

Sherif Girgis “The Way Forward”

What we're going to wrap up with is a final wrap up and overview from Sherif Girgis and for this session we're not going to have time for Q&A. Um but after the talk and in our continuing connections after this evening, hopefully there will be a chance for you to get your questions answered and pursue them with others in the group. And also on your way out if you'd like more information about the Stanford Anscombe Society, there's an email list to sign up on and free party favors; Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy. There are copies of the article by Sherif Girgis, Robert George and Ryan Anderson "What is Marriage". There are some more copies of these on the table as you're on your way out. So it's my pleasure to introduce Sherif Girgis, um for the other half of the group that was in this room that didn't get the pleasure of learning from him in the past hour, Sherif was born in Cairo and he grew up in Delaware. As an undergraduate he went to Princeton University where he majored in philosophy; and something that I'd commented on in the other room that I really want to reiterate, really struck me in his bio that he wrote his senior thesis on sex ethics. And it was really evidenced that you shouldn't be afraid to take on hard difficult, really deep and substantive meaningful topics with your academic research. You can succeed in doing this. Sherif went on with that senior thesis to win best thesis award both in ethics and in philosophy that year at Princeton. He then earned a Master's Degree at Oxford on a road scholarship and he is currently in a joint degree doing a PhD in philosophy at Princeton and a law degree at Yale Law School in addition to his public engagements like this one today, so please join me in welcoming Sherif Girgis.

Thank you. Um, I guess everyone can hear me off of this mic is that right? Very good. Well, it's a great honor to be here and to plow through a second hour straight of uh, of talks; but in particular to be part of this remarkable endeavor; that Caitlyn Surry, and Judy and Irene and everyone else who's worked on this has done just a fantastic job with. I think we've had a really wonderful arc of starting with intellectual arguments, the philosophy, the rational argumentation behind the thing and then talking about the influence of those ideas on culture and from there talking about the ways that culture gets applied in very concrete terms through things like Instagram and in personal conversations such as the ones that we talked about in this session over there. And I'm going to try to make my remarks, roughly follow that same arc. To talk about the importance of what we do at the level or reasons and arguments; to talk about the impact that that can have, even when it seems like it's not having it. On culture and to go from there to say something a little bit about our personal life and the way that we should conduct ourselves in all these endeavors; whether they're intellectual, or cultural or social; uh, when these are the issues and substantive views that we're looking to defend.

I'll start with a question that Ryan and Robby, George and I very often get which is "Does this stuff ever work?" "Do arguments persuade?" And the answer is yes. Over the last few years, the two of-the three of us have heard from many saying that we had convinced them to join the marriage debate by showing them its value and giving them a moral vocabulary and syntax for discussing it. From others who've decided to retire this or that contrary argument because they were convinced that it didn't work. And from still others who switched to our side of the issue. They've included to answer the next followup question, non-Catholics, non-Christians, agnostics, even a former and very prominent Marxist thinker. We've often remarked channeling G. K. Chesterton that the argument for marriage has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult or we would say feared difficult and left untried. And the same is true of the whole ethic of sex and marriage that we're here to describe and to defend.

The next argument then was well okay where are the mass conversions? If these arguments are so powerful, if they're effective, when you get to the right context, then why hasn't it sparked a social movement? Why can people go to a talk or read a paper and leave unconvinced. And the natural

