**Ryan Anderson: What is Marriage? (Presentation to the Stanford Anscombe Society conference) Co-author with Robbie George of book by the same name. Phi Beta Kappa, Magna Cum Laude.**

Too many people resort to empty slogans and name-calling. Ryan won’t talk about morality, theology, or tradition. He’ll make a philosophical argument. What is the state’s interest in marriage?

Everyone is in favor of marriage equality. But this bumper-sticker slogan is completely vacuous. We all want the law to treat all marriages equally. But what sort of relationship IS a marriage? Before a lawyer can get to equal protection of the law, he has to know what the law is trying to protect equally.

Because even those who want to re-define marriage will draw certain lines. And if we’re going to draw lines that are based on principle, reflect the truth, we have to know what sort of a relationship is a marriage and what sort of other consenting adult relationship are not.

When researching, they tried to read the best philosophers and political theorists who were arguing for redefinition. One of these men says marriage establishes your relationship with your number one person. What sets it apart is the priority of the relationship. It’s about the intensity and priority of the emotional bond or commitment.

We think this gets marriage wrong because it collapses marriage with companionship in general. It simply makes it the most important, most intense companionship relationship. It can’t account for any of the distinctive features of what marriage requires. Nor can it explain why government should be in the intense-companionship business.

If you want to redefine marriage to include the same-sex couple, why would you require it to be permanent, monogamous, and exclusive…or the kind of relationship which government takes interest in. Because on this account of marriage, it can be formed by more than two people.

There’s nothing which says this relationship must be exclusive. Some actually argue you might have an enhanced emotional union, care-giving relationship, if spouses could seek sexual satisfaction outside.

There’s no reason in principle it should be permanent, since emotions come and go, love lapses and wanes.

If marriage is just about the love-lives of consenting adults, why can’t we take the state out of the bedroom? But those who favor redefinition want to put the state into more bedrooms. Why?

Anderson presents his view in three steps: What marriage is from philosophical perspective. Why it matters from a policy perspective. What the likely consequences of redefining marriage will be.

We take our bearings from Aristotle, who tells us how to analyze any sort of community: look at the actions the community does, the goods the community seeks, the norms of commitment that shapes that community’s common life. His example: a university. The university community engages in academic actions. Professors research and write books. Students attend lectures, take notes, write papers, etc. What is the good? It’s all oriented toward truth and knowledge. It’s about eliminating ignorance, superstition, preconceived opinions…so we have a better understanding of what is true. What commitments are required? Integrity, an honor code: you can’t plagiarize, you have to cite sources, all your data…even that which calls your conclusions into questions. You don’t view as this as an attack but as something liberating, something that helps you see the fullness of truth.

So what makes the marriage community different from a football team or the university? Marriage is a comprehensive relationship in the act that unites spouses, in the goods that the spouses are inherently ordered toward, and in the norms of commitment that it requires from the spouses.

We are mind-body unities, not souls inhabiting flesh and blood. So to unite with someone in a comprehensive way, we must unite with them at all levels of their personhood: hearts, minds, and bodies. The good won’t be some particular singular good (like winning the next football game or getting a good grade on a paper) but a comprehensive good…procreation, the creation and rearing of whole new human organisms, who will be raised to participate in all the forms of human goodness. It sets the trajectory of that marriage on a comprehensive plane. Lastly, it calls for a comprehensive commitment: permanency and exclusivity. It’s comprehensive throughout time, forsaking all others.

This brings us to the bedrock of our argument. And it’s something that our parents and grandparents took this for granted. It used to be accepted as simple common sense.

How is it that two people can unite comprehensively? With most respects, we’re complete as individuals: location, digestion, circulation, etc. But there’s one biological function where we human beings are radically incomplete: procreation. In the conjugal act, man and woman don’t just rub up against each other or interlock in some way, like sticking one’s finger in another’s ear. They truly form a two-in-one-flesh union…there’s a single organism being formed by a mated pair. It’s a single biological purpose that the twosome performs together as a unity.

Just as all the cells and organs in my body work together for the good of my continued existence, man and wife are in the marital union coordinating toward a single unified biological purpose, the good of procreation. So what the Hebrew Scriptures describe isn’t just a poetic or metaphorical thing. It reveals something true about human nature…about what the sexual complementarity of a man and a woman allows for in terms of an act that can unite them. This act unites them so completely, that nine months later it may require a name. The love-making act is also the life-giving act. The act which unites man and woman as husband and wife also can make them as father and mother. That tells us something about what the marital relationship is ordered toward, about the good it seeks.

