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HOW SHOULD WE THEN RESPOND? A CHRISTIAN
PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE
TO TRANSGENDER IDEOLOGY

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HOW SHOULD WE THEN RESPOND? A CHRISTIAN
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To my wife and best friend, Kate, who never ceases to love and support me

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PREFACE

Four years ago, I never would have imagined I would be writing a PhD. dissertation. Moreover, I could not have imagined writing about transgender ideology. I credit Dr. Gregg Allison for convincing me to pursue this degree. As I prepared for comprehensive exams and wrote this dissertation, Dr. Allison walked beside me as a mentor and friend. Additionally, all ethics and philosophy faculty at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary have supported, challenged, and prepared me for this task.

I must give special recognition to Dr. Andrew Walker, who wrote the first book I read on the topic of transgender identities. His treatment of the issue intrigued and challenged me. I was intrigued by the unique opportunity for Christian theologians and ethicists to commit time and energy to the task of such an extensive cultural phenomenon. I was also challenged by Dr. Walker's humble and pastoral tone toward those who bear the image of God.

I only have the ability to write this dissertation because of the faithful Christian brothers and sisters who have given time and energy to the field of ethics involving gender and human embodiment. Thank you to Carl Trueman, Nancy Pearcey, Preston Sprinkle, Gregg Allison, Andrew Walker, Bryan Baise, Rebecca McLaughlin, Alan Branch, and Ryan Anderson. Their work has educated, inspired, and challenged me to devote years to this topic.

Ryan Welsh

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Historically, “gender” was a grammatical term.¹ Over the past few decades, the taxonomy of gender was understood as a synonym for biological sex. Asking for someone’s gender on an application was a substitute for inquiring about their biological sex. An additional and substantial shift occurred in more recent years. The American Psychological Association states that sex is “assigned at birth,” while gender “refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for boys and men or girls and women. These influence the ways that people act, interact, and feel about themselves.”² Transgender identified author Austen Hartke encapsulates the new distinction thus: “Gender is what’s between your ears, and sex is what’s between your legs.”³

The most culturally significant feature of the new gender ideology is not the distinction between sex and gender but the assertion and celebration of sex and gender misalignment.⁴ Transgender identities are the result of such a phenomenon.⁵ The

¹ Ryan T. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment* (New York: Encounter Books, 2018), 148.

² American Psychological Association, “Answers to Your Questions about Transgender People, Gender Identity and Gender Expression,” accessed November 6, 2019, <http://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/transgender.pdf>.

³ Austen Hartke, *Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 28.

⁴ Sex/Gender misalignment is a felt disagreement between a person’s biological sex and internal sense of gender identity.

⁵ “Transgender identities” and “transgender ideology” will be used throughout this study in place of the less precise “transgenderism.” Though typically used in political discourse, “ideology” is appropriate given the movement’s creeds and goals. See Bob Goudzwaard and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Beyond the Modern Age: An Archaeology of Contemporary Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic,

University of California Los Angeles' Williams Institute reports that there are 1.6 million transgender people in the United States, including 300,000 boys and girls between the ages of 13 and 17.⁶ According to these numbers, 0.5 percent of adults and 1.4 percent of youth (ages 13 to 17) in the United States identify themselves as having a gender that misaligns with their biological sex. These numbers are growing rapidly. The Williams Institute reports that their estimate of the number of transgender youths in 2022 has doubled since their last report six years earlier.⁷

This new definition and separation of sex and gender have triggered a battle for primacy between the physical and the non-physical. If sex (physical) and gender (non-physical) not only are different concepts but also can misalign, then where do people turn to find their identity? If someone feels tension between their biological and psychological realities, how do they know which is more foundational? Should a young woman who claims to feel like a boy turn to puberty-blocking medication and undergo surgery for physical agreement with psychological pressures? These questions are not merely sociological, biological, or psychological. Christian doctrine, flowing from God's Word, must direct God's people in these matters. The emerging transgender ideology is, in part, a theological issue. In his sovereign design, God chose to create a physical earth with embodied image bearers called man and woman. Therefore, he has authority to speak about sex and gender.

2017), 61-62. I will use "transgender ideology" when referring to the belief system and "transgender identities" when referring to the personal application of the ideology on an individual person or persons.

⁶ Jody L. Herman, Andrew R. Flores, and Kathryn K. O'Neill, "How Many Adults and Youth Identify as Transgender in the United States?," UCLA School of Law Williams Institute, June 2022, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/trans-adults-united-states/>, 1.

⁷ Herman, Flores, and O'Neill, "How Many Adults and Youth Identify as Transgender?," 1.

Thesis

In this study, I will argue that a faithful and biblical Christian response to transgender ideology is the rejection of its core tenets. At their foundation, transgender identities are the result of an ideology that affirms (1) the existence of gender identity and (2) that gender can, and sometimes does, misalign with biological sex. I will offer both a philosophical and theological rebuttal to these assertions. I will argue that philosophically, sex and gender (assuming the new definition of gender) cannot misalign in any rational way. Additionally, I will argue that theologically, transgender ideology should be rejected because it undermines Scripture's affirmation of the value of the human body. Scripture presents image bearers as holistic beings and not as sharply split mind-body beings. I will demonstrate that transgender ideology is anthropologically Gnostic and is, therefore, not consistent with orthodox Christian theology.

My goal is not to convince readers of the possible dangers of transgender medical treatment. In addition, I do not intend to argue for or against any public policy in society at large. Instead, my humbler objective is to convince readers that the core tenets of transgender ideology lack philosophical and theological undergirding. If my argument is correct, then there are many religious, social, and political ramifications, but those ramifications are not in view here.

Summary of Research

The transgender phenomenon is relatively new; therefore, research and writing in this area is fittingly scarce. Though works that cover anthropology and gender are numerous, I will limit the following summary of research to works that specifically address transgender ideology or identities. Furthermore, for brevity, I will limit the number of works that I will summarize. These treatments will be placed into one of two categories: non-theological and theological. By "non-theological," I do not mean that the author is not a Christian; and I also do not mean that the book lacks natural law assumptions. Indeed, two of the books that I have placed in this category are written by

professing Christians and assume a Christian worldview.⁸ Rather, by “non-theological,” I indicate that the author’s argumentation is not theological in method but rather philosophical or rational. Reciprocally, by “theological,” I indicate that the author uses Scripture in a hermeneutically faithful way in their argumentation.⁹

Non-Theological Research

Ryan Anderson provides an expansive description and assessment of the transgender movement—or, as he calls it, “our transgender moment.”¹⁰ Although he is Roman Catholic, Anderson does not address the topic from a theological perspective. His work is committed to a descriptive task, with logical rebuttals and cultural and political prescriptions. My current study benefits largely from Anderson’s research. However, I will employ his research to make a more precise argument—a distinctly Christian philosophical and theological response to transgender ideology.

Carl Trueman attempts to answer the “how” question: How did the West arrive at a place where a man can say that he is a woman trapped in a man’s body?¹¹ Trueman recognizes that only by a long history of thought, where the very idea of “self” is challenged, can the West arrive where it has. He demonstrates how the ideas of five eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thinkers not only made transgender ideology possible but conceivably created it.¹² I will use Trueman’s investigation as one of many sources in

⁸ Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*; Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

⁹ By “hermeneutically faithful,” I mean that the author views and uses Scripture in a fashion that shows it to be the final authority in ethical matters.

¹⁰ Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, 9.

¹¹ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 12.

¹² Those thinkers are Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, and Sigmund Freud.

the diagnostic process.¹³ Trueman’s task is descriptive, and though I benefit greatly from his work, my task is beyond the descriptive—my task is to propose a Christian rebuttal.

Helen Joyce, a non-Christian feminist and editor at *The Economist*, clarifies the transgender situation of our day.¹⁴ She describes the current state of “Gender Identity Ideology” and offers a robust rebuke on feministic grounds. Joyce’s concern is that women have been erased for the sake of men, who think they are women, transitioning and taking over their spaces.¹⁵ The reality of transwomen, in her estimation, is further evidence of sexism in America. Joyce’s argument is entirely secular and thoroughly practical. Her logic is sound, and her concern for women is valid; however, she offers no foundational reason why men cannot be women and women cannot be men. At best, her secular perspective offers a persuasive opinion.

Debra Soh, a sexologist and neuroscientist, maintains that both sex and gender are binary.¹⁶ Similar to Joyce, Soh shows that transwomen are a threat to women’s spaces. However, Soh’s approach is more scientific than practical. She provides solid scientific evidence of the differences between the sexes and argues logically that gender and sex must be linked. Her argumentation is useful and beneficial. She moves beyond Joyce by contending scientifically, yet she offers no ethical treatment of transgender ideology. From a secular perspective, a scientific “is” cannot lead to an ethical “ought.”

¹³ Other major diagnostic resources are Philip Rieff and Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006); Philip Rieff, *My Life among the Deathworks: Illustrations of the Aesthetics of Authority*, ed. Kenneth S. Piver (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006); Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1991); Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2018); Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

¹⁴ Helen Joyce, *Trans: Gender Identity and the New Battle for Women’s Rights* (London: Oneworld, 2021).

¹⁵ E.g., women’s sports, women’s bathrooms, women’s locker rooms.

¹⁶ Debra Soh, *The End of Gender: Debunking the Myths about Sex and Identity in Our Society* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2020).

Theological Research

Nancy Pearcey writes a contemporary ethic of the body in her book *Love Thy Body*.¹⁷ She posits that how we treat one another depends on what we think people are. Her opening chapter explains our current cultural moment as one where little value is given to the body. Furthermore, she argues that humans consist of a unity between the material and immaterial; therefore, treating the material as less important causes difficulties for the flourishing of human life. One of her chapters focuses specifically on transgender identities; she argues that the transgender phenomenon is a result of a cultural silencing of the body.¹⁸ Pearcey brilliantly demonstrates that rigid gender stereotypes are one major contributor to the dangerous ideology. Chapter 4 of this dissertation relies heavily on Pearcey's work. However, her research and writing are only a beginning. She provides useful research and convincing arguments but only narrowly begins a theological explanation of the situation.

The number of resources that Preston Sprinkle has produced in the area transgender identities and the Christian response is unmatched. His book *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church and What the Bible Has to Say* is the achievement of years of study and smaller contributions to the topic.¹⁹ Sprinkle shares both scientific and biblical arguments against a person's undergoing a gender transition—all the while maintaining a pastoral tone. Yet, while he argues against harmful procedures, he does not spend any significant time addressing the incoherence of a misalignment between biological sex and gender identity. One of the major arguments I will make is that gender identity is not a coherent category, and if it were, it could not misalign with biological sex. Sprinkle's work is profitable to my thesis, but I will deviate from some of his

¹⁷ Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2018).

¹⁸ Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 193-227.

¹⁹ Preston Sprinkle, *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2021).

conclusions as well as offer a more robust, less popular-level philosophical and theological response.

Andrew Walker's book *God and the Transgender Debate* is one of the earliest treatments of transgender identities from a Christian perspective.²⁰ He cogently describes the gender identity cultural situation from 2017. Walker also published an updated and expanded version in 2022 with new information pertinent to the discussion. I will not challenge any of Walker's arguments, as his biblical conclusions and pastoral prescriptions are sound. I will, however, add to his already relevant work by showing the deep historical foundations of transgender ideology and offering further practical and theological considerations. Walker's book, like Sprinkle's, is intended for the educated Christian reader. This dissertation allows me a freedom that Walker and Sprinkle did not have. Hence, I will argue beyond the popular level. My research will not attempt to cover the practical questions Christians are asking but will argue philosophically and theologically for the incoherence and heterodoxy of transgender ideology.

Sharon James contributes to the discussion in her 2019 book *Gender Ideology*.²¹ After giving a brief description of how the sexual revolution led to gender ideology, she provides a clear, concise history of gender ideology. James offers a biblical view of male and female, grounded in God's design for humanity. Though she mentions transgender ideology on a few occasions, she does not deal with it in any direct way other than describing the harm that transitioning causes children. While my thesis is aided by her work, she does not cover my topic in any direct manner.

²⁰ Andrew T. Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate: What Does the Bible Actually Say about Gender Identity?*, exp. and upd. ed. (Surrey, England: Good Book, 2022). This book was originally published in 2017.

²¹ Sharon James, *Gender Ideology: What Do Christians Need to Know?* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2019).

Alan Branch straightforwardly addresses transgender identities in *Affirming God's Image*.²² He covers a wide range of topics related to my concentration; however, his treatment is not primarily philosophical or theological. It is theological in its handling of gender, but his argument's approach against transgender identities is scientific and practical. My method will not include scientific evaluation and will be practical only as much as application is a necessary result of theological inquiry.

Significance

According to Gallup, the number of Americans that identify as LGBT has grown to 7.1 percent of the population.²³ The principal contributing factor to the percentage's doubling in the last ten years is that younger generations are increasingly identifying as LGBT. There is a 10-percent increase in identification from Millennials and Generation Z and a 16-percent increase from Generation X to Generation Z.²⁴ With numbers growing at this rate, there are few issues in Christian ethics that deserve the amount of careful study as LGBT-related topics. The newest of LGBT identities is transgender identities launching from a postmodern form of gender ideology.

Although in recent years the quantity of literature on transgender ideology has increased, no one has yet to formulate an argument against both the existence of gender identity and sex-gender misalignment from a philosophical and theological viewpoint. My dissertation will serve as a continuation to the thoughtful Christian and non-Christian study and writing that has already been provided. Deeper and more dedicated attention on the core beliefs of transgender ideology is needed for a more robust Christian response.

²² J. Alan Branch, *Affirming God's Image: Addressing the Transgender Question with Science and Scripture* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019).

²³ Jeffrey Jones, "LGBT Identification in U.S. Ticks Up to 7.1%," Gallup, February 17, 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/389792/lgbt-identification-ticks-up.aspx>.

²⁴ Jones, "LGBT Identification in U.S. Ticks Up to 7.1%."

My dissertation will offer an additional and necessary argument against this cultural phenomenon.

Argument

In chapter 2, I will introduce my topic, show its significance and prevalence, and articulate my thesis. The majority of chapter 2 will focus on today's cultural moment regarding gender ideology, including the areas of popular culture, politics, education, business, and medicine. I will show the arguments that transgender ideologists use to advocate their view as well as define key terms, such as sex, gender, gender expression, gender identity, gender misalignment, and gender dysphoria.

In chapter 3, I will offer an explanation of how the West arrived at this cultural moment. A new understanding of sex and gender did not simply appear. Rather, there exists an explanation behind our culture's drastic shift in how humans define "self." I will briefly summarize Carl Trueman's historical explanation as a foundation.²⁵ I will then offer a different path stretching from Friedrich Nietzsche to Michel Foucault to feminism to Judith Butler and arriving at today's transgender ideology. This explanatory chapter will assist in identifying the essential characteristics of transgender ideology. Finally, I will show how the elemental features of this modern ideology led to philosophical and theological heterodoxies.