answer is well that rational arguments don't of themselves spark mass conversions. First point to note is that that shouldn't discourage you or cast doubt on the quality of the arguments. For the same thing is true as a general idea, that there's no direct route from a philosophy argument to a mass social movement. It's true on any philosophical argument for any affirmative claim of any substance. That's why at some level we're debating the same questions that face the pre-Socratics twenty-five hundred years ago and we will keep doing so until the final trumpet interrupts the final Anscombe seminar. Okay, that's always going to be the case. But it doesn't mean that rationale arguments are worthless. In fact, what makes philosophy a blunt tool for massive campaigns also makes it apt for other, but still very important ends. For one thing, it can help to keep us integrated within ourselves and with the truth when various forces would pull us apart. It keeps us from becoming sentimentalists or from becoming esthetes. If your gut tells you one thing and your neighbor says another on this or any other issue, you will want to adjudicate the dispute. If a story or a social movement or a commercial or a music video with 50 million hits gets you riding a wave of passion towards a particular conclusion, you're going to want, if you're a conscientious person, to pull back and ask; "is this righteous, zeal, truly?" "Is this just passion or is there an argument behind it?" However informally you do that that will involve the giving and comparing of reasons. It will involve rational scrutiny, rational argument. Reasons not all that motivates a person but it motivates all conscientious persons. It's integral, even if it's not on its own sufficient. And what is the alternative? The easiest way to see why that's true is to think of the alternative. Again, G. K. Chesterton said "Man has no alternative accept being influenced by thought that has been thought out and being influenced by thought that has not been thought out. Yours, ours, is the effort to think out moral thought about sex and marriage, your peers, and friend's listeners and we ourselves will be swayed by moral thought about our choices on sex and marriage no matter what. The only question is whether it will be thought out and that's what were here to do. That said, again, there's no denying that all the rational argumentation in the world won't by itself spark the kind of cultural change that we want. Evalua-and it's worth actually stopping to think about the reasons why that's true. If it's not because arguments don't work or don't have value. What makes it true, that they don't have this kind of immediate and wide social impact? Well I think it's for several reasons. Evaluating an argument takes sustained attention. It requires holding lots of pieces together. Discerning very subtle patterns, generating and testing alternatives by turns in a king of always unfinished process. Rational argument is famously better at knocking down than at building up, even the most-even the strongest if it's affirmative conclusion's don't overpower us but they invite, they suggest, they recommend, they tug at us. And by itself the philosophy tugs so softly at the imagination and the senses that it can pull the head before the heart leaving you not so much moved as divided. That's why it has value, it has a role, but it's not complete on its own and that's why our conference today and the efforts of the Anscombe Society of the love and fidelity network more broadly and your and my efforts on the ground should move, not just at the level of the intellectual but also at the cultural and the practical media and the arts and personal one-on-one conversations. But we looked at both of those aspects of the struggle, the intellectual and the cultural because they're deeply connected. For even if abstract reasoning doesn't convert masses of people it shapes the thought of those who do in public and higher education, the media, the arts, and law and policy.

Glee may indeed inspire a new generation of sexual libertinism; but its screen writers owe their ideas, they didn't get them out of thin air. They owe them to late 19th century and pre-World War II thinkers who reduced sexual desire to a brute appetite and the value to sex to the sum of its pleasures. Ideas have consequences even when they're not direct. On the other hand there may well be a causal chain linking every novel that ever inspired virtue in a young reader to one of the Electra notes of Aristotle. There's a common theme here which is that culture responds to intellectual trends. That's the flip side of the idea that we can only have an impact on culture if our intellectual arguments inform broader efforts. What our cause needs then is not fewer philosophers, that's my plug for my own day job. It's not fewer

philosophers or fewer Anscombe Societies making arguments. What the cause needs is more of everyone and of everything. More artists and authors, poets and play writes, sculptors and screen writers, to reap the fruit of intellectual work for social ferment. Ryan and I do what we do not because philosophy and law alone matter, but because our paintings and plays really wound move no one. The next generation of culture makers though will be shaped purely by bad arguments of the sort that one can hear, in campus and in classrooms. Only if those bad arguments go unanswered and they can be answered only by better arguments. That's why our intellectual and artistic and media efforts have to harmonize each needs the other. And part of "The Way Forward" that's the title of my talk will require each of us to discern what our own gifts and opportunities are. What personal conversations, what social media ventures or misadventures, what contributions to art and culture we can make to advance these discussions. But most of us are here because we already knew some of that at some level. What we find difficult is not knowing what to say, or how to say it, or where to say it, but continuing to have the motivation to say it at all, when it looks like we're losing.