This explains the requirements for comprehensive commitments. What sort of exclusivity is required? It’s sexual. You don’t violate your marriage vows by attending a lecture with someone other than your spouse. You don’t cheat by playing football with someone other than your spouse. You cheat when you sleep with someone other than your spouse. The sexual act is what transforms an ordinary friendship – the union of hearts and minds – into the comprehensive domain of marriage. The conjugal act, distinctive of marriage, is exclusively reserved for the spouses.

The other commitment is permanence. You don’t hold anything back. If you have a sunset clause, an escape date, you are holding back, not uniting comprehensively.

This basic view is found in ancient thinkers Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero…in canon law (Church) and common law (England) and civil law (America)…in Augustine, Luther, Calvin…in Enlightenment thinkers like Locke, Kant…in Eastern thinkers like Gandhi. There are differences around the margins, but there’s something about the human good of marriage that all have tried to articulate.

Why does marriage matter? Why should we care? Why should the state care about this relationship?

From a policy vantage point, marriage exists to unite a man and woman as husband and wife so they’re equipped to be mother and father to any children that that union produces. It’s based on the anthropological truth that men and women are distinct and complementary, based on the biological fact that reproduction requires a man and woman, based on social reality that children deserve both a mother and father.

Whenever a child a born, a mother is nearby. That’s a fact of biology. The question for culture, policy, is will a father be close by…and if so, for how long? Marriage has been accepted by cultures around the world and across time to maximize the likelihood that that man will be committed to that woman permanently and exclusively and that the two of them will be committed to raising that child. When this doesn’t happen, social costs for the spouses and the child and for all of the community are very high.

We know from social scientists that there is no such thing as parenting, in the abstract. There is mothering and fathering…and men and women bring different gifts to the parenting enterprise. Social scientist David Popineau at Rutgers says: “The burden of social-science evidence supports the idea that gender-differentiated parenting is important for human development and that the contribution of fathers to child-rearing is unique and irreplaceable.” He refers to a literature review and says we should disavow the notion that mommies can make good daddies…and that daddies can make good mommies. “The two sexes are different to the core and each is necessary culturally and biologically for the optimal development of a human being.” Social science laws are not like physical laws. They apply in general, on average, for the most part. There will be instances in which single mother or a divorced parent could do a good job. But there are distinct challenges for a child in that situation.

Ryan proposes a thought experiment. Imagine a five-year-old is in the living room wrestling with one of his parents. Parent is teaching him to be masculine without being violent. Can put people in headlocks but not to bite, pull hair, gouge out eyes. Which parent is most likely here? This is what comes naturally to dads. It’s what fathers enjoy doing with their five-year-old sons. In the same way, the parent most likely to be tossing a child in the air is the dad…and the parent most likely to be saying ‘honey, not so high’ is the mom. Mothers tend to be more nurturing, care-giving.

In light of this thought experience, we can step back and analyze the social science. Five years later, the dad will be playing catch with the boy. Ten years later, he will be advising the son about his first dance.

That matters. The father is doing something for the son. (Sons without fathers are more likely to be involved in crime. If you don’t learn how to be physical without biting, you may go wrong later on.)

They also do something distinctive and complementary for daughters. He tends to steer her away from wrong sort of boyfriends. Father married to daughter’s mother also models what a good male/female relationship should look like. Girls without dads are more likely to experience out-of-wedlock pregnancies.

Single mothers are often the most heroic members of our society. They would also tell you they wish that that child’s father had ‘manned up.’ Marriage matters. State has an interest in promoting marriage to increase the likelihood that every child is given the gift of being raised by a married mother and father.

Up until the 1960s, virtually all children were raised by married mothers and fathers. Out-of-wedlock childbearing stats were in the single digits. Today 40% of all Americans, 50% of Hispanics, and 70% of Blacks are born out of wedlock. They will have a much tougher life.

When marriage is stable, it protects children from poverty, from committing crime. It protects the state from having to pick up the pieces of a broken marriage culture.

Final part: what are the consequences? Ideas have consequences and bad ideas have consequences. If you were to redefine marriage to eliminate the norm of sexual complementarity, to make it a genderless institution, there would be no institution left in civil society or public life that upheld even as an ideal that every child deserves both a mother and a father. The message would be that men and women are interchangeable, that mothers and fathers are substitutionable, and that two moms or two dads is the same thing as a married mom and a dad. It would teach that marriage is much more about the desires of adults than about the needs of children…it would re-center the marital relationship around adult romance and adult emotions rather than about the type of institution that can create new life and unite that new life with the man and the woman who gave it.