In chapter 4, I will argue that, philosophically, sex and gender cannot misalign in any rational way. First, I will show that transgender identities are based on rigid gender stereotypes, without which those identities cannot exist. Furthermore, I will employ Thomas Nagle's article "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" to show the logical incoherency with a member of one sex's claiming to "feel like" or "be" a member of the opposite

²⁵ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*.

sex.²⁶ Additionally, I will demonstrate the inconsistent application of body-self dualisms in our culture today, thereby offering a logical criticism to the core claims of transgender ideology. Finally, I will argue that the category of “gender” is too broad and diverse and therefore is confusing and unhelpful in modern discourse.

In chapter 5, I will move beyond the philosophical and contend theologically. I will demonstrate the Gnostic nature of transgender ideology’s sharp mind-body split and then juxtapose it with the value and meaning that Scripture communicates about the human body. First, I will show that sexed-embodiment is the natural state of human existence. Then, I will explain that God’s created order in sexed-human embodiment reveals the goodness and meaning of the image-bearer’s body. Finally, I will explain that a biblical worldview allows for humans to have authority in and through their bodies, but not over their bodies.

In chapter 6, I will restate my thesis and review my chapters and major conclusions.

²⁶ Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?,” *Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (October 1974): 435-50.

CHAPTER 2

WHERE WE ARE: A CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF GENDER IDEOLOGY

I will argue that the core tenets of transgender ideology ought to be rejected on philosophical and theological grounds. The ideology's core tenets are (1) the existence of "gender identity" and (2) that sex and gender can misalign. Fair treatment of "gender identity" and "sex-gender misalignment" necessarily begins with definitions of what transgender ideology means by and teaches regarding these concepts. Additionally, an overview of the influence of transgender ideology on the current social understanding of sex and gender will be profitable in showing the reason that such a refutation is needed.

Definitions

Before I survey the advancements and cultural victories of transgender ideology, some definitions are necessary. To adequately understand the ideas of transgender ideology activists, the terminology must come from the ideology's world of secular gender studies. At this stage in the argument, giving a biblical definition of sex and gender is not beneficial. First, understanding the ideology from the advocates' perspective is required.

Sex

Defining sex is the most straightforward task. Biologically, chromosomes determine sex, and a single Y chromosome distinguishes males from females. In over 99 percent of humans (excluding those classified as intersex), either an XX chromosome

structure for females or an XY structure for males exists.¹ These structures produce anatomy and reproductive systems that are observable, objective, and distinctive between the sexes. Sam Killermann, a transgender advocate, says that sex “refers to the objectively measurable organs, hormones, chromosomes, and other anatomy you possess.”² Ryan Anderson, an opponent of transgender ideology, agrees that apprehending sex “requires understanding the reproductive system and the reproductive process.”³

Preston Sprinkle sums up a person’s biological makeup based on four things: (1) the presence or absence of a Y chromosome, (2) internal reproductive organs, (3) external sexual anatomy, and (4) endocrine systems that produce secondary sex characteristics such as muscle mass, brain configuration, and other non-reproductive aspects.⁴ Feminist and psychologist Hilary Lips says that sex refers to “a person’s biological maleness or femaleness” and “is reserved for discussions of anatomy and the classification of individuals based on their anatomical category.”⁵ From liberal to conservative, from transgender advocates to transgender skeptics, nearly all agree that sexual dimorphism is observable and objective.⁶

¹ There are sixteen different conditions classified as intersex. These conditions include some males and females who have an extra X chromosome. Intersex conditions are infrequent, and this dissertation will address the over 99 percent of humans who do not fit into the intersex classification. However, chapter 5 will respond to transgender ideology’s attempt to utilize intersex conditions to make their argument.

² Sam Killermann, *A Guide to Gender: The Social Justice Advocate’s Handbook* (Austin, TX: Impetus Books, 2017), 74.

³ Ryan T. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment* (New York: Encounter Books, 2018), 81.

⁴ Preston Sprinkle, *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2021), 37.

⁵ Hilary M. Lips, *Sex and Gender: An Introduction*, 6th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill Education, 2007), 5-6.

⁶ Sexual dimorphism is the distinct difference in appearance and size between the sexes and the difference between sexual organs in both animal and human life.

Chromosomal configurations produce sexual anatomy that is obvious enough for parents to have “gender reveal parties” months before their child is born. However, this is where the objective and observable agreement ends. Ought these reveal parties be called “sex reveal parties” or, as is commonplace now, “gender reveal parties?” Though the nomenclature of these celebrations is of little concern to most, an investigation into the difference between sex and gender is significant in understanding the arguments of transgender ideology.

Gender

Historically, “gender” was a grammatical term where nouns were categorized as masculine or feminine (e.g., tavolo, tavola); however, when used to refer to a personal attribute, the term was synonymous with a person’s sex.⁷ It is clear now that a shift has taken place. Adam Cooper says the distinction between sex and gender is “sex as an anatomical and biological category on the one hand and gender as a culturally constructed role on the other.”⁸ Nancy Pearcey ascribes the distinction between sex and gender to sexologist John Money and his experimentation on David Reimer in 1965.⁹ Regardless of origin, even a cursory reading on gender and sexuality today indicates that “sex” and “gender” are understood as two separate classifications.

The American Psychological Association draws a hard line between the two:

Sex is assigned at birth, refers to one’s biological status as either male or female, and is associated primarily with physical attributes such as chromosomes, hormone prevalence, and external and internal anatomy. Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for boys and men or girls and women. These influence how people act,

⁷ Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, 148.

⁸ Adam G. Cooper, *Life in the Flesh: An Anti-Gnostic Spiritual Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 187.

⁹ Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2018), 199; John Colapinto, *As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006).

interact and feel about themselves. While aspects of biological sex are similar across different cultures, aspects of gender may differ.¹⁰

In general, a demarcation between sex and gender is the standard today. If gender is simply the expression of “maleness” or “femaleness,” then not only is there no harm in the sex-gender distinction but also it may be a good particularity.¹¹ At times, the distinction is overstated, as when Austen Hartke says, “Gender is what’s between your ears, and sex is what’s between your legs”; however, the proper response may not be the annihilation of the distinction.¹² Anderson argues that we should not jettison the concept of gender altogether but recognize that “gender properly understood is a social manifestation of human nature, springing forth from biological realities, though shaped by rational and moral choice.”¹³

Genealogy is the most helpful way to see the progression of gender’s meaning over time. The earliest understanding of gender as a concept beyond grammatical use was as a synonym for biological sex. Even today, the category of “gender” on a driver’s license or a job application is often a synonym for sex. However, second-wave feminism purposefully and successfully adapted the general usage of the term.¹⁴ Abigail Favale calls this new understanding of gender “the social and cultural accoutrements of each sex.”¹⁵ At this time, the basic understanding of gender was as the typical actions of, attitudes of, and general truths about males and females. For example, a “womanly” thing

¹⁰ American Psychological Association, “Answers to Your Questions about Transgender People, Gender Identity and Gender Expression,” accessed November 6, 2019, <http://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/transgender.pdf>.

¹¹ I will argue in chapter 4 that the concept of gender is too vast and vague to be helpful and should therefore be avoided.

¹² Susan Pinker, *The Sexual Paradox: Extreme Men, Gifted Women and the Real Gender Gap* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2008), 7-18.

¹³ Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, 149.

¹⁴ Chapter 3 will define the waves of feminism and discuss how they have contributed to transgender ideology.

¹⁵ Abigail Favale, *The Genesis of Gender: A Christian Theory* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2022), 150.

to do was to cook, clean, and stay home with the children. Likewise, a “manly” thing to do was to work, get dirty, and enjoy sports. Therefore, one might consider a man “feminine” if he does not fulfill the typical male duties in society. Similarly, one might consider a woman “masculine” if she likes sports but not shopping.

Third-wave feminism brought yet another alteration to gender’s meaning. Judith Butler, who will be a significant figure in chapter 3 of this dissertation, is the most significant figure in third-wave feminism. Her work lifted gender’s new distinctiveness as a “social construct, a complex fiction that we inherit and then repeatedly reenact.”¹⁶ What second-wave feminism assumed to be real differences between the sexes, third-wave feminists called merely manufactured fiction. According to the second-wave movement, the general differences between the attitudes and actions of the sexes could be called gender distinctions; nevertheless, genuine sex (biological) differences generally—but not always—lead to different attitudes and actions. The third-wave movement believed this notion was a lie; the general differences between these attitudes and actions, proponents said, are cultural paradigms created by men to keep men and women acting in specific ways. In summary, gender was once grammatical, then a synonym for sex, and then a general description of hobbies and actions of men and women; with third-wave feminism, it is a pejorative concept and a fantasy.

One more contemporary understanding of gender results from the intersectional work between feminists and the LGBT community.¹⁷ A shift occurred in feminism around the turn of the millennium when much feminist scholarship and activism were positioned in an “increasingly sophisticated” approach called

¹⁶ Favale, *The Genesis of Gender*, 150.

¹⁷ Intersectionality is an analytical structure for understanding how a person’s multiple social identities amalgamate to create various modes of discrimination and privilege.

“intersectionality.”¹⁸ A key marker in intersectional theory is standpoint epistemology wherein one’s experience is equally as valid as any other epistemological tool. The goal of standpoint epistemology is to give voice and power to the marginalized and underrepresented. The result is the rejection of objective truth and the celebration of all identities, even and especially self-created identities. Rather than uniting in the shared identity of womanhood, intersectional feminists rejected the common experiences that women share, complicating any objective understanding of what it is to be a woman. This intersectional version of gender sees “gender as the sex of the soul, the innate manhood or womanhood that may or may not ‘align’ with the sex of the body.”¹⁹ Andrew Walker articulates that “gender has always been expressed in different ways. What has changed today is that many now see gender as unattached to sex. That is, you don’t just express gender differently; you can be a different gender. . . . Rather than a biological reality, gender has become a psychologized reality.”²⁰ With this view, gender is entirely internal—an inward sense of maleness, femaleness, both, or neither.

As a result of these divergent definitions, society uses the term “gender” today liberally and inconsistently; therefore, understanding how culture comprehends and promotes the word is crucial.²¹ Today, transgender advocates use “gender” in two ways: (1) “gender expression” (second-wave feminism version) and (2) “gender identity”

¹⁸ Helen Pluckrose and James A. Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody* (Durham, NC: Pitchstone, 2020), 135.

¹⁹ Favale, *The Genesis of Gender*, 150-51.

²⁰ Andrew T. Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate: What Does the Bible Actually Say about Gender Identity?*, exp. and upd. ed. (Surrey, England: Good Book, 2022), 34.

²¹ Sprinkle urges, “When people use the term ‘gender,’ make sure you ask them what they mean.” Sprinkle, *Embodied*, 47.

(intersectional version). Helen Joyce clarifies, “Gender-as-stereotypes is generally called ‘gender expression,’ and gender-as-feeling, ‘gender identity.’”²²

Gender Expression

Gender expression is an essential concept to define; however, it needs less explanation than gender identity because it is less novel and generally easier to understand. The LGBT advocacy group GLAAD (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) defines gender expression as “external manifestations of gender, expressed through a person’s name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behavior, voice, and/or body characteristics.”²³ Nicholas Teich, a transgender identified male, defines the term similarly: “Gender expression is the external representation of one’s gender identity, usually expressed through feminine or masculine behaviors and signals such as clothing, hair, movement, voice or body characteristics.”²⁴ In other words, gender expression is how a male or female expresses himself or herself as a male or female. This definition is the basic second-wave feminism understanding of gender. Rather than a prescription of what ought to be, gender expression is a description of what is. Not all men express masculinity the same way, and not all women express femininity equally.

Gender Identity

If gender expression is outward (i.e., the way a male or female expresses their maleness or femaleness), then gender identity is inward (i.e., the way a person feels on the inside). GLAAD defines gender identity as “a person’s internal, deeply held sense of

²² Helen Joyce, *Trans: Gender Identity and the New Battle for Women’s Rights* (London: Oneworld, 2021), 115.

²³ GLAAD, “GLAAD Media Reference Guide: Transgender People,” accessed November 7, 2019, <https://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>.

²⁴ Nicholas Teich, *Transgender 101: A Simple Guide to a Complex Issue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 6.

their gender.”²⁵ The definition seems simple enough; however, the transgender movement, as a wing of the sexual revolution, has progressed so quickly over the last decade that many LGBT advocates have difficulty keeping up. The result has been varying gradations of how far gender identity may be understood. On the one hand, the advocacy group Gender Spectrum claims that though the location of a person’s true gender is on the inside, “individuals do not choose their gender, nor can they be made to change it.”²⁶ In other words, though a biologically born male can identify as a female because of a robust internal sense, the gender they feel is concrete; it is who they are and is not to be changed. On the other hand, transgender advocates such as Ann Travers affirm “gender self-determination.”²⁷ Leslie Feinberg agrees: “I support the right of all people to self-determination of their own bodies.”²⁸ This “self-determination,” contrary to the view of Gender Spectrum, rejects any concrete identities or terminology; therefore, one’s gender can change as often as one feels necessary. Regardless of the minor disagreements inside the movement, its universal belief is that gender identity is a person’s existential apprehension of their authentic gender distinctiveness.

In the last decade, many advocates have written on the topic of transgender identities. One of the few consistent precepts in all of these works is language about the importance of self-discovery. Two authors in particular show the prominence of self-discovery behind transgender ideology: Nicholas Teich writes from a secular worldview; Austen Hartke writes as a professed Christian. Both identify as transgender males, and though their books vary in aim, Teich and Hartke agree on the importance of self-discovery in gender. According to Teich, even the non-transgender person has to choose

²⁵ GLAAD, “GLAAD Media Reference Guide: Transgender People.”

²⁶ Gender Spectrum, “Understanding Gender,” accessed October 28, 2019, <https://www.genderspectrum.org/quick-links/understanding-gender/>.

²⁷ Ann Travers, *The Trans Generation: How Trans Kids (and Their Parents) Are Creating a Gender Revolution* (New York: NYU Press, 2019), 9.

²⁸ Leslie Feinberg, *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 19.

an identity: “If you are not transgender . . . and you do identify with the biological sex you were labeled with at birth, then you might be called non-transgender or cisgender.”²⁹ That is to say, everyone *must* identify with a gender. One is not merely identified passively by one’s biological sex; instead, one must actively identify with a gender. Hartke agrees and adds, “God created me with a body that was designed female when I was born—a body that I struggled to connect with for the first twenty-six years of my life and that I now finally feel at home in—but God also created me with a capacity for change and with a mind that identifies as male.”³⁰ Therefore, regardless of whether or not they employ theological language, Teich and Hartke agree that the transgender journey is about finding and claiming one’s true identity.