What's the point and on the marriage debate, which is-you know marriage, at marriage, marriage as a human good, I feel like that every time, and-and even the part where he says you know-you know, you're using that way-that word, and I don't think it means what you think it means. That's equally at stake in this discussion. Marriage is the organizing principle of our whole ethic of sex and marriage. You can summarize everything by saying marriage understood a certain way is a fundamental human good and having society understand it that way and having people live according to it is important for people, for individuals, and for the common good. That's a summary of everything we're talking about from pornography, to divorce, to promiscuity, to same-the same sex marriage debate and everything in between. And now it looks like the very organizing principle of our whole system is on trial in the courts and at stake is a radical, reconceptualization of that core concept of marriage. From that perspective it can look like what's the point. If everything really rides on this vision of what makes a marriage and everything that flows from that for policy and culture and individual practice, and it's that very thing that's at stake, that's on trial, that's in the dock, somewhere in the federal system, and actually in several different states and several different trials. And looks to a lot of people like the Supreme Court through his serene majesty Justice Kennedy, is going to push that debate one way rather than another. What's the point, isn't there any-is there really any hope of turning the social tide or should we all go home? And here I agree with Ryan that we can take a cue from the Pro-life movement and despite the fact that he stole my thunder on this, I'd like to elaborate on that analogy just a little bit. Ryan and I are effectively when it comes to this issue, the same person. We have many of the very same points to make, so if I slip into repeating his words verbatim, it's not, we'll maybe it's because I'm plagiarizing, it will just be hard to tell. Um, around the time of Roe V. Wade, as Ryan pointed out; public opinion was moving swiftly for abortion on demand. And it's hard for people our age to realize this because we weren't around, there may be some of who were busy gestating. We weren't there to experience the deep parallels that some of our elders, Professor George is always happy to tell us this at story time, uh, when we're getting discouraged about this issue. He says it was exactly the same and if anything, it might have been a little bit worse. It was the same thing with the politicians. Pro-life politicians like Ted Kennedy and Bill Clinton and Al Gore and Jessie Jackson were evolving by the day. Pro-lifers were aging; they were accused of being anti-woman. They were warned of being caught on histories bad side. They were told that it was just a matter of time; the numbers were something like three to one among the young. The idea was the only way you were only really against abortion access at all stages for all women, was you know, either you were dying or you had a collar around your neck, this is the wave of the future, go home. And of course, the court's decision in Roe made substantive protections impossible for the foreseeable future. They were even farther down that path than we are now. But a few pro-lifers were undaunted and their intellectual and culture and legal and policy and personal efforts through think tanks and arguments and research and advocacy and campaigns and

building and staffing and living out there witness through pregnancy help centers, all of those efforts pay off. My generation, your generation, is more pro-life than our parents and our children's will likely be more pro-life than ours. That did not just happen. History was headed in the opposite direction. Difference is that people realized it didn't have to. That this myth of history is some kind of blind bruited force that's just moving us inexorably toward a particular conclusion was rejected as a kind of pagan, Christian afterthought. It's a distortion of the idea of providence and the lord of history to think that there is some impersonal historical force that's just leading us to particular social outcomes. And that example of the few undaunted pro-lifers who could not have seen where things would end up, who could not have seen that today we would have a majority pro-life country and that the young would be evermore pro-life than their parents. Their example is what should guide us as the organizing principle of our whole ethic the understanding of marriage is on trial. First to make it concrete in the legal context, while the spirit of the supreme court's decision striking down to almost federal definition of marriage, does give liberalizing judges all the primacies they need to remake state marriage laws, it doesn't require that as Roe required abortion on demand. So again, the pro-life movement woke up, even later in the game than the pro-marriage movement has now.