Think about how we redefined marriage the first time, with the introduction of no-fault divorce. In the common law, there was a strong presumption of permanency. Abuse, abandonment, and adultery were the only real reasons for divorce at that time. Now people can divorce for any reason or no reason at all. The divorce rate more than doubled after no-fault divorce. The law taught that marriage need not even aspire to be permanent. Law shapes culture. Culture shapes our beliefs. Beliefs shape our actions. The law taught that marriage was primarily about adult romance not about stable family life for creating and raising children. Think of all the social costs that have resulted from this.

The most pressing social problem is absentee fathers. How will we insist that dads are essential if the law says they’re optional. If we redefine marriage, it will change the meaning of marriage and what the law will teach about it, and what people believe about marriage and shape how they live out marriage.

Second: there’s no reason to think that redefining marriage will stop here. We now have three new words that the advocates of same-sex ‘marriage’ use to further redefine it. Twenty years ago same-sex marriage was an oxymoron. Now we have, in prominent publications: **throuple**…a three-person couple. This term and idea appeared in New York Magazine. This is not a polygamous relationship. It’s a group marriage, polyamory. All three partners are married to each other. If marriage is just about intense emotional or romantic feelings, why isn’t the throuple in the same situation as the same-sex couple? Or the opposite-sex quartet? What is magical about the number 2?

NY Times, Sunday magazine, ran an article on gay-rights activist Dan Savage. He was asked what will straight couples learn from same-sex couple? His response is the virtue of the **monogamish** relationship. This is a play on the word monogamous. Savage wants to get rid of the sexual exclusivity requirement. He says this is outdated and inhumane, unrealistic expectation to think you could have all sexual needs fulfilled by one person. This, he says, is what’s wrong with heterosexual relationships. This will enhance one’s emotional life.

**Wedlease** is a play on the word wedlock. This term was introduced in Washington Post. This is published after the SC’s ruling on the DOMA act. The argument is that you should be able, legally, to lease a spouse. Spouses have unrealistic expectation that they’ll love one person for the rest of their lives. People would sign a 5- to 10-year license. It would have a natural sunset clause.

Think about the public-policy consequence of this! Government is not in the marriage business because it’s a sucker for romance. It’s involved because the sexual union of man and woman can produce a child…and that child deserves a mother and father…and when it doesn’t happen, there’s a social cost!

The throuple and monogamish and wedlease ideas make it more likely that a man has multiple sexual partners in short-lived relationships. It directly undercuts the public-policy of marriage in the first place. All of these further redefinitions follow logically from getting rid of the male-female aspect of marriage. If you say marriage has nothing to do with man and woman and with the procreative capacity, what are you left with regarding its permanence and exclusive of twosomes.

The primary victims will be children. The authors describing the throuple, monogampish, and wedlease ideas only spoke about consenting adults. They never spoke what this would mean for child-rearing.

The last consequence is the one we’re experiencing first: the attack on religious liberty. In Massachusetts, Illinois, and D.C., evangelical and Catholic adoption agencies and foster-care providers had to shut down because the government said they were required to place children with same-sex couples. Such couples are free to adopt from state agency or secular agency…and the religious agencies weren’t fighting this reality. They just didn’t want to do this themselves. They wanted to run their agencies in accordance with their beliefs. They said they had social science evidence that children do best with married mother and father than with same-sex couple. They also cited the 1st amendment, which protects their businesses according to their religious convictions. In Massachusetts, the court made clear its ruling had nothing to do with funding…but with state licensing.

Professionals that intersect with wedding industry are being hauled into court for the same reason. In none of these cases did the businessperson say “we don’t serve homosexuals.” It’s just about their moral objection to same-sex ‘marriage.’ They were essentially saying only that we don’t want to use God-given talents to tell a story about or celebrate a relationship that tells a lie about God’s intention for marriage.

In all these case, the same-sex couple found somebody else to provide the service! There’s no need to have the government coerce the evangelical, Catholic, or Mormon.

Religious liberty doesn’t just mean freedom to worship, on Sunday. But the way the courts are ruling, once you step out into the market place, you must leave your faith at the door; you can’t live out your faith in your profession. The founders didn’t intend this.