Teich is the founder and President of Harbor Camps (formerly Camp Aranu’tiq), the first-ever summer camp serving transgender and gender-variant youth between the ages of 8 and 15. In his book *Transgender 101*, he boasts, “I am so proud of the campers for having the courage to be themselves and the staff for taking a chance and subsequently changing lives.”³¹ The pronoun “themselves” is critical to transgender ideology as an identity word. To be “themselves,” people must first discover who they are. Teich further clarifies his position: “It’s about people trying to find their way through life just like anyone else. It’s about people being themselves and hoping to be content with who they really are. Isn’t that all any of us can ask for?”³² His focus on self-discovery reaches its height in his chapter “Coming Out as Transgender.” The purpose of

²⁹ Teich, *Transgender 101*, 15.

³⁰ Austen Hartke, *Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 2.

³¹ Teich, *Transgender 101*, xv.

³² Teich, *Transgender 101*, xix.

“coming out,” or revealing that one is transgender, Teich says, is “to be yourself, to live life as the genuine you.”³³

In summary, the generally accepted demarcation between sex and gender is that sex refers to a biological reality and that gender ought to be broken up into two categories. Gender expression, as a concept, refers to how second-wave feminism viewed the term “gender”; it refers to how a man or woman expresses himself or herself as a man or woman in society. Therefore, a man can be more or less masculine or feminine based on personal expression grounded in generalities and stereotypes. Gender identity is how a man or woman internally views himself or herself. Therefore, regardless of expression, if a biological male feels like a woman, then his gender identity is female; if a biological female feels like a man, then her gender identity is male. Most often, a “transgender” classification describes a person who has a sex and gender identity that misalign. In other words, a transgender person is one who believes they exist within a body that does not accurately convey their gender identity.

Misalignment and Gender Dysphoria

Mark Yarhouse defines “transgender” as “an umbrella term for the many ways in which people might experience and/or present and express (or live out) their gender identities differently from people whose sense of gender identity is congruent with their biological sex.”³⁴ Someone who is a biological male but whose internal sense of self is not male but female would be labeled as transgender; someone who is a biological female but whose internal sense of self is not female but male would be labeled as transgender. This label does not necessitate a surgical procedure, hormone therapy, or changing one’s name or pronoun. The very nature of gender identity is inward; therefore, being

³³ Teich, *Transgender 101*, 29.

³⁴ Mark A. Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 20.

transgender does not have to take on any outward appearance. However, a transgender identity most often manifests in some outward appearance, whether name, pronoun, dress, or medical procedure.

Perhaps the best way to describe sex-gender misalignment is to allow a transgendered person to describe it. Elliot Page, formally called Ellen Page, told *Time Magazine* about her misalignment in a 2021 article.³⁵ By the time of the interview, Ellen had already medically transitioned to Elliot. Comments and descriptions made by Page illustrate the misalignment experienced. Though a biological female, Page says, “I just never recognized myself For a long time I could not even look at a photo of myself.”³⁶ A sensed misalignment between biology and self led Page to a social and medical transition where “he” was “finally able to embrace being transgender.”³⁷ Page said this transition was a way of “letting myself fully become who I am.”³⁸ Page describes the surgeries not only as life-changing but also as life-saving procedures that allowed “him” to finally recognize “himself” when “he” looks in the mirror, providing a catharsis for which Page had been waiting since the “total hell” of puberty.³⁹ The language Page uses to describe the experience shows the discomfort felt and the self-discovering experience of “alignment.”

Sex-gender misalignment is not always as neat as a biological male who feels like a female or vice versa. “Gender fluidity” is a concept that describes those who do not necessarily feel that their gender is male or female but something both or neither or in

³⁵ Throughout this dissertation, I will use names in lieu of preferred pronouns the majority of the time. When using pronouns (unless quoting from a source), I will use biological pronouns or preferred pronouns in quotation marks to signify that the pronoun used is the pronoun the person described uses for themselves.

³⁶ Katy Steinmetz, “Elliot Page Is Ready for This Moment,” *Time*, March 16, 2021, <https://time.com/5947032/elliott-page-2/>.

³⁷ Steinmetz, “Elliot Page Is Ready for This Moment.”

³⁸ Steinmetz. “Elliot Page Is Ready for This Moment.”

³⁹ Steinmetz, “Elliot Page Is Ready for This Moment.”

between. Another expression for this idea is “non-binary.” Psychologists Maggi Price and Avy Skolnik believe there are countless genders, maintaining that “gender identity can be considered a ‘multiverse’ wherein there are infinite ways by which one can identify.”⁴⁰ Following suit, in 2022, Merriam-Webster added a non-binary, singular form of “they” to the dictionary.⁴¹

A transgender identity should not be confused or conflated with an experience of gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria refers to a person’s suffering of distress caused by their sex-gender misalignment.⁴² There are both gender dysphoric individuals who are not trans and trans people who are not gender dysphoric.⁴³ Some with gender dysphoria do not transition in any manner, and because the feelings are unwanted, they actively fight against it. Also, some trans people are not distressed about their sex-gender misalignment and therefore are not dysphoric. They accept the misalignment, celebrate it, and most often participate in some transition to fit their gender identity.

Conclusion

These definitions display a drastic shift from the historical understanding of sex and gender. The assertion of the existence of gender identity and the belief that sex and gender can misalign are culture-shifting notions. These novel ideas have the potential to appear fringe and unpopular. However, though the number of transgender individuals is infinitesimal in relation to the total population, Western society’s embrace of transgender ideology has been swift and comprehensive. Not only do recent polls show

⁴⁰ Maggi Price and Avy Skolnik, “Gender Identity,” in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Psychology and Gender*, ed. Kevin L. Nadal (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2017), 663-68.

⁴¹ Liam Knox, “Merriam-Webster Adds Nonbinary ‘They’ Pronoun to Dictionary,” *NBC News*, September 18, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/merriam-webster-adds-nonbinary-they-pronoun-dictionary-n1055976>. See also *Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary*, “they” (entry 3d), accessed April 19, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/they>.

⁴² American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*, 5th ed. (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 452-53.

⁴³ Sprinkle, *Embodied*, 50-52.

rapid growth of trans-identified individuals but also surveys of popular culture, politics, education, business, and medicine illustrate society's broad acceptance and celebration of transgender ideology. Though "transgenderism had been a topic that barely registered on most people's radars," Andrew Walker declares that "now, and quite suddenly, gender identity became the most fashionable social-justice issue of our day."⁴⁴

Statistics

In 2012, estimates of the number of transgender people ranged from a low of 0.25 percent to as high as 1 percent of the U.S. population.⁴⁵ In 2016, the University of California Los Angeles' Williams Institute reported that 1.4 million adults in the United States claim to have sex-gender misalignment.⁴⁶ In June 2022, it reported that there are 1.6 million transgender people in the United States, including 300,000 boys and girls between the ages of 13 and 17.⁴⁷ According to these numbers, 0.5 percent of adults and 1.4 percent of youth (ages 13 to 17) in the United States identify as having a gender that misaligns with their biological sex.

These numbers are multiplying rapidly and Millennials are responsible for the majority of the increase.⁴⁸ A 2017 Harris poll conducted on behalf of GLAAD reported that 10 percent of Millennials self-identified as transgender, agender, genderfluid, bigender, or genderqueer, compared to only 4 percent of Generation X.⁴⁹ As noted, the

⁴⁴ Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate*, 22.

⁴⁵ Teich, *Transgender 101*, 13.

⁴⁶ Andrew R. Flores et al., "How Many Adults Identify as Transgender in the United States?," UCLA School of Law Williams Institute, June 2016, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Trans-Adults-US-Aug-2016.pdf>, 2.

⁴⁷ Jody L. Herman, Andrew R. Flores, and Kathryn K. O'Neill, "How Many Adults and Youth Identify as Transgender in the United States?," UCLA School of Law Williams Institute, June 2022, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/trans-adults-united-states/>, 1.

⁴⁸ Those born between 1981 and 1996 (ages 27 to 42 in 2023) are considered Millennials.

⁴⁹ GLAAD, "Accelerating Acceptance 2017," March 29, 2017, <https://www.glaad.org/publications/accelerating-acceptance-2017>. Those born between 1965 and 1980 are considered Generation X.

Williams Institute reports that their estimate of transgender youths in 2022 doubled since their last report six years earlier.⁵⁰ The number of transgender people in the U.S. is proliferating, yet these numbers remain minor compared to the total population. However, the social, legal, political, educational, medical, and corporate effects of transgender ideology do not seem proportional to the percentage of people who are transgender.⁵¹

The impact of this novel view of gender is present in the law, school curricula, business policies, and medical practices. Between the turn of the century and now, redefinitions have occurred, with seemingly complete acceptance as the goal. The effort by the government, businesses, media, and popular culture seems to be succeeding. The contemporary human imagination of sex and gender is changing. Many believe that gender self-identification is “this generation’s civil-rights battle.”⁵² Below are examples from popular culture, politics, education, business, and medicine. These examples will demonstrate the magnitude of the normalization of transgender ideology in Western society.

Popular Culture

A 2022 Pew Research poll asked participants if they believed that a person’s identity as a man or a woman was determined by sex at birth or if one could self-identify with a sex. The study found that 60 percent of Americans believe that sexual identity is determined at birth, while 38 percent agree with some form of transgender ideology.⁵³

⁵⁰ Herman, Flores, and O’Neill, “How Many Adults and Youth Identify as Transgender?” (2022), 1.

⁵¹ Based on the low percentage of transgender individuals in the U.S., the type and speed of changes to these various fields seem extreme.

⁵² Joyce, *Trans*, 3.

⁵³ Anna Brown, “Americans’ Complex Views on Gender Identity and Transgender Issues,” Pew Research Center, June 28, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2022/06/28/americans-complex-views-on-gender-identity-and-transgender-issues/>.

Furthermore, only 63 percent of Christians agree that biology determines sex or gender identity. Perhaps the most significant contributing factor to society's rising approval of the phenomenon is popular culture's acceptance and celebration of transgender identities as well as its enforcement of others' acceptance and celebration.

There are numerous popular transitions by well-known personalities; however, they were not the first, just the loudest. In 1950, 24-year-old George Jorgensen traveled from the Bronx to Europe following rumors that Swedish doctors could help him become a "her."⁵⁴ In Copenhagen, he met the endocrinologist Christian Hamburger, who diagnosed George as experiencing "transvestism." Dr. Hamburger treated Jorgensen with hormonal replacement therapy and eventually removed his testicles and penis. He also had vaginal plastic surgery. Two years after he arrived in Europe, George changed his name to Christine out of respect for Dr. Christian Hamburger.⁵⁵

Dr. John Money of Johns Hopkins Medical School was one of the earliest to propose the idea that sex and gender can misalign.⁵⁶ His first and most famous case study was David Reimer. David, born in 1965, had his penis severely damaged during circumcision. Dr. Money convinced David's parents that gender identity was flexible and that he could create a female identity for David. Raised as a girl and given a new name, David was unaware of his birth sex. His parents revealed the truth as he grew severely depressed when he was 14 years old.⁵⁷ David chose to revert to living as a male, yet the damage was so severe from years of treatment and abuse that at 38 years old, he committed suicide.⁵⁸ Though this tragic end was not a victory for the young cause of

⁵⁴ Joyce, *Trans*, 17.

⁵⁵ Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, 13.

⁵⁶ Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 199.

⁵⁷ John Colapinto, *As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006), 180.

⁵⁸ Joyce, *Trans*, 23.

transgender medicine, John Money and others continued to push forward with a novel concept of sex and gender.

Popular culture and popular media have aided the normalization of transgender ideology. The most famous transgender person in history is Caitlyn Jenner, the former Olympic athlete Bruce Jenner. However, the media's attention to the transgender cause began in earnest with a public figure preceding Jenner. In 2014, the natal male Laverne Cox, star of Netflix's *Orange Is the New Black*, became the first transgender identified female to be awarded the Woman of the Year honor by *Glamour Magazine*.

The following year, Caitlyn Jenner arrived in the public eye after Bruce Jenner medically transitioned to be identified as a woman. The media not only accepted Jenner's transition but also heralded its virtue from America's television screens. In 2015, ABC aired a special with the newly arrived Caitlyn Jenner.⁵⁹ *Vanity Fair* followed and published a cover story titled "Call Me Caitlyn" with the now-feminized Jenner on its cover.⁶⁰ In the same month, July 2015, Caitlyn was awarded the Arthur Ashe Courage Award from ESPN and Woman of the Year by *Glamour Magazine*, the second year in a row that a transgender identified female won the award.

What may have been shocking to the general public in 2015 was fashionable in 2020. On December 1, 2020, Canadian actress and star of *Inception* and *Juno* Ellen Page announced via Instagram, "Hey Friends, I want to share with you that I am trans, my pronouns are he/they and my name is Elliot. I feel lucky to be writing this. To be here. To have arrived at this place in my life."⁶¹ Since this announcement, any evidence that Ellen existed has been eradicated from the internet. A simple search for "Ellen Page" returns

⁵⁹ *20/20*, "Bruce Jenner: The Interview," aired April 24, 2015, on ABC News.

⁶⁰ Condé Nast, "Caitlyn Jenner: The Full Story," *Vanity Fair*, June 1, 2015, <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2015/06/caitlyn-jenner-bruce-cover-annie-leibovitz>.

⁶¹ Elliot Page (@elliottpage), Instagram post, December 1, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CIQ1QFBhNFg/?hl=en>.

hundreds of results for “Elliot Page.” Popular society’s response was euphoric, and Elliot gained 400,000 followers on Instagram that day alone.⁶²

As acceptance and celebration of transgender individuals increase, any dissent to the ideology is threatened with punishment. Six months after Elliot Page’s announcement, J. K. Rowling, author of the *Harry Potter* series, responded to an article titled “Creating a More Equal Post-COVID-19 World for People Who Menstruate.”⁶³ Rowling, responding to the absurdity of the description “people who menstruate,” posted to Twitter, “People who menstruate. I’m sure there used to be a word for those people. Someone help me out. Wumben? Wimpund? Woomud?”⁶⁴ She received relentless backlash for her comments and was labeled a transphobe and a TERF (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist) by transgender activists.⁶⁵ Rowling defended herself and her commitment to socially liberal causes by warning, “If sex isn’t real, there’s no same-sex attraction. If sex isn’t real, the lived reality of women is globally erased. I know and love transpeople, but erasing the concept of sex removes the ability of many to meaningfully discuss their lives. It isn’t hate to speak the truth.”⁶⁶

Daniel Radcliffe, who played Harry Potter in the *Harry Potter* films, to distance himself from the creator of his fictional character, was the first celebrity to respond publicly to Rowling. Radcliffe asserted, “Transgender women are women. Any statement to the contrary erases the identity and dignity of transgender people and goes

⁶² Steinmetz, “Elliot Page Is Ready for This Moment.”