Maybe the court's decision in Windsor was meant to trigger a cascade of successful challenges to state laws so that when the Supreme Court later returned to impose genderless marriage nationwide it would be riding faster cultural currents and it would have an easier time of it. But that would only mean that Justice Scalia's dissent was right. The court will do on marriage just whatever it thinks it can get away with. Might it flinch from imposing redefinition if it fears the furry of a vibrant marriage movement? Well the answer depends not on impersonal occurrence of history but on what we do. That is why continued argument and advocacy on the whole range of marriage and family issues including this one, remain crucial even in the face of that possible court decision. But not only does social action make long term legal defeat less likely. It also serves the broader value for which legal victory like academic argumentation is just a component and a condition which is the shaping of hearts and minds and lives in line with the truth. After all our freedom to live out and pass on our views of sex and marriage is also more threatened after the DOMA decision and other recent policy trends like in Arizona, the defeat of the religious liberty law. By deeming conjugal marriage supporters bigots the court makes it easier for law makers and courts to use anti-discrimination laws and public education to drive us to the margins of public life. And then it will be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of the needle than say for our own future children to pass through college with a sound, marital and sexual ethic. Even as an earlier generations efforts made it easier for you and me to be pro-life. But even this aspect of it, the direction that the religious liberty issue goes, depends, even apart from the court's decision on marriage, depends on what we do. If we fight to make clear and ever clearer the reasons for the conjugal view, we make it less likely that it gets regarded in the future as racism is. We make it more likely that it gets regarded in the future as the pro-life view was say 15 years ago, where it was still a minority view but one that reasonable people can disagree on.

To give you a sense of how much this has moved, at Yale Law School, which is like somewhere to the left of Che Guevara; at Yale Law School, nobody wants to talk about abortion. They outnumber pro-lifers there, my class of 206 people has I think about six pro-lifers. They outnumber us 200/6 or whatever 100/3; but they don't want to talk about it. When they do talk about it they only bring it up as an example, as a prime example of a difficult issue on which reasonable people can disagree so let's just move on. Okay? They're nervous, but they're nervous because people did the hard work when they weren't nervous and when it looked like all was lost. Well, even-and that's, now remember that change happened without any significant legal changes happening, because Roe has been on the books, only moderately modified by Casey in the 90s, so whether or not the court goes in that direction, it matters for these very real life concrete freedoms to pass on and live out our views socially and otherwise, that

we fight to make clear the reasons for those views.

So the DOMA decision but also these other recent reforms, heighten the value the value of winning while lowering the odds of a near term win. What to do then? Well no judicial decision can change our duties to see to it by our cultural norms and our personal behavior that children know the care of the man and woman whose love gave them life and that everyone else married or not, lives by the demands of true love in both its marital and other forms. In fact, I've been drawing these parallels between the historical trajectories of the pro-life and pro-marriage debates, but the parallels run deeper than just those sociological similarities. Also linked are the ideas underlying the two movements, this is a point that people often miss. For while some try to draw a sharp line between them, the fight for marriage serves the fight for life. The sexual revolution and the abortion license flow from the same tragic mistakes which professor Lopez so nicely outlined in the progress of those ideas in musicals and movies. The idea that the individual and not the family is of basic social and moral value; the idea that personal adult fulfillment trumps the needs of children who can be deliberately deprived of their own parents or extinguished if only our sense of fulfillment demands it. That sex has no inherent procreative significance and no value besides its power to please. These are ideas behind the pro-life as well as the pro-family efforts. Just as family life fulfills marriage, as Ryan pointed out; so robustly protecting life, calls for protecting marriage. It's one of the best things you can do to reduce the abortion rate is to increase the strength of the marriage culture, that's another reason we can't give up on our marriage culture. But if we can forfeit the cultural fight for our vision of sex and marriage and human dignity and the human good, and recent developments block any immediate victory, we must take the long view, we must do on marriage and family issues, even before we get a full out row on marriage, what we've been doing for years on life issues, even after the actual row. Investing the long-term political and legal and cultural and social capital to win down the line. And if redefined marriage and casual sex and all these other errors are built upon tragic mistakes about the human good and the common good, then they will eventually take their place on the ash heap of history along so many other inevitabilities like Marxism, settled support for abortion access that were themselves built on errors. But to play our part in dismantling the lie, we can never flag in bearing witness to the truth and that's why we're here. So the fight is worth keeping, it's winnable, if we take the long view and the values at stake are too urgent to give up on trying to win. But as we work through all these means, we work through the rationale arguments, the intellectual advocacy, law and culture, personal interactions and friendships; we have to be sure to take care of ourselves, to conduct ourselves in accordance with our own values. So having gone from the intellectual and the one-on-one efforts to the legal and the cultural; let me return for a moment to the personal.

