Robert P. George, the McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence at Princeton University, is one of America’s most prominent public intellectuals. He has been hailed by everyone from Supreme Court justice Elena Kagan (who praises “his sheer brilliance, the analytic power of his arguments, the range of his knowledge”) to talk show host Glenn Beck (who calls him “one of the biggest brains in America”). Professor George recently took questions from ISI students about undergraduate education, the conservative movement, his new book, and much more.

What advantage does a liberal arts education offer over preprofessional programs?
— Adam Schwartzman, Dartmouth

Robert P. George: True liberal arts learning is soul enriching. It broadens and deepens us as free and rational beings—beings who are not determined by external or internal forces beyond our control, but who believe and act for reasons. At its best, this broadening and deepening helps us meet the basic spiritual and moral challenge facing every human being—making reason the master of passion or desire. Thus liberal arts learning offers the promise of liberation from the most abject form of slavery: slavery to self.

What do you see as the future of the marriage debate? Do you think gay marriage will be legalized nationally?
— Kelsey Rupp, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

RPG: What individuals and societies do or will do is not inevitable. Huge consequences can flow from the choices and
Contemporary left liberals are moralists—moralists on a mission. They are so certain that they understand moral truths correctly that they are willing to impose them on society.

actions of a small number of people. What will happen to the institution of marriage is up to us.

And yes, you are right to draw the comparison with the abortion debate in the late 1960s and (especially) the 1970s. Acceptance of abortion was, its advocates insisted, inevitable. The pro-life cause, they said, was doomed. But forty years later, abortion has not been accepted. A majority of Americans are pro-life, and today’s young people are more pro-life than their parents’ generation was.

What would you say to students of a conservative mind-set who are wary of speaking up against an opposing campus culture?
—Tony Alimi, Princeton

RPG: Standing up to campus conformism isn’t easy—at least at the beginning. You worry about damaging your reputation, inviting a bad grade, even losing friends. You will find, however, that standing up for your principles elicits the respect of people whose respect is worth having, even if they do not share your convictions. That is why I urge students who dissent from campus dogmas to be bold. That does not mean to be reckless. What’s the difference? It is reckless to speak out when one doesn’t know what one is talking about; it is bold to defend unpopular truths by understanding the evidence and mastering the arguments on the competing sides of the debate.

What is the conservative movement most in need of? How can young conservatives best prepare themselves to be of use?
—Bijan Aboutorabii, Yale

RPG: The conservative movement needs what every social-reform movement needs: dedicated, well-informed, intellectually sophisticated, bold young activists. We’ve got lots of them at Princeton. I know that there are many at Yale. Another thing we need more of is supportive faculty members. Conservative students and student groups at colleges and universities that have a critical mass of such faculty members really flourish.

What do you see as the political future of social conservatism, particularly with respect to the age disparities in approval of homosexuality and same-sex marriage?
—Michael Cowett, Harvard

RPG: Young men and women today were formed in a culture in which it is difficult not to absorb the premises of sexual revolutionary ideology. Even conservative young people often don’t realize that they are uncritically buying into premises about human nature and the human good that have no more right to the status of orthodoxies than does belief in the virtues of central economic planning. This is an enormous achievement by the Left, and an enormous failure of the modern conservative movement—and of religious institutions of nearly every tradition. The situation can be reversed only by exposing the errors of me-generation liberalism and defending a superior set of ideas about sexuality and marriage. The question is, will there be people of courage who will stand up, speak out, and fight?

Your new book, Conscience and Its Enemies, challenges the “dogmas of liberalism.” Don’t liberals like to say that reason and science are on their side, while it is conservatives who cling to orthodoxies?
—Lillian Civantos, Intercollegiate Studies Institute

RPG: Contemporary left liberals are moralists—moralists on a mission. They are so certain that they understand moral truths correctly that they are willing to impose them on society. What are some of those “truths”? The absolute right to abortion. The right to conduct one’s sexual life however one pleases, so long as one refrains from obtaining sex by coercion or deception. The conviction that “marriage” is the union of two people (or more) without regard to gender. The idea that anyone who disagrees with them is a “bigot.” And on and on.

As for liberal claims that science is “on their side,” the aim of Conscience and Its Enemies is to show why that can only be regarded as laughable.