⁶³ Marni Sommer, Virginia Kamowa, and Therese Mahon, “Opinion: Creating a More Equal Post-COVID-19 World for People Who Menstruate,” *Devex*, May 28, 2020, <https://www.devex.com/news/sponsored/opinion-creating-a-more-equal-post-covid-19-world-for-people-who-menstruate-97312>.

⁶⁴ J. K. Rowling (@jk_rowling), Twitter, June 6, 2020, 5:35 p.m., https://twitter.com/jk_rowling/status/1269382518362509313.

⁶⁵ Rebecca McLaughlin, *The Secular Creed: Engaging Five Contemporary Claims* (Austin, TX: The Gospel Coalition, 2021), 87.

⁶⁶ J. K. Rowling (@jk_rowling), Twitter, June 6, 2020, 6:02 p.m., https://twitter.com/jk_rowling/status/1269389298664701952.

against all advice given by professional health care associations who have more expertise on this subject than either [Rowling] or I.”⁶⁷ Two days later, Emma Watson, who played Hermione Granger in the *Harry Potter* films, publicly distanced herself from Rowling as well, insisting, “Trans people are who they say they are and deserve to live their lives without being constantly questioned or told they aren’t who they say they are.”⁶⁸ The responses from celebrities and public figures continued for weeks. There was urgency to find a place in the culturally acceptable line and herald that place so all could hear.

Transgender ideology messaging is not always overt. For example, in 1999, the Wachowski siblings wrote, produced, and directed *The Matrix*. By 2020, both brothers had transitioned and identified as women. In 2020, Lilly, the younger sibling, confirmed rumors that *The Matrix* was, in fact, a “trans metaphor.”⁶⁹ Though neither sibling has given a complete key to understanding all of the metaphors in the movie, author Helen Joyce explains,

In the trans-allegorical reading, the Matrix is “cisnormative” society, and people unplugged from it are trans The red pill represents cross-sex hormones. Anderson’s exit from the pod where his body has been imprisoned represents the experience of transition: a second birth. Slimy, gasping and helpless, detached from the tubes that have sustained him, he is ejected from a dream state into the real world. The agents, terrifying programs that patrol the Matrix and destroy anyone who recognizes it as illusionary, represent transphobia. They are self-doubt, hatred of authenticity and acceptance of a vicious system. Morpheus, their chief enemy, represents the power of acceptance and self-actualization. The Oracle, whom Morpheus brings to Neo to visit, represents an older, wiser trans person, or a gender therapist The moment when Neo starts to believe in himself offers two trans-allegorical readings. As Agent Smith pummels Neo, he repeatedly refers to him as Mr. Anderson—“deadnaming” him, in the activist’s lexicon When Neo fights back, he asserts his true identity with the words “My name is Neo.”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Josh Weaver, “Daniel Radcliffe Responds to J.K. Rowling’s Tweets on Gender Identity,” The Trevor Project (blog), June 8, 2020, <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/blog/daniel-radcliffe-responds-to-j-k-rowlings-tweets-on-gender-identity/>.

⁶⁸ Emma Watson (@EmmaWatson), Twitter, June 10, 2020, 5:15 p.m., <https://twitter.com/EmmaWatson/status/1270826851070619649>.

⁶⁹ Joyce, *Trans*, 53.

⁷⁰ Joyce, *Trans*, 54-55.

The Matrix's covert message is surprising to most. However, the veiled method of the Wachowski brothers in 1999 is no longer necessary in 2023.

There must be aid from many mediums to create a new vision for identity and make it seem natural. Famous transitions and allegorical movies are not enough. For a complete normalization to take place, everyday language must also change. For example, *Teen Vogue* published a “no-nonsense, 101 guide to masturbation for vagina owners.”⁷¹ The article reads as a guide for “women” to pleasure themselves; however, the word “woman” is not present. Instead, the article addresses “those with a vagina.” Joyce summarizes how invasive this language has become:

Information campaigns from cancer charities tell “anyone with a cervix” to get regular Pap smear tests. An ad for Tampax enjoins the world to “celebrate the diversity of all people who bleed.” La Leche League USA says it “supports all breastfeeding, chestfeeding, and human milk feeding families.” An American charity bemoans the frequency with which “black birthing bodies” die in the delivery room.⁷²

Such ad campaigns by major companies demonstrate the overt nature of today's transgender ideology in practice.

Politics

The gradual yet steady social normalcy achieved through the media has been aided by a political ally. President Obama's administration pushed “gender identity” policies as civil rights initiatives. Likening the inclusion of both sexes' access to whichever bathroom they prefer to the racially segregated bathrooms in the mid-twentieth century was just one of these political strategies.⁷³ Black attorney general Loretta Lynch compared gender identity to race. Regarding North Carolina's bathroom bill, which protected both sexes from sharing a bathroom with anyone of the opposite sex, Lynch

⁷¹ Gigi Engle, “This Is How to Masturbate If You Have a Vagina: Finger and Toy Tips,” *Teen Vogue*, October 19, 2022, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/how-to-masturbate-if-you-have-a-vagina>.

⁷² Joyce, *Trans*, 137-38.

⁷³ Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, 12.

recalled, “It was not very long ago that states, including North Carolina, had signs above the restrooms, water fountains and on public accommodations keeping people out based upon a distinction without a difference.”⁷⁴ Furthermore, President Obama commuted the sentence of transgender identified female Chelsea Manning, formally Bradley Manning, for leaking classified information. The President’s commutation of Manning’s sentence may not have been motivated by transgender ideology. However, the fact that taxpayers paid for Manning’s reassignment surgery in the process certainly was.

On his first day in office as President, Joe Biden (formerly President Obama’s Vice President) joined the effort by signing an executive order preventing discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation. This executive order declares, “Children should be able to learn without worrying about whether they will be denied access to the rest room, the locker room, or school sports All persons should receive equal treatment under the law no matter their gender identity or sexual orientation.”⁷⁵ The crowning achievement of Biden’s transgender ideology campaign thus far was passing the Equality Act through the House of Representatives in 2021. The Equality Act would amend the 1964 Civil Rights Act to include sexual orientation and gender identity. The Civil Rights Act dealt with discrimination in employment and housing; accordingly, the Equality Act would substantially expand those protections. It would cover federally funded programs and public accommodations, including public restroom usage in schools, stores, and stadiums.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Mark Berman, Sarah Larimer, and Sari Horwitz, “North Carolina, Justice Dept. File Dueling Lawsuits over Transgender Rights,” *The Washington Post*, May 9, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2016/05/09/north-carolina-justice-dept-face-monday-deadline-for-bathroom-bill/>.

⁷⁵ Abigail Shrier, “Joe Biden’s First Day Began the End of Girls’ Sports,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 22, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/joe-bidens-first-day-began-the-end-of-girls-sports-11611341066>.

⁷⁶ Danielle Kurtzleben, “House Passes the Equality Act: Here’s What It Would Do,” *NPR*, February 24, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/02/24/969591569/house-to-vote-on-equality-act-heres-what-the-law-would-do>.

On the 2020 democratic campaign trail, candidates Elizabeth Warren, Julian Castro, Pete Buttigieg, Cory Booker, Tom Steyer, and Kamala Harris updated their Twitter profiles to include their preferred pronouns.⁷⁷ Additionally, current Vice President Harris let the audience at a CNN town hall meeting know, before answering their questions, that her preferred pronouns were “she/her/hers.”⁷⁸ By 2017, most states (including New York, California, Washington, Oregon, and Ohio) allowed individuals to change birth certificates to align with their gender ideology.⁷⁹ By 2018, around twenty countries (including Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Denmark, France, Iceland, Japan, Spain, and the United Kingdom) had enacted laws protecting the right to change sex.⁸⁰ With support from the political realm resulting in new laws and restrictions, the normalization of transgender ideology now affects the life of every citizen.

Education

Political movements will necessarily lead to education adjustments. Transgender education policy adjustments go back to 2016, when the United States Department of Education expanded Title IX to include transgender students. Under this newly widened policy, schools are required to treat transgender students based on their gender identity. This amendment allows students access to restrooms and locker rooms that match their declared gender identity. Additionally, teachers must use the correct

⁷⁷ Debra Soh, *The End of Gender: Debunking the Myths about Sex and Identity in Our Society* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2020), 75.

⁷⁸ Harmeet Kaur, “Why It Matters What Pronouns You Use to Refer to People and What to Do If You Slip Up,” *CNN*, October 16, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/16/us/preferred-gender-pronouns-explainer-trnd/index.html>.

⁷⁹ Transgender Law Center, “State-by-State Overview: Changing Gender Markers on Birth Certificates,” April 2017, <https://transgenderlawcenter.org/resources/id/state-by-state-overview-changing-gender-markers-on-birth-certificates>.

⁸⁰ Sharon James, *Gender Ideology: What Do Christians Need to Know?* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2019), 17.

names and pronouns of their transgender identified students.⁸¹ The policy applies to all preschools, K-12 schools, and universities that receive federal funding.

New standards do not merely affect access to spaces and correct pronouns. Around the world, school unions and districts are updating curricula to educate children about gender ideology. Examples are ubiquitous; therefore, a few samples will have to suffice. In 2017, the National Union of Teachers in the United Kingdom advocated for educating children as young as two years old in transgender theory.⁸² In Sweden and Germany, parents who object to their publicly-schooled children receiving sex education do not have the right to remove children to educate them at home.⁸³

Domestically, the situation is similar. U.S. school districts are adopting curricula that will indoctrinate the youngest students. In 2022, *The Washington Times* reported, “Oregon’s Portland Public Schools is defending its decision to teach kindergartners that boys can have vulvas and girls can have penises.”⁸⁴ The district has decided to educate children, starting at 5 years old, about transgender ideology, sexual orientation, and the role of white colonizers in marginalizing LGBTQ people. One PowerPoint slide for a kindergarten class labels a cartoon figure of male and female biological parts as “person with a penis” and “person with a vulva” instead of boy and girl.

⁸¹ National Center for Transgender Equality, “Fact Sheet on U.S. Department of Education Policy Letter on Transgender Students,” August 15, 2016, <https://transequality.org/issues/resources/fact-sheet-on-us-department-of-education-policy-letter-on-transgender-students>.

⁸² Camilla Turner, “Teach Toddlers about Transgender Issues, National Union of Teachers Say,” *The Telegraph*, April 17, 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/04/17/teach-toddlers-transgender-issues-national-union-teachers-say/>.

⁸³ Gabriele Kuby, *The Global Sexual Revolution: Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom*, trans. James Patrick Kirchner (Kettering, OH: LifeSite/Angelico Press, 2015), 212-29.

⁸⁴ Sean Salai, “Portland Public Schools Defends Teaching Transgender Ideology to Kindergartners,” *The Washington Times*, August 1, 2022, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/aug/1/portland-public-schools-defends-teaching-transgend/>.

Business

Even beyond popular culture and politics, extreme pressure exists to conform businesses to culture's new understanding of gender identity. In the age of social media, boycotts arise from a single post. The success of any business is contingent on keeping large swaths of its customer base happy. The hyper-politicized nature of our current time leads to customers' evaluating a business by its products as well as by its values. Twitter has been involved in much free speech controversy over the past decade.⁸⁵ The pressure to conform to culture's new ethical pressures is tremendous for a company like Twitter, whose product is a platform to speak online. Transgender ideology is no exception, and Twitter has often given in to this pressure.

In 2016, Jamie Shupe became the first legal non-binary identified person in the United States.⁸⁶ James began to live like a woman in 2013 and changed his name to Jamie to fit this new identity. Three years later, he realized that his sex could not be altered, but he was also convinced that he was not a man because of his many female traits. In court, he argued, "As a transgender person with male biology and distinctly feminine traits, I believe myself to be a unique variation of nature. I am not ashamed of who I am. I was not born into the wrong body. My genitals are not a birth defect. And I am not to be sterilized by psychiatry and a medical establishment that has run amok."⁸⁷ A Multnomah County Court in Oregon allowed him to change his sex designation to non-binary. He was subsequently issued a birth certificate with the sex marker "unknown."

Three years later, he realized that transgender ideology was a lie:

I believe that gender identity is a fraud perpetuated by psychiatry, the likes of something the United States and other nations hasn't experienced since the

⁸⁵ Twitter de-platformed or canceled many accounts between 2020 and 2023 for insensitive language toward the transgender community, such as misgendering someone or failing to use preferred pronouns.

⁸⁶ Jamie Shupe, "I Am the First Official Genderless Person in the United States," *The Guardian*, June 16, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/16/i-am-first-official-genderless-person-united-states>.

⁸⁷ Shupe, "I Am the First Official Genderless Person in the United States."

lobotomy era. As a result, I have returned to my male birth sex I no longer identify as a transgender or non-binary person and renounce all ties to transgenderism. I will not be a party to advancing harmful gender ideologies that are ruining lives, causing deaths and contributing to the sterilization and mutilation of gender-confused children I am and have always been male.⁸⁸

James was subsequently blocked from Twitter upon his return to share that his gender dysphoria was a mental illness. For sharing his story and opinions, Twitter blocked his account for violating their “hateful conduct” rules.

The number of companies publicly celebrating transgender ideology is too numerous to exhaust. However, a straightforward approach to understanding the corporate embrace of transgender ideology is to explore the policy decisions of the largest companies. The Human Rights Campaign reports that by 2016, 75 percent of Fortune 500 companies included “gender identity” in their nondiscrimination policies, whereas only 3 percent did so fourteen years earlier. Additionally, in 2002, not one Fortune 500 company offered healthcare with transgender-specific procedures included, but 511 companies did so in 2016.⁸⁹ It is no surprise, then, that as popular culture, government, and education have embraced this novel ideology, the corporate world has followed close behind.

Medicine

The most improbable field for transgender ideology to permeate is medicine, the purpose of which is not harm but health. However, the medical field has recently adapted language and practice to conform to transgender ideology. Dr. Deanna Adkins, a Duke University School of Medicine professor, says, “From a medical perspective, the appropriate determinant of sex is gender identity.”⁹⁰ Additionally, the official website for

⁸⁸ James, *Gender Ideology*, 49.

⁸⁹ Human Rights Campaign, “Human Rights Campaign Foundation Overview,” December 2015, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/foundation-overview>.

⁹⁰ Declaration of Deanna Adkins, M.D., U.S. District Court, Middle District of North Carolina, Case 1:16-cv-00236-TDS-JEP, p. 5, quoted in Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, 30.

the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology dictates the proper medical language that practitioners must use in official documentation. For example, “‘Patient Sex (at birth)’ or ‘Assigned Sex’ is the sex (male or female) given to a child at birth, most often based on the child’s external anatomy.”⁹¹ The site also defines the coding options for patients’ files. The options are “M for male,” “F for female,” “UNK for unknown,” “OTH for other,” “ASKU for asked, but unknown,” and “NASK for not asked.”

