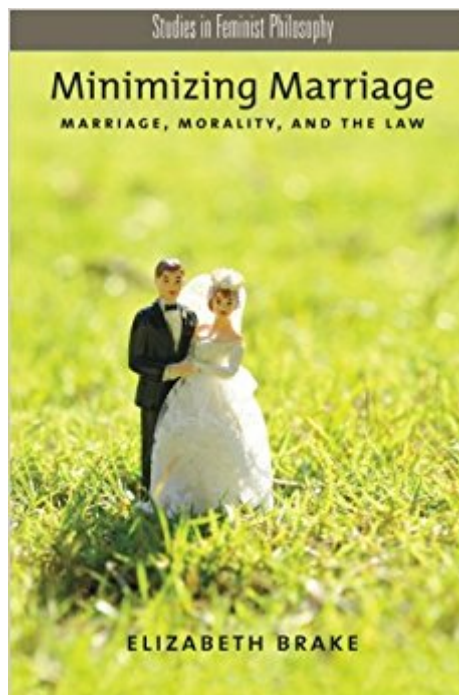




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# **Minimizing Marriage: Marriage, Morality, And The Law (Studies In Feminist Philosophy)**



## Synopsis

Even in secular and civil contexts, marriage retains sacramental connotations. Yet what moral significance does it have? This book examines its morally salient features -- promise, commitment, care, and contract -- with surprising results. In Part One, "De-Moralizing Marriage," essays on promise and commitment argue that we cannot promise to love and so wedding vows are (mostly) failed promises, and that marriage may be a poor commitment strategy. The book contends with the most influential philosophical accounts of the moral value of marriage to argue that marriage has no inherent moral significance. Further, the special value accorded marriage sustains amatonormative discrimination - discrimination against non-amorous or non-exclusive caring relationships such as friendships, adult care networks, polyamorous groups, or urban tribes. The discussion raises issues of independent interest for the moral philosopher such as the possibilities and bounds of interpersonal moral obligations and the nature of commitment. The central argument of Part Two, "Democratizing Marriage," is that liberal reasons for recognizing same-sex marriage also require recognition of groups, polyamorists, polygamists, friends, urban tribes, and adult care networks. Political liberalism requires the disestablishment of monogamous amatonormative marriage. Under the constraints of public reason, a liberal state must refrain from basing law solely on moral or religious doctrines; but only such doctrines could furnish reason for restricting marriage to male-female couples or romantic love dyads. Restrictions on marriage should thus be minimized. But public reason can provide a strong rationale for minimal marriage: care, and social supports for care, are a matter of fundamental justice. Part Two also responds to challenges posed by property division on divorce, polygyny, and supporting parenting, and builds on critiques of marriage drawn from feminism, queer theory, and race theory. It argues, using the example of minimal marriage, for the compatibility of liberalism and feminism.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Brake's clearly argued thesis is a powerful alternative to more standard feminist views that would eliminate marriage as an institution. The author makes a very important contribution to all aspects of the current marriage debates. Highly recommended."--CHOICE  
"Brake carefully examines a range of views on marriage, from conservative moralists to feminist and queer theorists, and then offers a novel and compelling proposal for legal and institutional reform. For scholars, students, and anyone interested in the current political struggle to define marriage, this book builds the case for change from its thorough critique of the moral and political foundations of marriage."--Laurie Shrage, Florida International University in Miami

Elizabeth Brake was educated at The Universities of Oxford (B.A.) and St. Andrews (M. Litt., PhD). Since 2000 she has taught in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Calgary, Canada; in 2011-2012 is a Visiting Associate Professor at Arizona State University. She has written on the construction of parental obligations, fathers' rights and responsibilities, and political liberalism, in addition to work on marriage.

A persuasive look at why marriage should be extended beyond exclusive, central, different-sex and same-sex dyadic amorous relationships to include all caring relationships. The language can get a little technical at times, especially in the later chapters, and Brake sometimes repeats herself, but overall a perfectly readable book for the layperson. Brake's argument for why it's morally acceptable to break wedding vows is interesting, even though I didn't entirely buy it.

Elizabeth Brake's Minimizing Marriage is one of the most interesting, well-written, and well-argued books about the future of marriage written in a long while. While there is a voluminous academic literature on same-sex marriage, surprisingly, little has been written about the disestablishment (abolition) of civil marriage (w/ the notable exception of Tamara Metz's Untying the Knot) and its being replaced with a more inclusive, marriage-like status that doesn't privilege monogamy, different-sex or same-sex. Brake argues that the state can and should remain in the

marriage business, so to speak, provided that it has a sufficiently neutral or public reason for offering such a legal status. That reason is the promotion of care in intimate relationships that do not have to only involve two persons or be premised upon a romantic or sexual relationship. Brake is a moral and political philosopher but she writes in a manner that is not only admirably jargon-free but she also includes real-world examples that make her work less abstract than it otherwise would be and therefore, more accessible to someone who isn't trained as an analytical philosopher. In short, I couldn't recommend this book more highly for anyone who is interested in where the debate over same-sex marriage is likely to lead.

Great little book about everything that is wrong with marriage.

Great book. Brake writes succinctly and fits an amazing amount of information in her book. It's a fun read if you're curious about this institution.

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