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## Our Marital Future

One Democrat gets it.

By Robert P. George & Ryan T. Anderson

**D**avid Blankenhorn's new book, *The Future of Marriage*, explodes the widely promoted myth that redefining marriage to include same-sex partnerships would be a harmless innovation.

Blankenhorn, the Harvard-educated author of *Fatherless America* and founder of *The Institute for American Values*, unabashedly describes himself as a "marriage nut." Long before the issue of same-sex "marriage" rose to national prominence, he was a founder of the "Marriage Movement" — a campaign to lower divorce rates, decrease out-of-wedlock child-bearing, and provide as many children as possible with the care and protection of their mother *and father*. As Blankenhorn knows, these problems preceded the push for legal recognition of same-sex unions. His concern is — and always has been — to strengthen *marriage*.

Homosexuality and "gay" relationships were not among Blankenhorn's concerns — which is why he recoils from charges of "prejudice" or even "conservatism." Having grown up in Mississippi during Martin Luther King's leadership of the civil rights movement, Blankenhorn is "a lifelong Democrat," thinks of himself "essentially as a liberal," and cannot stand "to be viewed as a bigot." He affirms that "the principle of equal human dignity must apply to gay and lesbian persons," but insists that the institution of marriage is not the vehicle for advancing gay-rights, for marriage is not "fundamentally about the rights of adults." "Marriage is fundamentally about the needs of children." And "what children need most are mothers and fathers. Not caregivers. Not parent-like adults. Not even 'parents.' What a child wants and needs more than anything else are the mother and the father who together made the child, who love the child, and who love each other."

Drawing from the resources of evolutionary biology, psychology, history, anthropology, and sociology, Blankenhorn defends the thesis that marriage is a natural institution present in all (or nearly all) human societies. He shows that marriage is not just a private emotional bond between lovers, or a mere religious affair, but rather a natural and profoundly *public* institution.

Blankenhorn concludes that marriage exists to bring a man and a woman together in a sexual relationship — one publicly recognized and approved because of its unique aptness for the bearing and rearing of children. In particular, marriage attaches a father to his children — and to his children's mother — and fulfills the societal need for children to have the love and care of both mother and father. Marriage as an institution is the natural response to human sexual embodiment as male and female, to human longing for bonding and intimacy, to sexual (as opposed to asexual) reproduction, and to human dependency and need (especially in view of the fact that human newborns, unlike newborns of many other species, require many years of nurture before reaching

self-sufficiency).

Blankenhorn's historical, cross-cultural study presents what practical philosophy calls the basic human good of marriage — an intrinsic, irreducible aspect of human well-being and fulfillment both for individuals and the communities they form. Marriage, understood as the communion of spouses founded on physical union in reproductive-type acts, is perfective of human persons as bodily, sexually complementary beings and is uniquely suitable for the bearing and rearing of children. As such, a well-ordered society protects, promotes, and encourages marriage as an institution that fulfills the adults who choose to enter into it and serves and protects the children who come as its fruit — and as the concrete embodiment of marital communion.

#### **BUT WHAT COUNTS AS MARRIAGE?**

But what about the possibility of persons of the same sex being “married”? Why is sexual complementarity so central to marriage? How would social and legal recognition of Adam and Steve's sexual partnership as a “marriage” affect anyone else? Some people, most notably Jonathan Rauch, have argued that “gay marriage” would actually *strengthen* marriage as an institution by securing its foundational role in adult sexual behavior. Blankenhorn isn't buying this claim for a moment, and he provides a barrage of reasons for rejecting it.

- *Same-sex “marriage” would harm children by intentionally depriving them of their mom or dad. It would send the cultural and legal message that moms and dads don't matter.*

Consider the conclusions of the left-leaning research institution Child's Trends:

Research clearly demonstrates that family structure matters for children, and the family structure that helps the most is a family headed by two-biological parents in a low-conflict marriage. Children in single-parent families, children born to unmarried mothers, and children in stepfamilies or cohabiting relationships face higher risks of poor outcomes. . . . There is thus value for children in promoting strong, stable marriages between biological parents.

Redefining marriage to embrace same-sex relationships would deprive a class of children of their birthright to be raised by their natural mother and father. It would advance the notion that children do not need a mother and a father, let alone their own mother and father. Same-sex parenting would send the message that parenting is not gendered. There would be nothing known as mothering or fathering, solely “parenting” — a unisex phenomenon. Both culture and law would be unable to stress the important role that fathers play in their children's lives without giving offense to “alternative” families in which there simply is no father. This would have disastrous effect for our nation's children.