First, for those of us who see the home as the foundation of society, too much focus on public affairs can have obvious risks, the daunting sense that our mission is to change the culture and change the world, can promote in us a kind of idolatry of the national and a contempt for the local that undermined the very love of family and neighbor that we're trying to champion. The lecture circuit can enable the peculiar hypocrisy of preaching the values of family at the expense of one's own. And here I'm talking to myself as much as anybody else. I'm uh, very lucky to be engaged to be married to a fantastic woman named Gabby Speech, whom Ryan Anderson unfortunately introduced me to. I say unfortunately because now our first child is going to have to be Ryana Girgis or something. So, some kind of tribute to Ryan. By the way, if anybody can return the favor to Ryan he'll need it. So if you have someone in mind, there's a suggestions box in the back of the room. Okay. Anyway, I'm in-I'm personally engaged to be married and of course on any given weekend it can look like my options are well, just spend more weekend with my fiance, whom I'm going to have my whole life with anyway, or go and defend marriage in front of a thousand people, maybe five of whom will change their minds and it will be awesome. And of course there's a kind of utilitarian calculus that can always make that

decision come out the wrong way. And all of us in our own cases, have to think about the degree to which we're actually living by our own ethic and not allowing some abstract fight for the common good destroy our own participation in the goods we're trying to promote more broadly. Similarly our focus on the intellectual and the rational, while it's important and I've argued it's indispensable; can undermine our commitment to the lived and the personal. So we have to be the most vigilant adherence of the values and the morals that we want to share. We have to make our daily lives the most intense and the most constant form of witness to our own views that there is, much louder than our words and whatever form that takes, we want to be sure to keep ourselves more accountable than we would propose to keep others, to live by the very demand-whatever part of this ethic of sex and marriage is most demanding for us to make sure that we're faithful on that. It imposes different burdens on different people at different points and whether it means being-practicing chastity before marriage or fidelity within marriage or putting the right restrictions on your computer so you don't go in the wrong direction from an innocent or not innocent Google Search. Whatever it takes; that is-that should be the focus of our efforts even before the more public and other oriented arguments. In other words, having our own house in order, quite literally, will give us not just the credibility to fight on these issues but the freedom and the joy to witness compellingly, in other words it will give us the gift of being happy warriors on this stuff.

Um, I-I've really been struck by the difference that happy warriors make in the last few years, because I've had a really nice study in contrast, so for the last two years, before this academic year, I was at Yale Law School, and I'm involved in the Federalist Society there which is a kind of conservative student group. And we've brought in a ton of conservatives to come speak at Yale. And of course at Yale they feel like they're on the defensive, and they've got to be kind of nasty and so-on. One-to give you an example of how bitter some of them can be, one of them was asked, um, you know, how could you when you were working for the Bush Administration, have supported waterboarding, I mean it's torture, it's evil; and he said, he kind of got his grin on, and he said "more people died in Ted Kennedy's car at Chappaquiddick than have died from water-okay-waterboarding". So that's uh, that's a bitter answer okay. And um, and I-I started to notice a pattern, that folks who had fought on a particular conservative cause in a world that was always against them because it was the world of DC Government or whether it was politics or the Academy or otherwise. A lot of them gave into the temptation to bitterness and it made a huge difference. It made them extremely unattractive advocates of the views that they were pushing. And the-and the contrast to this that's closest to me and to Ryan is Professor George. Professor George, if you've ever gotten to see him give a talk or you've gotten to meet him; he's-one thing that's always true of him is just that he's always so happy. Uh, he loves doing what he's doing and I think partly that's because he gets a thrill of combat that I just don't have, uh, in an innocent and good way, but-but partly it's because he has, he lives by a kind of insight that's actually behind the more socially conservative side of these political issues, which is that politics isn't everything and shouldn't be; that actually politics is serving a higher and broader goal. And so in his own life, that gets reflected, it's not-the political debate doesn't take up the whole screen for him. He's got other interests, most importantly; he's got other responsibilities that are primary. Responsibilities to his own family, and to his students as a teacher and to other aspects of his vocation. And I think one way to avoid the bitterness of this unbelievable speaker at Yale and to try to emulate some of the joy of Ryan's and my mentor and of other people, is to make sure that we're living by that aspect of our ethic that subordinates the political to the personal. The-Father Richard John Newhouse was I think another great example of this, he-if you ever read his writings in First Things. Um, you got to go back-everybody in those days who got-had a subscription to First Things would always start with the back of First Things because that's where his stuff was, and it was called "While we're at it". And you should go back to them, it's all archived on-line. The tone of every one of those, even when he was skewering some opponent, his favorite opponent for about two decades was the New York Times. So he would pick out an editorial

