar to Ron Paul. I was definitely in favor of gay marriage: I actually wrote my "Christian Ethics" midterm paper on how the Bible's stance on homosexuality had been widely misinterpreted. But during my senior fall, I was assigned the article version of "What is Marriage?" and I found its arguments quite convincing. Over the course of the next few months, I became a traditional marriage advocate and eventually became a social conservative. Second, I thought I would offer a little perspective on how Professor George is seen by his fellow faculty and by his students. As you might imagine, the average student and the average professor at Princeton is quite liberal (the school newspaper published a survey in 2008 that showed that 80% of the student body and 95% of the faculty had voted for Obama). However, Professor George is widely respected on campus, even by those who vehemently disagree with him, because he takes care to have a strong rational principles for his beliefs, because he takes care to address the criticisms of the other side, and because of his personal warmth. This balanced and rigorous approach to the material was borne out in our course readings, where Professor George always assigned the best arguments on both sides of the issue--he told us to let him know if we thought a particular position wasn't well-defended and that he would replace the reading with one we thought was better.

After juxtaposing "Tricky Nicky's" review with "What is Marriage," I have to wonder if we read the same book. One of the best aspects of this eloquent, succinct resource is its ability to define its answer to the question it poses distinctly from peripheral irrelevances. For example, the book's introduction explains what the book is not. This is helpful in discounting Tricky Nicky's critique, as well as others, as mischaracterizations of the authors' argument. While Tricky Nicky seems to think that the authors are simply clinging (perhaps Tricky Nicky would add "bitterly"?) to the definition of

marriage because of its historical rooting - a history that Tricky Nicky then goes on to undermine - the authors in fact distinguish their argument from history or religious tradition. As the authors say, "from a thousand facts about how marriage has been, one can deduce nothing about how it should be." History is only employed here to the extent the history of marriage has a constant, which is that "the conjugal view of marriage is not uniquely Jewish or Christian; something quite similar to it was developed apart from these traditions." Nor is the common critique that the definition marriage has something to do with hatred to homosexuals relevant here. As the authors note, also at the outset, "the philosophical and legal principle that only coitus could consummate a marriage arose centuries before the concept of a gay identity . . . and even in cultures very favorable to homoerotic relationships (as in ancient Greece), something akin to the conjugal view [of marriage] has prevailed - and nothing like same-sex marriage was even imagined.

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