



# Untying the Knot: Marriage, the State, and the Case for Their Divorce

*Tamara Metz*

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Marriage is at the center of one of today's fiercest political debates. Activists argue about how to define it, judges and legislators decide who should benefit from it, and scholars consider how the state should protect those who are denied it. Few, however, ask whether the state should have anything to do with marriage in the first place. In *Untying the Knot*, Tamara Metz addresses this crucial question, making a powerful argument that marriage, like religion, should be separated from the state. Rather than defining or conferring marriage, or relying on it to achieve legitimate public welfare goals, the state should create a narrow legal status that supports all intimate caregiving unions. Marriage itself should be bestowed by those best suited to give it the necessary ethical authority--religious groups and other kinds of communities. Divorcing the state from marriage is dictated by nothing less than basic commitments to freedom and equality.

Tracing confusions about marriage to tensions at the heart of liberalism, *Untying the Knot* clarifies today's debates about marriage by identifying and explaining assumptions hidden in widely held positions and common practices. It shows that, as long as marriage and the state are linked, marriage will be a threat to liberalism and the state will be a threat to marriage. An important and timely rethinking of the relationship between marriage and the state, *Untying the Knot* will interest political theorists, legal scholars, policymakers, sociologists, and anyone else who cares about the fate of marriage or liberalism.

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