- *Same-sex “marriage” would enshrine “rights” to artificial reproductive technologies (ART) that sever children's biological origins from the adults who will raise them. This would lead to new definitions of parenthood — creating a distinction between natural and legal parents.*

Artificial reproductive technologies allowing homosexual partners to create their own children either with donor eggs or donor sperm, or with surrogates, or even perhaps by means of cloning, would further erode the ideal of children being conceived and raised by their natural parents. While no one claims that same-sex “marriage” is a unique cause of ART, the creation of a legal structure for same-sex sexual unions with all the rights of marriage — including a “right” to parenthood — would secure a permanent place for ART in our nation. Because same-sex couples are biologically unable to have children naturally, they would have to resort to some form of

artificial reproduction or another if they want to fulfill their desire to have children.

Whereas adoption and divorce have always been understood as *remedial* institutions needed to deal with tragedies of one sort or another, same-sex “marriage” would enshrine in law a normative right of adults to “have” children. The law would thus not recognize natural parenthood as being the ideal.

The new distinction between the *natural* and *legal* parents would apply not only to same-sex couples, but to *all couples*, and to *all children*. Because there would not be two sets of laws — one that applies to same-sex “marriages” and one that applies to opposite-sex “marriages” — the law would have to treat all couples the same, for under law *they would be the same*.

- *Same-sex “marriage” would deinstitutionalize marriage. Once the guiding rationale for why marriage exists in the first place — to attach men and women to each other in order to raise the children they produce — is eliminated in law, it would become unintelligible why sex and childbearing should take place only within marriage.*

This is a crucial point, and Blankenhorn has developed it brilliantly. If children do not need a mom and a dad, and if the “products” of one’s sperm and egg are not necessarily one’s children, then why does sex and childbearing need to take place within marriage? Same-sex “marriage” would eliminate in law and weaken in culture the ideal that children should be conceived, born, and raised by their married, natural parents. All of which would further deinstitutionalize marriage. The public meaning and purpose of marriage would be eliminated; marriage would be redefined as simply the private relationship of consenting adults, and parenthood would be understood solely as a legal phenomenon of those choosing to take responsibility for a child. The social function marriage plays in society — providing children with their natural mother and father — would be lost.

This would inevitably result in a devaluation of marriage itself and its function in society. No longer seeing the point of marriage, many people would cease to get or stay married — lower marriage rates, higher divorce rates, increased cohabitation, and increased non-marital childbearing would follow. As marriage came to be understood simply as a private relationship, the importance of the institution would be lost. Marriage would become one lifestyle and family choice among others — one that could not legitimately be given a privileged status in law. All of this would eliminate the ideal of marriage as *the place* to bear and rear children.

It would become almost impossible to educate children to prepare them for marriage, or to socialize them in a marriage culture. Particularly in public schools, teaching any traditional norms about sexual or familial life would be banished. Societal expectations — particularly legal expectations — would no longer include bringing together marriage, sex, childbearing and rearing, and parenthood. Teaching that there are sexual and familial moral principles and expectations (beyond the avoidance of coercion and fraud in sexual relationships) would amount to bigotry.

- *Same-sex “marriage” would severely limit religious freedom, cause unprecedented strife between religious and civil obligations, and irreparably damage the mediating institutions that provide social services.*

In as much as traditional marriage norms and practices persisted, they would be viewed as exclusively the domain of sectarian “religious” understandings. Blankenhorn fears that the legal

recognition of same-sex partnerships as “marriages” would “lead to new state-imposed restrictions of religious freedom and freedom of expression,” significantly eroding the freedom of orthodox Jewish, Christian, and Muslim citizens. At the same time, it would eliminate the vital mediating role that religious institutions play in providing public services “due to state disqualification over refusing programmatically to endorse same-sex marriage.”