and just-just have the time of his life with it. You were-it was always clear that he was having the time of his life, and even when he was talking about a particular person, you could hear in every sentence in the back of it was this proposal, like come over here, like, have a glass of whiskey, like, sit down, let's share this cigar, let's talk this through, let's reason together as friends. That kind of spirit, that (31:28 inaudible che gioia verve), that joy in combat in a totally innocent and benign way, is something that we have to work at cultivating, if we're going to fight in a way that's sustainable, on issues that should give people joy because they correspond to the true and the good. And if that is how we operate, then even before we achieve broad, visible success we will know that the fight, the witness, even the peaceful endurance of defeats will make its own lasting contribution already through character and other spiritual fruits on ourselves and those around us. For to witness, to love and to the requirements of love, is itself a way of loving; and at the end of the day that is the measure of our legacy. It's not history understood as some bruited force in the sky, it's not victories or defeats in the courts or the ballot boxes, but love. It-after all it's not in our hands at the end of the day whether we convince our friend in a bull session in the dorm or whether we convince Justice Kennedy, or whether our log or culture go this way or that. The only thing over which we have immediate and continuous control, is whether we ourselves live well which just comes to the question as whether we love well. Whether we love the roommate in the bull session at one hand who is pushing us and shouting when it hurts, or when we-whether we love the friend that is cohabiting with his girlfriend or with his boyfriend by sharing our convictions in ways that make them understand and feel our concern. Father Newhouse said once in a uh, in a talk at Princeton on the pro-life cause, he quoted his own mentor, Dr. Martin Luther King, with whom he marched for Civil Rights, with whose cause for Civil Rights and for the down trodden and for the most vulnerable and society he thought that the life and marriage efforts were just continuous. He quoted him saying "whom you would change, you must first love and they must know that you love them." I think the way to make it clear that we love them is to show by example and by word, what our real goals are. As I started to say earlier, no true social conservative, none, fights just to win a fight or values politics or persuasion for their own sake. In these matters, policies and arguments even Anscombe Societies and Anscombe conferences are only a means. Paraphrasing C.S. Lewis, "we should all be happy to concede that all the world's court cases and white papers, all the conferences, add up to nothing in themselves." To us they are for not unless they facilitate real goods, basic goods. A child toddling towards his attentive father who is there, a middle-schooler absorbed by her novels instead of grief over her parents' divorce, a family bickering boisterously over dinner, a young man unscarred by male authority, unafraid of commitment, kneeling in prayer or in marriage proposal, a young woman confident in her body and in her worth who says yes for the right reasons from a position of strength and equality. A man unable to marry because of prior responsibilities or inability to find a mate or queer self-identity being freed of the oppressive idea that an emotional intimacy and true love are to be had only in marriage or only through sex; being liberated to pursue the distinctive joys of companionship, to honor that basic form of love without the dissonance of trying to assimilate it to another. People have dry by loneliness of any kind; being grafted onto other forms of community; as our neighbors and confidants, our fellow workers and worshipers, partners in common cause, De Facto members of our families, big siblings to our kids, natural and regular guests in our homes. That's just the point, these scenes and others like them will prevail where good (35:39 morias) and good laws and good personal beliefs and good arguments prevail and they are undermined by the spread of bad ones. We are here for the spread of good ones. We are here as Professor Budziszewski started this conference by saying "for love." Thanks.

Thank you all once again and we really appreciate that this has been a wonderful conference and for all of your support thank you. Yes an extra round of applause for the Stanford Anscombe Society students and Judy. Thank you.

End of audio. (00:36:44)