Biology is the necessary underpinning of medicine. As transgender ideology spreads, even in fields that require biological precision, language is altered and practice follows. According to data compiled by *Reuters*, 42,167 youth (ages 6-17) were diagnosed with gender dysphoria in 2021, and this number is up from 15,172 just five years earlier.⁹² As the number of gender dysphoric youth rises, trans-affirming treatments also rise. In 2021 alone, 1,390 youth were given puberty blockers, 4,231 were given hormone therapy, and 282 received top surgery.⁹³ One medical journal reports that over 9,000 transgender surgeries (youth and adult) were performed in 2021 alone. 10.9 percent of all transgender medical encounters result in “gender-affirming” care.⁹⁴

The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) describes transgender surgeries as “essential and medically necessary” and that “relief from gender dysphoria cannot be achieved without modification of their primary and/or

⁹¹ HealthIT.gov, “Representing Patient Sex (At Birth),” accessed November 7, 2022, <https://www.healthit.gov/isa/representing-patient-sex-birth>.

⁹² Robin Respaut and Chad Terhune, “Number of Transgender Children Seeking Treatment Surges in U.S.,” *Reuters*, October 6, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-transyouth-data/>.

⁹³ Respaut and Terhune, “Number of Transgender Children Seeing Treatment Surges in U.S.”

⁹⁴ “Gender-affirming surgery” is the language used to describe a surgery performed on an individual to change their appearance to look like the opposite sex. “Gender-reassignment surgery” was standard nomenclature until it was judged by many not to be as accurate a term. “Gender-affirming” indicates the belief that a transgender identified female is a female in the wrong body; therefore, the surgery affirms their already present gender. Vishnu R. Mani et al., “Transgender Surgery – Knowledge Gap among Physicians Impacting Patient Care,” *Current Urology* 15, no. 1 (March 2021): 68-70, <https://doi.org/10.1097/CU9.0000000000000002>.

secondary sex characteristics to establish greater congruence with their gender identity.”⁹⁵ The medical field has largely adopted this opinion, resulting in horrifying bodily damage to patients. A male-to-female genital gender reassignment surgery entails removing the testes, amputating the penis, and creating the labia, clitoris, and vagina. A female-to-male genital gender reassignment surgery involves the removal of the ovaries and the uterus and sometimes the removal of the vagina. Additionally, an artificial scrotum and penis are created. Most often, skin is taken from the forearm, formed into a phallic shape, and then grafted into the clitoris.⁹⁶

These surgeries cannot create functioning organs, only artificial pieces of flesh that resemble working organs. Moreover, these surgeries come with huge risks. Postoperative complications are expected with gender reassignment surgeries, and 41 percent of female-to-male surgeries have urologic complications.⁹⁷ The skin used to create a new urethra in a manufactured penis is usually taken from “hair-bearing skin, and growth of hair within the urethra can cause obstruction to urinary flow.”⁹⁸

Scott Newgent, a former transgender identified female, experienced this urologic problem and detailed his grueling process of medical transition:

During my own transition, I had seven surgeries. I also had a massive pulmonary embolism, a helicopter life-flight ride, an emergency ambulance ride, a stress-induced heart attack, sepsis, a 17-month recurring infection due to using the wrong skin during a (failed) phalloplasty, 16 rounds of antibiotics, three weeks of daily IV antibiotics, the loss of all my hair, (only partially successful) arm reconstructive surgery, permanent lung and heart damage, a cut bladder, insomnia-induced-hallucinations—oh and frequent loss of consciousness due to pain from the hair on

⁹⁵ World Professional Association for Transgender Health, “Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender Nonconforming People,” 2010, <http://www.wpath.org/publications/soc>.

⁹⁶ J. Alan Branch, *Affirming God’s Image: Addressing the Transgender Question with Science and Scripture* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 98-101.

⁹⁷ Britt Colebunders et al., “Female-to-Male Gender Reassignment Surgery,” in *Principles of Transgender Medicine and Surgery*, ed. Randi Ettner, Stan Monstrey, and Eli Coleman, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2016), 296.

⁹⁸ Branch, *Affirming God’s Image*, 105.

the inside of my urethra . . . between me and my insurance company, medical expenses exceeded \$900,000.⁹⁹

A long-standing motto of medical ethics is the Hippocratic Oath, which states, “first, do no harm,” yet most transgender medical treatments take healthy bodies and harm them. Only within a culture overwhelmed with transgender ideology can medicine do the opposite of its purpose and call it “care.”

In 2022, England’s National Health Service (NHS) recognized the medical harm inflicted on transgender identified youth and issued new guidelines for the treatment of gender dysphoria in minors.¹⁰⁰ These new guidelines sharply differ from England’s previous “gender affirming” approach as well as from the view of WPATH that the United States follows. The key highlights of the new guidelines are (1) the elimination of the “gender clinic” model of care, (2) the classification of social gender transition as an active intervention eligible for informed consent, (3) the establishment of psychotherapy as the primary line of treatment, (4) an emphasis on the importance of “biological sex,” (5) the reaffirmation of the *DSM-5* diagnosis of “gender dysphoria” for treatment decisions, and (6) the loss of support to those who choose to bypass the new protocols.¹⁰¹ Thus far, England is the only country in the West to adopt guidelines that oppose the gender-affirmative care model.

Conclusion

Popular culture, politics, education, business, and medicine have all played a part in normalizing transgender identities and their accompanying ideology. However,

⁹⁹ Scott Newgent, “Forget What Gender Activists Tell You. Here’s What Medical Transition Looks Like,” Quillette, October 6, 2020, <https://quillette.com/2020/10/06/forget-what-gender-activists-tell-you-heres-what-medical-transition-looks-like/>.

¹⁰⁰ Society For Evidence-Based Gender Medicine, “The NHS Ends the ‘Gender-Affirmative Care Model’ for Youth in England,” October 24, 2022, <https://segm.org/England-ends-gender-affirming-care>.

¹⁰¹ Society For Evidence-Based Gender Medicine, “The NHS Ends the ‘Gender-Affirmative Care Model’ for Youth in England.”

this cultural phenomenon could not have come from nowhere. It must have a source, the identification of which will assist in the attempt to understand it fully. The attempt to find transgender ideology's source is the subject of chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3
HOW WE ARRIVED HERE: THE HISTORICAL
AND PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERGIRDING
OF TRANSGENDER IDEOLOGY

As postmodern thought permeated the modern world, transgender ideology became possible. The belief that truth was a worthwhile and attainable quest, the conviction that human beings have a fixed nature, and the confidence that morality could be supported by a widespread societal agreement would all be confronted and deemed unsuitable givens in a new world.

Bob Goudzwaard and Craig Bartholomew identify four main traits of the postmodern worldview: “deadlock, peacock, plurality, and irony.”¹ “Deadlock” describes postmodernity’s assertion that modernity has proven false and that the great dreams and ideologies the Western world once embraced have broken down and are untrustworthy. Additionally, “truth” can no longer serve as a yardstick of what is “shown and what we see, but rather the desire to impress and make an impression. News is not found but made.”² The effect is that illusions rule culture because it is overwhelmed by images. Goudzwaard and Bartholomew call this phenomenon “peacock” because when a predator sees a peacock’s tail, it believes its size is reality. “Plurality” refers to postmodernity’s assertion that the Western world should never again believe in great stories and objective values but should (1) celebrate plurality over monotony and (2) distrust all claims about what is good for humankind.³ Finally, “irony” describes the only appropriate way to live

¹ Bob Goudzwaard and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Beyond the Modern Age: An Archaeology of Contemporary Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 75.

² Goudzwaard and Bartholomew, *Beyond the Modern Age*, 76.

³ Goudzwaard and Bartholomew, *Beyond the Modern Age*, 78.

now that all common goals between humans have been torn down. “With irony,” postmodernists believe, “we are able to distance ourselves from public opinion in a relativist, humor-filled way. Listen in a friendly manner, but never reveal your deepest intentions. If you do, you may get hurt again; you may be betrayed again or become a sacrifice.”⁴

The postmodern man does not desire to build something new but only tear down what is old. There exists no optimistic worldview inside postmodernity, only the absence of modernity. For this reason, Philip Rieff calls the postmodern culture a “deathwork,” by which he means, “an all-out assault upon something vital to the established culture.”⁵ In other words, the postmodern intention is not to fix broken structures for a common goal but to deconstruct all previous philosophies and to provide permission to all individuals to construct themselves and their lives as they desire. Rieff appropriately calls this an “anti-culture.”⁶

To juxtapose postmodernity and modernity, Gene Veith says,

The modernist imagines the human mind observing, understanding, and exploiting the natural order, thus mastering it. The postmodernist imagines the human mind creating reality, whether by constructing truth or by taking the raw materials of nature and technologically making new realities out of them, thus bending nature to the human will.⁷

That is to say, truth is not something we discover but something we construct. Moreover, morality is untethered to nature and tethered to the construction of an individual or culture.⁸ Therefore, the postmodern project attempts to take on the role of God.

⁴ Goudzwaard and Bartholomew, *Beyond the Modern Age*, 78.

⁵ Philip Rieff, *My Life among the Deathworks: Illustrations of the Aesthetics of Authority*, ed. Kenneth S. Piver (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 7.

⁶ Rieff, *My Life among the Deathworks*, 8.

⁷ Gene Edward Veith, *Post-Christian: A Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 75.

⁸ Veith, *Post-Christian*, 25-26.

Postmodernity has made transgender ideology obtainable. The phenomenon of a sex-gender misalignment did not simply appear one day. From the disappearance of truth to the erasure of human nature, postmodernity's negative response to modernity's achievements provided an atmosphere where the construction of one's identity could be taken to the furthest extremes. This chapter will trace the genealogy of transgender ideology. Carl Trueman's 2020 book *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* shares a similar goal as this chapter. Therefore, a brief overview of *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* and how this chapter differs from it is necessary.

Trueman asks "how and why a particular statement has come to be regarded as coherent and meaningful: 'I am a woman trapped in a man's body.'"⁹ His thesis is that the modern (or postmodern) view of "self" is the cause of the moral and sexual revolution.¹⁰ He believes it is near-sighted and without context to suggest that somehow the sexual revolution appeared out of nowhere in the 1960s. Instead, he argues, the ideas of particular intellectuals from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have become mainstream, even if undetected. They are the source of this new definition of self, which is the cause of the sexual revolution. The path of the revolution, according to Trueman, follows three steps: (1) the "self" must be psychologized, (2) psychology must be sexualized, and (3) sex must be politicized.¹¹

For a culture to conceive that a man can, in any real sense, become a woman, a psychologizing of the self must take place—step 1. For this thinking to become part of our social imaginary,¹² Trueman says, the teaching and writing of four eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophers must be accepted, even if unacknowledged: Jean-

⁹ Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 19.

¹⁰ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 22.

¹¹ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 221.

¹² "Social imaginary" language is borrowed from Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2018).

Jacques Rousseau, Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, and Charles Darwin.¹³ Rousseau taught that men and women are essentially born good, but social conditioning has corrupted all;¹⁴ therefore, only through authentic self-expression, no matter the expression, can man and woman be made whole again and find wholeness. In other words, there exists no objective human purpose in this life; each individual is required to self-create. Toward the same end, Friedrich Nietzsche attempted to persuade other Enlightenment philosophers of the consequences of “god’s death.” He convincingly taught that without a god,¹⁵ there is no telos to this life; therefore, the individual must create themselves, including their meaning and purpose.¹⁶ Karl Marx proposed that because traditional morals were the oppressor’s tool, human nature does not include a responsibility to obey any “so-called” objective morality.¹⁷ Finally, Charles Darwin obliterated the telos of mankind. If human life on earth is not contingent on a creator, as Darwin opined, then the idea of an authoritative purpose to life is unnecessary.

Trueman summarizes their contribution this way: “Darwin strips the world of intrinsic meaning through natural selection; Nietzsche, through his polemic against metaphysics; Marx, through . . . a radical and consistent materialism”¹⁸ In other words, for all of these men, meaning is created, not given; therefore, the modern view of self need not include the material but only the non-material. Human persons can rely

¹³ Trueman’s historical sketch in *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* is especially succinct and therefore lacks important nuance with respect to the thinking of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, and Sigmund Freud. The summary of Trueman’s work provided in this section is not an endorsement indicating that he has exhausted the ideas of these men.

¹⁴ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 111.

¹⁵ A lowercase “g” will regularly be used for “god” in this chapter. When I am referring to the Christian concept of God, an uppercase “G” will be used. Nietzsche’s general usage of “god” is the concept of a purpose-giving, moral-giving god but not the God of the Bible in particular.

¹⁶ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 174. Throughout this chapter, I will add nuance to Nietzsche’s thought where Trueman does not.

¹⁷ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 191.

¹⁸ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 191-92.

solely on internal factors for self-identification, such as desires, passions, and self-reflection. Consequently, while “self” used to be defined by a creator’s purpose, a physical body, and one’s responsibility to a community, it is now defined by a person’s will alone.

Trueman then turns to Sigmund Freud to explain the sexualization of the psychological man—step 2. He explains the main product of Freud’s teaching as a polemic against civilization’s attempt to socially condition morality in order to curb sexual expression. For Freud, sexual gratification is the highest good for humans; therefore, sexual repression is not morally upright but morally evil. Additionally, he believed that a culture’s sexual ethic leads to inauthentic living. Hence, if “self” is psychological and true happiness is found in one’s unfettered expression of sexuality, then one’s true self—one’s identity—is nothing more and nothing less than the sexual expression one chooses for oneself.

Finally, Trueman explains the underpinning of the politicization of sex—step 3. He gives credit to the Frankfurt school of the early 1900s to explain the existence of what he calls the “New Left,”¹⁹ which he describes as the “shotgun wedding of Freud and Marx.”²⁰ Marx’s ideology was economical; however, the Frankfurt School, mainly through the writings of Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse, amalgamated Freud with Marx, resulting in a cultural Marxism where oppression can often be psychological. The creation of a new victimhood arose by combining the philosophies of Freud and Marx. The oppressed and exploited are those whose sexual preference, sexual orientation, gender identity, and more are not recognized and celebrated by the culture. These sexual minorities are now victims who should be fought for—enter the political scene with legislation to do just that.

¹⁹ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 229.

²⁰ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 230.

The process is complete. Trueman argues that a world where misgendering a person can get one fired and where schools allow biological men in women's bathrooms and locker rooms was accomplished in three steps: (1) the "self" has been psychologized, (2) psychology has been sexualized, and (3) sex has been politicized.