There is ample evidence that Blankenhorn is correct. Consider some recent examples. After the Massachusetts supreme court’s ruling that forced the creation of same-sex “marriage” in that commonwealth, Catholic Charities was forced to close its adoption agencies, while parents of public school children were told they may not opt their kids out of homosexual sex education — even in kindergarten. Meanwhile, in Canada the Bishop of Calgary has been charged with international hate-speech crimes for a sermon he gave on Catholic sexual ethics. Across the Atlantic, things are no better. The U.K. has recently refused to grant a religious exemption to allow Catholic Charities to continue its adoption ministry, and a parliamentary committee has even gone so far as to propose making it illegal for a Catholic school to teach its students that homosexual conduct is wrong.

As Blankenhorn argues, the legal creation of same-sex “marriage” would force many “to choose between being a believer and being a good citizen.” We fear it would go even farther, as those who witness to the traditional Jewish, Christian, and natural law understanding of marriage as a conjugal union of a man and a woman would be perceived as promoting a view that is “discriminatory” and, as such, contrary to public policy. Advocates of same-sex “marriage” would argue that such people (and the religious institutions to which they belong) should be treated under the law as the law treats racial bigots and institutions that promote racism. They will argue, for example, that tax exemptions should be removed from institutions that treat marriage as the union of a man and a woman, just as tax exemptions are removed from religious colleges that forbid interracial dating or promote other racist ideas.

- *Same-sex “marriage” would mark the first step toward the abolition of marriage and the embrace of polygamy and polyamory. There is social scientific evidence that those places which have embraced same-sex “marriage” have weaker marriages in general.*

Those who have been most vocal in attacking marriage during the past few decades — arguing it was an outdated, repressive, patriarchic institution — are now among the leaders in promoting gay “marriage.” As Blankenhorn shows, they openly admit that they see it as a stepping stone toward abolishing marriage as a legally privileged institution. “That is why those who are overtly hostile to marriage as an institution typically support gay marriage, and why the very arguments that for years have been used most frequently to attack marriage, and to push for its further deinstitutionalization, are now being used to advocate for same-sex marriage.” The push for polygamy, polyamory, and bisexual group marriages will be right around the corner. The elimination of the requirement of sexual complementarity would, at the same time, remove any basis of moral principle for regarding marriage as the union of only two (and not three or more) partners.

Blankenhorn’s argument here was vindicated this past summer with the publication of a statement signed by several hundred notable intellectual and cultural leaders entitled “Beyond Gay Marriage.” Arguing for public recognition of “committed, loving households in which there is more than one conjugal partner” and of “queer couples who decide to jointly create and raise a child with another queer person or couple, in two households,” the signatories were remarkably

candid about their end goal: “Marriage is not the only worthy form of family or relationship, and it should not be legally and economically privileged above all others. While we honor those for whom marriage is the most meaningful personal — for some, also a deeply spiritual — choice, we believe that many other kinds of kinship relationships, households, and families must also be accorded recognition.”

But according every variety under the sun of adult sexual-choice will serve only to weaken marriage. In fact, Blankenhorn marshals the social scientific evidence that demonstrates that marriage is weakest in the countries that have redefined marriage under pressure to honor same-sex sexual partnerships. Utilizing the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) and its research on marriage and family life throughout 35 different countries, Blankenhorn concludes: “The weakest support for marriage as an institution is in those countries with same-sex marriage. Countries with same-sex civil unions show more support, and countries with only regional recognition show still more support. By significant margins, the most support for marriage is in countries without same-sex unions.”

#### MARRIAGE AND CHILDREN

For anyone who has been studying marriage and its effects for the wellbeing of adults, children, and society as a whole — the way that David Blankenhorn has — it is all too clear that the push to recognize same-sex unions as “marriages” is not in the interest of strengthening and protecting marriage, but solely in the interest in advancing the acceptance of homosexuality and gay rights. Our children deserve better than this. They are fortunate to have an advocate as eloquent and compelling as David Blankenhorn. As he sees it, “After all, the big idea is not stopping gay marriage. The big idea is stopping the erosion of society’s most pro-child institution. Gay marriage is only one facet of the larger threat to that institution.”

No matter what, the law will teach. It will either teach that marriage exists as a natural institution with public purposes and meanings, centered around bridging the gender divide, and bringing together one man and one woman to share their lives as husband and wife and to become father and mother to their children, or it will teach that marriage is a mere creation of the state, recognizing and condoning the private sexual choices of adults, and intended merely to fulfill adult desires. There is no other option; one or the other will become normative. This is Blankenhorn’s most fundamental insight. We can only hope that judges and policy makers will heed his warnings before it is too late.

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