Trueman's historical sketch clearly explains how we arrived at this cultural moment. This chapter will not contend with Trueman's work; instead, it will focus on the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the men Trueman uses to trace the origins of transgender ideology, as the starting point of a different genealogy. Where Trueman combines the teachings of Rousseau, Nietzsche, Marx, and Darwin to clarify the psychologizing of culture, this chapter will start with Nietzsche and uncover a different path toward transgender ideology. Many thinkers and philosophies have led to this moment, and neither Trueman's work nor this chapter can exhaust the ideas that led to transgender ideology. However, I will argue that the lineage that led to the possibility, reality, and celebration of transgender identities runs from Friedrich Nietzsche to Michel Foucault to Judith Butler to a transgender ideology where the idea of a sex-gender mismatch is popularized and stabilized.²¹

First, I will argue that the ideas of Nietzsche influenced French philosopher Michel Foucault, who sexualized the postmodern approach.²² Next, I will show that feminist scholar Judith Butler appropriated Foucault's ideas, creating a radicalized feminist philosophy by amalgamating Foucault and the sex-gender distinction from second-wave feminism. Then, I will explain how the work of Foucault and Butler

²¹ Though a clear connection between Nietzsche and Foucault will be shown, this dissertation recognizes that Foucault reappropriated much of Nietzsche's work in ways that Nietzsche would not have supported.

²² For more on the connection between Nietzsche and postmodernity, see Allan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Cornel West, "Nietzsche's Prefiguration of Postmodern American Philosophy," in *Why Nietzsche Now?*, ed. Daniel T. O'Hara (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 241-69.

infiltrated academia and normalized a worldview where transgender identities are considered coherent.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Much of what is considered postmodernism today is “remarkably congruent with Nietzsche’s main ideas.”²³ He consistently revealed himself to be “a foe of modernity.”²⁴ However, in fairness to Nietzsche, his thoughts and writings are often complex and confusing, resulting in various interpretations. Nietzsche scholar Alexander Nehamas asks,

Does he or does he not, then, think that his views of the self, of morality, or of history, many of which are themselves at least apparently paradoxical, are true? If he does, how can this possibly be consistent with his view that all views are only interpretations? If he does not—that is, if he does not think that his views are true—why does he make the effort to present them in the first place?²⁵

Yet, it is clear that the shadows of the Enlightenment, Nietzsche argued vigorously for consistency in the application of philosophy. If modernity proved that god is not necessary for epistemology, metaphysics, or ethics, then he contended that a culture that believes this should look different from a pre-Enlightenment culture. Nietzsche’s most well-known quote expresses his concern:

God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?²⁶

²³ John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015), 329.

²⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 88.

²⁵ Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 2.

²⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), 181-82.

The tone of Nietzsche's appeal is not gleeful but severe and dark. He does not declare victory but contends for a consistent application of the Enlightenment's detachment from god. Nietzsche exhorts those who have sloughed off the chains of religion to have the courage to follow the logical consequences of their actions.

Enlightenment philosophers still needed to complete the modern shift. There are necessary metaphysical and moral consequences to detaching from god. Nietzsche understood that the consequences were costly, and he knew that his project would cause damage and pitch old assumptions into chaos. In his autobiography, he confesses, "I know my fate. One day my name will be associated with the memory of something tremendous—a crisis without equal on earth, the most profound collision of conscience, a decision that was conjured up against everything that had been delivered, demanded, hallowed so far. I am no man, I am dynamite."²⁷ Nietzsche offers a two-part dismantlement of Enlightenment's suppositions. Though his works are many and vast in scope, his postmodern arguments can be summarized as (1) the dismantling of truth, nature, and morals and (2) the appeal to self-creation.

Nietzsche Dismantles Truth, Nature, and Morals

Nietzsche sought to end the idea that religion, or some belief in god, informs man's social imaginary. He challenged the conception that the world has any intrinsic meaning, arguing that "knowledge," or what we might call such, is purely a human creation; indeed, for Nietzsche, humans are in the habit of fabricating reality and classifying it as "truth."²⁸ Furthermore, Nietzsche believed that truth structures are an

²⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin Classics, 1992), 1.

²⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Falsity in an Extra-Moral Sense," in *Early Greek Philosophy and Other Essays*, ed. Oscar Levy, trans. M. A. Mugge (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), 2:44-46.

illusion based on language alone.²⁹ He asks, “Are not words and sounds rainbows and illusive bridges between things which are eternally apart?”³⁰ Garth Gillan summarizes Nietzsche on language: “Language is not anchored in things, names are illusive, because words dance over and around objects. The very pattern of that dance is enigmatic.”³¹ For this reason, Nietzsche argued that “we really ought to free ourselves from the seduction of words.”³² The subjectivity of language was only his starting point. Moving beyond language to objective truth in general, Nietzsche “claimed that no datum given to us enables us to determine the nature of everything. Rather, the world is a flux, a chaos, upon which we impose our will, in order to achieve our purposes.”³³

Nietzsche seems to be correct. If there is no god, there is no way to judge something true or false. Without a creator, then there is no way to judge something as natural or unnatural. According to Nietzsche, because objective truth is not available, all that is left is truth language that humankind attaches to statements that will serve their purposes. Nietzsche famously calls this the “will to power.”³⁴ Nietzsche opposed modernity by declaring that there are no facts, only interpretations.³⁵ Regarding everyday facts, he did believe in truth and falsity, but not when applied to general theories like philosophy, religion, and morality.³⁶ To summarize, Nietzsche argued that because god

²⁹ Nietzsche, “On Truth and Falsity in an Extra-Moral Sense,” 2:44-46.

³⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, trans. Thomas Common (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1999), 149.

³¹ Garth Gillan, “Foucault and Nietzsche: Affectivity and the Will to Power,” in *Postmodernism and Continental Philosophy*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman and Donn Welton (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), 135.

³² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1973), 91.

³³ Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 330.

³⁴ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967).

³⁵ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 14-15.

³⁶ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 272.

does not exist, metaphysical truths do not exist.³⁷ This conviction then led him to reject human nature altogether.

Trueman affirms that Nietzsche “would have acknowledged human nature as a biological reality, but biology is not metaphysical and does not allow for claims about how people should live or what purpose and destiny they all share.”³⁸ Therefore, though Nietzsche did not deny biology, he argued that the “is” of biology does not lead to any “ought” based on human nature. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche expresses his denial of human nature:

Man has been educated by his errors. First, he always saw himself only incompletely; second, he endowed himself with fictitious attributes; third, he placed himself in a false order of rank in relation to animals and nature; fourth, he invented ever new tables of goods and always accepted them for a time as eternal and unconditional: as a result of this, now one and now another human impulse and state held first place and was ennobled because it was esteemed so highly. If we removed the effects of these four errors, we should also remove humanity, humaneness, and “human dignity.”³⁹

Nietzsche claims that throughout the modern period, humans have made inaccurate assumptions about themselves. These assumptions have created fictitious conclusions such as the notion that mankind possesses a nature unique vis-à-vis the animal kingdom and inherent dignity.

According to Nietzsche, these conclusions led to humans’ enslaving themselves and others to moral codes based on an inherent human nature that does not, in actuality, exist. His abandonment of human nature necessarily led to the denial of objective ethics. The Enlightenment constructed an “objectivist” understanding of ethics, and there was an assumption that ethics were not produced by humans but discovered based on a transcendent reality. Nietzsche believed that religion, and Christianity in

³⁷ Or at the very least, they cannot be known.

³⁸ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 173.

³⁹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 174.

particular, was guilty of using the idea of “god” to enforce personal morality on others: “Out of this erroneous perspective on all things one makes a morality, a virtue, a holiness for oneself, one unites the good conscience with seeing falsely—one demands that no other kind of perspective shall be accorded any value after one has rendered one’s own sacrosanct with the names ‘God,’ ‘redemption,’ ‘eternity.’”⁴⁰ Therefore, according to Nietzsche, Christian truth claims are statements of desire—proclamations of how the Christian wants the world to be—to suit a particular purpose.⁴¹

In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche communicates most of his thoughts on morals without offering an ethical theory;⁴² instead, as Alasdair MacIntyre notes, “he proposed an abandonment of theory.”⁴³ Nietzsche attempts to show that morals change in every culture and are culturally created and not objective. He counsels that humanity would do better to disremember the past and cultivate “the art and power of forgetting.”⁴⁴ MacIntyre says that the task of the genealogist

was to write the history of those social and psychological formations in which the will to power is distorted into and concealed by the will to truth. The specific task of the genealogist of morality was to trace both socially and conceptually how rancor and resentment on the part of the inferior destroyed the aristocratic nobility of archaic heroes and substitutes a priestly set of values in which a concern for purity and impurity provided a disguise for malice and hate.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and the Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 2003), 132.

⁴¹ Nietzsche spoke of Christianity’s guilt, in particular, in using truth language to assert power and create fabricated meaning to one’s life. He believed that religion was the primary way individuals reconciled a self-created purpose to life. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he asserts that Christianity spreads “sunshine over such eternally tormented people and makes them bearable even to themselves.” Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 61.

⁴² Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Robert C. Holub (London: Penguin Classics, 2014).

⁴³ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 49.

⁴⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 10.

⁴⁵ MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, 39-40.

Hence, Nietzsche attempts to dismantle objective morality by assigning ulterior motives to people—typically Christian men and women—who purport such a morality. If “god is dead” and, therefore, no innate human nature exists, and if objective morality is fiction, then what remains for human life?

Nietzsche’s work is overwhelmingly negative, tearing down structures of modernity; however, if there is a positive contribution, a proposal of sorts, then it is his appeal to self-creation.

Nietzsche Appeals for Self-Creation

Nietzsche saw what Enlightenment philosophers did not—that the elimination of god removes creation with its order, meaning, and telos. He is, therefore, sometimes assumed to be a nihilist. However, this is not the case. Alternatively, the majority of his life’s work is an attempt to avoid nihilism as the only alternative to god’s existence. Ken Gemes states that “the postmodern rejection of all authority, all principle of order among the competing modes of representation, presents the very nihilism that Nietzsche predicts, and warns against, as a natural result of the defeat of dogmatism. For Nietzsche there is still room for an immanent authority, an authority that comes from within.”⁴⁶ Thus, although he rejected knowable truth, objective morality, and human nature, Nietzsche did not see human life as meaningless. Though he rejected the notion that meaning comes from the transcendent, he appealed for a meaning that comes from the imminent.

If god is dead, then, according to Nietzsche, the only alternative is for humans to self-create meaning “that takes on the status of being absolute and from there orders the life of citizens.”⁴⁷ Nietzsche, using his typical playful language, pleads to himself, “I

⁴⁶ Ken Gemes, “Postmodernism’s Use and Abuse of Nietzsche,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* LXII, no. 2 (March 2001): 342.

⁴⁷ Goudzwaard and Bartholomew, *Beyond the Modern Age*, 60.

must go on dreaming lest I perish. . . . [A]pppearance is the active and living itself.”⁴⁸ The project of self-creation was tremendously important to Nietzsche, as shown by the subtitle of his autobiography *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche asks, “What does your conscience say?” He answers, “You must become who you are.”⁴⁹ He advocates for the creation of truth for oneself:

“Truth” is. . . not something there, that might be found or discovered—but something that must be created and that gives a name to a process, or rather to a will to overcome that has in itself no end—introducing truth as a *processus in infinitum*, an active determining—not a becoming conscious of something that is in itself firm and determined.⁵⁰

Nietzsche did not advocate for a life disconnected from others or values contradictory to the rest of society. Rather, based on his rejection of objective values received from the past, he argued that the new man, the strong man, is the man who works hard to create new values and purposes and then seeks to live by them for the good of self and society.⁵¹

Trueman explains that the rejection of human nature “paved the way for the plausibility of the idea that human beings are plastic creatures with no fixed identity founded on an intrinsic and ineradicable essence.”⁵² Plastic creatures can reimagine and re-create themselves into something better.⁵³ According to Nietzsche, humans can and ought to create meaning and values. If convinced that they are free from any metaphysical restraints imposed on them, then they are free from the essentialism of modernity and prepared for self-creation.

⁴⁸ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 54.

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 270.

⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 552.

⁵¹ For more information on the depths and nuance of Nietzsche’s self-creation see Paul Franco, “Becoming Who You Are: Nietzsche on Self-Creation,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 49, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 52-77.

⁵² Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 167.

⁵³ Foucault will take Nietzsche’s idea of self-creation and will repurpose and expand it far beyond anything that Nietzsche intended.

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche envisions the individual human as an artist:

One thing is needful—to give style to one’s character—a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. Here a large mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of original nature has been removed—both times through long practice and daily work at it Here the ugly that could not be removed is concealed: there is has be reinterpreted and made sublime For one thing is needful: that a human being should attain satisfaction with himself, whether it be by means of this or that poetry and art.⁵⁴

In short, we can and should make ourselves into a better version of ourselves. Once again, this is what Nietzsche calls the “will to power.” Paramount to human life, Nietzsche believed, was the desire to be perfect and transcend the self via creative performances rather than dependence on anything outside the self. Furthermore, he considered things to have value only to the extent that we give them value.⁵⁵ The aim of the individual should be self-preservation and self-promotion.⁵⁶ Humans are free, Nietzsche says, to seek their greatness, aspiring to be *Übermenschen* (“supermen”) who can achieve what the “herd” cannot.⁵⁷ In summary, god is dead, man can become god himself, and man must become the author of his meaning and values.

The connection between Nietzsche’s ideas and transgender ideology is evident. Transgender identities are plausible only if truth is subjective, human nature is detached from anything transcendent, morality is not objective, and self-creation is the goal of human life. Yet, Nietzsche is only the point of departure in the lineage of transgender ideology, and his ideas have been repackaged and reappropriated and delivered to our moment in history by others. The next historical figure in the lineage is French philosopher Michel Foucault, who sexualized Nietzsche’s ideas.

⁵⁴ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 232-33.

⁵⁵ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 241-42.

⁵⁶ See Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 92.

⁵⁷ See Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

Michel Foucault

One of the most recognizable traits of postmodernity is the analysis of language, specifically, how language and power relate. Michel Foucault is best known for his analyses of this relationship. He is deeply anti-progressive in his view of history. He denied the progressive optimism of the Enlightenment and spent most of his adult life writing and speaking against its structures. He understood “truth” language and identity categories expressed in language as oppressive toward the marginalized, specifically, homosexuals, women, the criminally insane, non-whites, and prisoners. Foucault’s work as a homosexual was personal.⁵⁸ In the 1960s, he lived in a heteronormative culture wherein he and his lifestyle were “other” and unnatural.

With his homosexual lifestyle and Nietzschean inspiration, Foucault became Nietzsche’s messenger to a Western culture already experiencing the early stages of the sexual revolution. Foucault sexually appropriated Nietzschean philosophy and influenced the West, particularly academia, in profound ways regarding sexuality and identity. To be fair to Nietzsche and his ideas, a demarcation between he and Foucault is needed. Indeed, Foucault himself admits to taking Nietzsche’s work and reappropriating it for his own purposes:

I am tired of people studying [Nietzsche] only to produce the same kind of commentaries that are written on Hegel or Mallarmé. For myself, I prefer to utilize the writers I like. The only valid tribute to a thought such as Nietzsche’s is precisely to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest. And if commentators then say that I am being faithful or unfaithful to Nietzsche, that is of absolutely no importance.⁵⁹

Though Nietzsche and his ideas heavily influenced Foucault, the connection between the two should be nuanced enough so that Nietzsche is not somehow held responsible for

⁵⁸ Foucault would not classify himself as a “homosexual.” He was against all such identity language. However, he had a long-term male partner and was known only to pursue sexual relationships with men.

⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, “Prison Talk,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Vintage, 1980), 53-54.

what Foucault fashioned with his ideas. Above all, Foucault followed Nietzsche's strategy: (1) dismantle truth, nature, and morals and (2) appeal to self-creation.

Foucault Dismantles Truth, Nature, and Morals

Where Nietzsche began with the death of god, Foucault begins with what he calls "archaeology."⁶⁰ His historical method does not look at overarching historical narratives but focuses on specific events that have taken place in history. Foucault did not believe in historical narratives, even arguing against the existence of such things. He calls these single snapshots in history "archaeologies." He explains his method thus: "Instead of deducing concrete phenomena from universals, or instead of starting with universals as an obligatory grid of intelligibility for certain concrete practices, I would like to start with these concrete practices and, as it were, pass these universals through the grid of these practices."⁶¹ Foucault rejects the deduction of universals from history and rejects the explanation of history's happenings by universals. He intends to look at a particular event from the past and compare it to another—more recent—event.

Foucault begins with "archaeology" and later develops a "genealogy." His genealogical method follows Nietzsche's method, which he calls by the same name. Foucault uses his work *History of Madness* to develop an archaeology then uses *Discipline and Punish* to develop his genealogy. His goal in using "archaeology" is to show that in any given period in human history, there are considerable limitations on how people can think and speak. By reflecting upon historical examples of classification language, Foucault argues that the creation of taxonomies is arbitrary and used for power.

⁶⁰ See Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, ed. Jean Khalfa, trans. Jonathan Murphy (New York: Routledge, 2006); Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage, 1973); Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Les Mots (New York: Vintage, 1973); Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge: And the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage, 1972).

⁶¹ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2004), 3.

The limitations of knowledge that Foucault sees in human history are called “epistemes,” the concept that he introduces in *The Order of Things*. “Epistemes” describe “the most important rules governing the formation of ideas in a given historical context.”⁶² Specifically, an “episteme” is the attempt to bring to light the epistemological field:

In this knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility . . . Such an enterprise is not so much a history, in the traditional meaning of that word, as an “archaeology.”⁶³

Put more succinctly, an “episteme” is an epistemological field that produces knowledge according to particular rules.

Foucault’s method of “archaeology” reveals differing “epistemes” throughout history. Foucault uses this method to show that there is no objective truth or objective morality. He uses archaeology to highlight that cultures from the past have interpreted societal happenings in divergent ways from more contemporary cultures. As Nietzsche used genealogy to show the progression of morality, Foucault uses archaeology to show the progression of classification language. Where Nietzsche sought to prove that objective morality is not absolute, Foucault seeks to prove that the language used to identify groups of people is not objective and, therefore, should be rejected. However, Foucault will turn to genealogy in *Discipline and Punish* to show, as Nietzsche did, the moral dimension of his work.

In *History of Madness*, Foucault provides a snapshot of behaviors and practices leading to a taxonomy of “madness.” He rejects the supposition that “madness” is an objective category transcending time and culture. He asks, “If we suppose that it (a universal concept of madness) does not exist, then what can history make of these

⁶² Christopher Watkin, *Michel Foucault*, Great Thinkers (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2018), 13.

⁶³ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xxiii-xxiv.

different events and practices which are apparently organized around something that is supposed to be madness?”⁶⁴

Foucault juxtaposes the Renaissance (pre-modern/pre-Enlightenment) understanding of madness with the classical (modern/Enlightenment) understanding. During the Renaissance, he argues, madness was viewed “as a transient stage through which one could pass.” In contrast, the classical age “considered it a one-way street: the mad could not be cured and were to be separated from the rest of the population, confined with other miscreants such as criminals, the licentious, and vagabonds.”⁶⁵ Moreover, whereas the mad were once seen to mock the delicacy of reason yet occupy a wisdom of their own, in more modern times, the mad are a danger to themselves and society, and the prescription is confinement in hospitals. Foucault understands the “madness” of the past and the “mental illness” of the present as synonymous. The taxonomy of “madness” does not seem to have a universal, ahistorical meaning but appears culturally defined.

Foucault cites the story of Philippe Pinel’s protest during the French Revolution. Philippe protested the chaining of the mad like animals. Foucault quotes the story:

Turing to Pinel [Courthon said]: “Now citizen, are you mad yourself to seek to unchain such beasts?” Pinel replied calmly: “Citizen, I am convinced that these madmen are so intractable only because they have been deprived of air and liberty.” [Courthon replied] “Well, do as you like with them, but I fear you may become the victim of your own presumption.” Whereupon, Courthon was taken to his carriage Everyone breathed again; the great philanthropist immediately set to work.⁶⁶

Foucault disagrees with this assessment. He rejects the idea that Pinel is a hero, and he believes this story portrays the falsity that unchaining the “mad” and placing them in an institution is compassionate. While the story presents Pinel and others like him who have

⁶⁴ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 3.

⁶⁵ Watkin, *Michel Foucault*, 23.

⁶⁶ Scipion [Philippe] Pinel, *Traité complet du régime sanitaire des aliénés* (Paris, 1836), 56, quoted in Foucault, *History of Madness*, 242.

rejected past superstitions as advocates of Enlightened science-based treatment, Foucault says, “The truth was quite different.”⁶⁷ He maintains this view because he believes that the unchaining of the “mad” to the supervision and medical treatment of the asylum for therapy was purported to make the madman “feel morally responsible for everything in him that may disturb morality and society, and must hold no one but himself responsible.”⁶⁸

This seems like a strange reaction to a humanitarian effort; however, for Foucault, the asylum represented a facade for “the great continuity of social morality.”⁶⁹ According to Foucault, therapy for the “mad” was not a space for objective observation and aid but a space where the “prisoner” would be morally judged for not living in line with social norms. The asylum, Foucault says, “is not a free realm of observation, diagnosis, and therapeutics” but one where the previously chained is now “imprisoned in a moral world.”⁷⁰ Foucault considers the “mad” a “credible challenge to normalcy.”⁷¹ He rejects the ideas of normalcy, nature, and morality; therefore, classification language attributed to an individual is an act of power used to control the individual.

Foucault denies personal labels of any kind, believing that personal taxonomies are for power and control. His denial of labels is the goal of his archaeological work. He uses the historical understanding of “madness,” knowing that modern man will agree that usage of the term has not been consistent, to prove that all personal labels are arbitrary and abusive. Foucault remains consistent, even saying about himself, “Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same Let us leave it to our bureaucrats and our

⁶⁷ Foucault, *History of Madness*, 243.

⁶⁸ Foucault, *History of Madness*, 246.

⁶⁹ Foucault, *History of Madness*, 257.

⁷⁰ Foucault, *History of Madness*, 269.

⁷¹ Gary Gutting, *Foucault: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 69.

police to see that our papers are in order.”⁷² Moreover, he attempts to have no fixed identity and “writes in order to have no face.”⁷³ His ultimate archaeological aim is to question whether language can communicate truth. He asks, “What relation is there between language and being, and is it really to being that language is always addressed?”⁷⁴

Foucault’s treatment of madness should not be confused with particular care for the mentally ill. Instead, he uses this example to serve the greater goal of questioning and rejecting all objective taxonomies. If “madness” does not have an objective, non-progressive meaning, then do any human concepts? Is any truth objective? This sowing of doubt is Foucault’s aim. He follows Nietzsche in questioning truth. While Foucault’s archaeological work has sought to undermine truth, his genealogical work, like Nietzsche’s, will center on morality and power.

Discipline and Punish is where Foucault works out his genealogy, following Nietzsche’s lead. With genealogy, he pivots to show how arbitrary truth claims lead to power and social control over human bodies. Foucault describes his shift from archaeology to genealogy: “Consequently, I left the problem of causes to one side; I chose instead to confine myself to describing the transformations themselves, thinking that this would be an indispensable step if, one day, a theory of scientific change and epistemological causality was to be constructed.”⁷⁵ In other words, Foucault progresses beyond identifying truth claims as false to showing the harmful effects of those truth claims on human bodies.

⁷² Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 17.

⁷³ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 17.

⁷⁴ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 306.

⁷⁵ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xiii.

Focusing on the effects on human bodies is how Foucault reappropriates and sexualizes Nietzsche's work. By focusing on the effects truth claims have on human bodies, he appropriates Nietzsche's denial of truth to sexual minorities. What ultimately binds Nietzsche and Foucault is their belief that objective truth claims are fictitious and used to wield power over people. Foucault, however, employs this theory in a very particular fashion, a way in which Nietzsche would not have thought of a hundred years earlier. Foucault uses this theory to show the use of knowledge as power against people's bodies. His work *Discipline and Punish* is not concerned with language alone but with the power that comes with language and changes the world.

Foucault begins *Discipline and Punish* with a horrific story:

On March 2 1757 Damiens the regicide was condemned "to make the amende honorable before the main door of the Church of Paris," where he was to be "taken and conveyed in a cart, wearing nothing but a shirt, holding a torch of burning wax weighing two pound"; then, "in the said cart, to the Place de Greve, where, on a scaffold that will be erected there, the flesh will be torn from his breasts, arms, thighs and calves with red-hot pincers, his right hand, holding the knife with which he committed the said parricide, burnt with sulfur, and, on those places where the flesh will be torn away, poured molten lead, boiling oil, burning resin, wax and sulfur melted together and then his body drawn and quartered by four horses and his limbs and body consumed by fire, reduced to ashes and his ashes thrown to the winds."⁷⁶

For effect, Foucault wants his reader to experience the horrendous nature of the punishment meted out on a man who attempted to assassinate King Louis XV. He compares this story with the later treatment of prisoners, quoting rules from a detention center in Paris just eighty years after the punishment of Damiens: "The prisoner's day will begin at six in the morning in winter and five in the summer. They will work for nine hours a day throughout the year. Two hours a day will be devoted to instruction. Work

⁷⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 3. Robert-Francois Damiens unsuccessfully attempted to kill King Louis XV on January 5, 1757. Condemned as a regicide, Damiens died on March 28, 1757.

and the day will end at nine o'clock in winter and at eight in the summer."⁷⁷ Foucault concludes, "We have, then, a public execution and a time-table."⁷⁸

In juxtaposing these two punishments from less than a century apart, Foucault shows the change in practice between the brutal punishment of one prisoner to the non-violent punishment of many. An Enlightenment philosopher would call this progress, but Foucault, as one might expect, disagrees. He did not condone the beating of Damians; however, he does not believe the later more "humanitarian" treatment of prisoners is any more civilized. Foucault thinks the point of this more contemporary treatment is "not punish less" but "punish better."⁷⁹ "Better punishment" is Foucault's sarcastic way of saying "more control of a person's body." To kill a prisoner is to eliminate him, but to "discipline" is to control his body.

Foucault identifies four significant shifts in criminal punishment from the pre-modern world to the modern world: (1) punishment is no longer a public display; (2) what is punished is no longer the crime but the criminal; (3) "experts" are depended upon to judge the type and severity of the punishment; and (4) punishment is no longer retribution but reform and rehabilitation of the criminal.⁸⁰ Foucault concludes that the essential shift is that modern punishment requires an inner transformation of the criminal. He believes this is an attempt to control the soul imprisoned inside the body.⁸¹ For Foucault, the modern approach to discipline is to produce "docile bodies."⁸² Foucault accuses modern Western society of desiring to control bodies to do what is right and do it in precisely the right way.

⁷⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 6.

⁷⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 7.

⁷⁹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 82.

⁸⁰ Gutting, *Foucault*, 78.

⁸¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 30.

⁸² Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 138.

Foucault uses Jeremy Bentham's panopticon as the image of society's desire to control every area of human life. Bentham's idea of a perfect prison involves architecture designed so that guards can always see inside the inmate's cells without the inmates knowing precisely when they are being observed. When an inmate acts wrongly, punishment follows; therefore, the inmates are forced continually to act as if they are being watched to avoid punishment for wrongdoing. Foucault calls this "the deployment of force and the establishment of truth";⁸³ the result of such observation and control will "induce in the inmate a state of consciousness and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power."⁸⁴ Foucault's concern is not primarily with prisons or inmates, rather, he believes it is a microcosm of how society is constructed. Arbitrary truths have been created, and to keep normalcy in a given culture, these truths will be enforced, and as a result, bodies will be controlled.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault makes his sexual pivot. He takes his concepts from *Discipline and Punish* and applies them to sexual-bodied experiences. His earlier emphasis on marginal groups now focuses on one: sexual minorities, specifically, homosexuals. He believes the same body control of prisoners is being levied against people in the modern discourse on sexuality: "The notion of 'sex' made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, pleasures; and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning, a secret to be discovered everywhere."⁸⁵ In other words, Foucault understood modern medicalized discourse on sex "as the entry point for the 'surveillance' and regulation of individual bodies and of populations."⁸⁶ He follows

⁸³ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 184.

⁸⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 201.

⁸⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 154.

⁸⁶ Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics*, New Studies in Christian Ethics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21.

his methodology in *History of Madness* by claiming that classification language, understood as truth language, is used to label and condemn.

Foucault believed that speech—taxonomy language—about sexual identity always includes “forbidden words” about sexuality.⁸⁷ Aggressively rejecting sexual identity language, Foucault refused to accept the identity classification of “homosexual” for himself. Importantly, he considered the acceptance of the label as an acknowledgment of heteronormativity.⁸⁸ In other words, though Foucault himself was a homosexual, he rejected the label because it suggested that his desires were unusual and unnatural. Lisa Sowle Cahill summarizes Foucault’s position on sexual identity: “The very notion of ‘sexuality’ is a historical construct, deployed in the service of bourgeois power.”⁸⁹ Therefore, a fixed nature described by language is not objective and should be avoided. Just as Nietzsche denied any fixed human nature, Foucault followed suit, focusing specifically on sexual identity. He believed that one could not tell the truth about oneself because one would have to use culturally created identity language that lacked objectivity: “If I tell the truth about myself . . . , it is in part that I am constituted as a subject across a number of power relations which are exerted over me and which I exert over others.”⁹⁰ To use modern-day terminology, Foucault would not celebrate a man or woman’s “coming out of the closet” and announcing their homosexual identity—because to label oneself “gay” is to say something fixed about oneself, which is speech that aims to control the body.

Just as Nietzsche rejected any objective human nature in *The Gay Science*, Foucault rejects any objective sexual nature in his numerous works on the subject.

⁸⁷ Michel Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion and Robert Hurley (New York: The New Press, 1994), 70.

⁸⁸ “Heteronormativity” is a pejorative term used to classify the attempt to make heterosexuality normal and natural and to make homosexuality abnormal and unnatural.

⁸⁹ Cahill, *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics*, 22.

⁹⁰ Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 452.

Following Nietzsche's lead once again, Foucault turns from nature to morality. Any taxonomy language about sexuality, according to Foucault, necessarily reckons some actions righteous and others wicked. In *History of Sexuality*, he cites the story of Charles Jouy, a 40-year-old rural farmer in France in the 1860s. He was known as the village idiot and was often mocked by women when he showed romantic or sexual interest. One young girl, Sophie Adam, agreed to play a game of masturbation with him.⁹¹ This game resulted in Charles Jouy pulling Sophie Adam into a ditch and nearly raping her. Foucault's commentary on this story indicates his lack of any sexual morality. He describes this activity as "harmless embraces" made to be more because Adam's mother found out and reported Jouy. He was found guilty of no crimes; however, he was diagnosed as an "imbecile" and confined to an asylum for the rest of his life.⁹²

Foucault's response is unexpected:

What is the significant thing about this story? The pettiness of it all; the fact that this everyday occurrence in the life of village sexuality, these inconsequential bucolic pleasures, could become, from a certain time, the object not only of a collective intolerance but of a judicial action, a medical intervention, a careful clinical examination, and an entire theoretical elaboration.⁹³

His response to such an event expresses his rejection of objective sexual ethics. He argues that from the eighteenth century, "same-sex intercourse was seen in terms of the difference between the active and the passive partner or as an expression of libertinage."⁹⁴ However, Foucault purports, "what dates from the nineteenth century is the idea that homosexual practice is an expression of the deepest identity of the persons involved: an act (sodomy) is replaced with an identity (homosexuality)."⁹⁵ Foucault

⁹¹ Foucault claims that this game was typical among the people in the village at the time.

⁹² Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1:32.

⁹³ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1:31.

⁹⁴ Watkin, *Michel Foucault*, 62.

⁹⁵ Watkin, *Michel Foucault*, 62.

avers, “The homosexual was now a species.”⁹⁶ He believed so strongly that sexual identity is dangerous and is used by those in power to seek maliciously to control bodies that he fought to decriminalize sex with minors in France.⁹⁷

Foucault rejected objective classification language in order to reject fixed human nature in order to reject objective sexual ethics. Following Nietzsche’s lead, he also saw Christianity as the cause of the perpetuation of such fictitious truth claims. In particular, he believed that the practice of confession, propagated by Christianity, was the primary vehicle used to control bodies:

Confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one’s crimes, one’s sins, one’s thoughts and desires, one’s illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. The most defenseless tenderness and the bloodiest of powers have a similar need of confession. Western man has become a confessing animal.⁹⁸

Foucault’s issue with Christian confession was that it assumes a stable, standard human nature and renders any deviation from that nature abnormal and sinful. He saw Christianity as another power source where arbitrary truths are fashioned to control sexual bodies. Specifically, he understood Christian confession to be the “public or private witness against oneself.”⁹⁹

Ultimately, Foucault argues for authentic living. He believes any lifestyle, actions, or identities imposed upon an individual is inauthentic and should be challenged and rejected. Foucault describes this as the “power of normalization,” an inconspicuous

⁹⁶ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1:43.

⁹⁷ Abigail Favale, *The Genesis of Gender: A Christian Theory* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2022), 76.

⁹⁸ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1:59.

⁹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: The New Press, 1994), 242.

power that excludes persons or groups.¹⁰⁰ The power of normalization commands that all must behave as “normal” people.¹⁰¹ Again using Nietzsche’s framework, Foucault’s battle for authentic living is a battle for self-creation. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche describes the individual as an artist who, having no nature and needing to adhere to no objective truth, should create himself to become the *Übermensch*. Foucault reappropriates Nietzsche’s appeal for self-creation, and his refashioning becomes the telos of his work, all of which was a construction designed to accomplish this purpose.

Foucault Appeals for Self-Creation

Foucault, in keeping with his Nietzschean denial of fixed human nature, objective truth, and objective sexual morality, has two options: either (1) accept nihilism or (2) appeal to individuals to create their own identity and telos in the world. He, of course, elects for the latter. Christopher Watkin explains Foucault’s self-creation: “The ethic of self-transformation starts from the position that there is no deep truth of the individual, no essence waiting to be discovered and named: sex is not the object of the discourse of sexuality, but its product.”¹⁰² In other words, for Foucault, there is no human nature, just actions and desires to be enjoyed. There is no need for individuals to seek out hidden truths about themselves; instead, humans should accept the task of creating their identity, particularly their sexual identity.¹⁰³

Foucault articulates his project of self-creation: “To be modern is not to accept oneself as one is in the flux of the passing moments; it is to take oneself as an object of a complex and difficult elaboration Modern man . . . is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent

¹⁰⁰ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 185.

¹⁰¹ Goudzwaard and Bartholomew, *Beyond the Modern Age*, 74.

¹⁰² Watkin, *Michel Foucault*, 63.

¹⁰³ “Hidden truth,” here, refers to some knowledge of humanity’s received and fixed-nature.

himself.”¹⁰⁴ When all entanglements of Enlightenment rationale—all claims of truth, nature, and morality—have been sloughed off, humans are finally free to create themselves how they see fit. Thus, identity is not received but created. Angela Franks says that, for Foucault, self-creation is about “bodies and pleasures [I]t does not matter if bodies are male or female; they are all just raw material for anonymous couplings.”¹⁰⁵

Consistent with Nietzschean language, Foucault expresses this project as one by which “we create ourselves as a work of art.”¹⁰⁶ The centrality of self-creation for Foucault and his work is evident in a 1982 interview where he says, “The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning.”¹⁰⁷ This notion applies, most specifically, to bodies and acts done with and to bodies. As a homosexual, he most often applies this concept to his situation: “We don’t have to discover that we are homosexuals We have to create a gay life.”¹⁰⁸

Though Foucault was heavily influenced by Nietzsche’s ideas, a demarcation between what each man purported about “self-creation” is essential. Daniel Nica summarizes their differences: “Whereas for Nietzsche, the purpose was the enhancement of life and creativity of strong individuals to the inevitable detriment of those weak and vulnerable, for Foucault, the purpose was, conversely, to give the fragile and vulnerable

¹⁰⁴ Michel Foucault, *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: The New Press, 1994), 311.

¹⁰⁵ Angela Franks, “Humanae Vitae in Light of the War against Female Fertility,” *Church Life Journal*, July 24, 2018, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/humanae-vitae-in-light-of-the-war-against-female-fertility/>.

¹⁰⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 351.

¹⁰⁷ Michel Foucault, “Truth, Power, Self,” interview by R. Martin recorded on October 25th, 1982, in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), <https://foucault.info/documents/foucault.truthPowerSelf/>.

¹⁰⁸ Foucault, *Ethics*, 163.

subject a weapon of resistance against domination.”¹⁰⁹ One might rightly conclude that though Foucault received his concept and framework of “self-creation” from Nietzsche, Foucault’s reappropriated version of “self-creation” was shaped for the victim where Nietzsche’s “self-creation” would inevitably create more victims. Nietzsche’s “self-creation” is about self-enhancement; Foucault’s is a weapon against domination. Nietzsche’s project was to “become who we are—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves!”¹¹⁰ Foucault’s project was to create a “hotbed of resistance for the otherwise fragile and vulnerable subjects.”¹¹¹ Whereas Nietzsche’s project is in the affirmative—an active philosophical life, Foucault’s project is in the negative—a reactive philosophical life.¹¹²

The differences between their “self-creation” projects are well-defined, yet it remains difficult to overstate Nietzsche’s impact on Foucault. Foucault utilized the very structure of Nietzsche’s argument in his work: (1) the denial of objective truth, (2) the denial of human nature, (3) the denial of objective morality, and (4) the appeal to self-creation. Foucault took this structure and formulated his unique victim-focused, sexualized version. The connection between the ideas of Foucault and Nietzsche and transgender ideology is evident. Transgender identities are possible only if truth is subjective, human nature is denied, morality is not objective, and self-creation is the goal of human life. However, Foucault is only one step beyond Nietzsche in the lineage of transgender ideology. His ideas have been repackaged and delivered to our moment in history by others. Odd as it may seem, a particular type of feminism has contributed to the success of transgender ideology, and Foucault was its source.

¹⁰⁹ Daniel Nica, “Nietzsche and Foucault on Self-Creation: Two Different Projects,” *Annals of the University of Bucharest: Philosophy Series* 64, no. 1 (2015): 22.

¹¹⁰ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 241.

¹¹¹ Nica, “Nietzsche and Foucault on Self-Creation,” 36.

¹¹² Nica, “Nietzsche and Foucault on Self-Creation,” 37.

Feminism and Judith Butler

A reasonable challenge to this chapter's argument might be to question the significance and reach of Michel Foucault's ideas. He is certainly not a household name, as most Americans have never heard of him. Therefore, why do his thoughts have any consequence on society's acceptance and celebration of transgender ideology? The answer is that though a relative unknown in popular culture, Foucault is one of the most-cited twentieth-century thinkers and, according to some metrics, the most-cited figure across the social sciences and humanities.¹¹³ In 2016, according to one metric, Foucault was named the all-time most-cited author across all academic fields.¹¹⁴ Christopher Watkin says, "His reach is broad as it is deep: the Library of Congress Online lists 1,299 books partially or wholly on Foucault, including titles such as *Foucault and Law*, *Foucault and Geography*, *Foucault and Classical Antiquity*, *Foucault and Education*, *Foucault and Fiction*, *Foucault and Religion*, and *Foucault and Aging*."¹¹⁵

Foucault's influence is far-reaching in academia; however, perhaps the academic discipline most influenced by Foucault is gender studies. His influence on feminism becomes evident through a cursory reading of feminist literature. For example, Foucault's use of Bentham's panopticon in *Discipline and Punish* is one of feminism's most-borrowed concepts. From the feminist perspective, the panopticon represents how women are observed and judged by a patriarchal culture—power is exercised through the perpetual male gaze.¹¹⁶ Moreover, the overall argument that Foucault made about the structures of power designed to control bodies is operative for feminist ideology.

¹¹³ Colin Koopman, "Why Foucault's Work on Power Is More Important than Ever," *Aeon*, March 15, 2017, <https://aeon.co/essays/why-foucaults-work-on-power-is-more-important-than-ever>.

¹¹⁴ Watkin, *Michel Foucault*, xxi.

¹¹⁵ Watkin, *Michel Foucault*, xxi.

¹¹⁶ Monique Deveaux, "Feminism and Empowerment: A Critical Reading of Foucault," *Feminist Studies* 20, no. 2 (1994): 223-47.

Amy Allen, in her essay “Feminist Perspectives on Power,” says, “It should come as no surprise that so many feminists have drawn on Foucault’s analysis of power. Foucault’s analysis of power has arguably been the most influential discussion of the topic over the last forty years; even those theorists of power who are highly critical of Foucault’s work acknowledge this influence.”¹¹⁷ Foucault’s entire philosophy is motivated by the body as a site of power, leading Lisa Sowle Cahill to state, “No wonder that feminists find his work amenable, though he does not deal at any length with gender roles.”¹¹⁸ As shown above, Foucault believes that sex and sexuality, as concepts, are social power plays. While his iconoclastic style offers no alternative to power dynamics, contemporary feminism has grown into one of the most influential movements in the late twentieth century, mainly due to Michel Foucault and his work.¹¹⁹

A brief presentation of the history of feminism is necessary to fully appreciate Foucault’s influence in general and his influence on well-known feminist scholar Judith Butler in particular. After investigating Foucault’s influence on Butler, I will explain her advancements in feminism beyond Foucault. Once Butler’s contributions are evident, it will become unmistakable how her ideas have aided transgender ideology.

A Brief History of Feminism

Originally, feminism was a fight for equal rights. Whether in the voting booth or the workplace, feminism challenged the male-dominated culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Commonly known as a “first wave,” this iteration was not radical and not led by revolutionaries. The aim was equal legal representation. Second-

¹¹⁷ Amy Allen, “Feminist Perspectives on Power,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, Fall 2022 ed., Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, last modified October 28, 2021, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/feminist-power/>.

¹¹⁸ Cahill, *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics*, 22.

¹¹⁹ Aurelia Armstrong, “Michel Foucault: Feminism,” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed November 14, 2022, <https://iep.utm.edu/foucgefem/>.

wave feminism, erupting in the 1960s, was a movement characterized by a rethinking of women's roles in society, both at home and in the workplace. The fight of this variety of feminists was against biological determinism—the belief that the biological sex of a person should determine his or her role in society.

The most significant contribution of the second wave was the sex-gender distinction. By separating sex and gender, feminists could argue that a woman's biological sex does not confine her to specific activities in life; rather, gender (the way a person expresses their sex) can, and often does, vary. One example of biological determinism is that of Patrick Geddes and John Arthur Thompson in 1889.¹²⁰ They argued that social, psychological, and behavioral traits are metabolic.¹²¹ On the one hand, women, being anabolic,¹²² tend to conserve energy, causing them to be more passive, sluggish, stable, and uninterested in politics. On the other hand, men, being katabolic,¹²³ tend to be more aggressive, eager, passionate, and interested in political and social issues.¹²⁴ These arguments were used to deny women's voting power, workforce participation, and other social activities.

In order to combat these demeaning explanations that exclude women from large swaths of society, feminists appropriated the term “gender.” In 1968, psychologist Robert Stroller began using the term to explain why some felt trapped in the wrong body.¹²⁵ Employing “gender” in this way allowed Stroller to explain the phenomenon of

¹²⁰ See Toril Moi, *What Is a Woman? And Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 18.

¹²¹ “Metabolic” refers to the chemical changes that take place in an organism.

¹²² “Anabolic” refers to the storage of energy inside an organism.

¹²³ “Katabolic” refers to the releasing of energy inside an organism.

¹²⁴ Mari Mikkola, “Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, Fall 2022 ed., Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, last modified January 18, 2022, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/feminism-gender/>.

¹²⁵ R. J. Stroller, *Sex and Gender: On the Development of Masculinity and Femininity* (New York: Science House, 1968).

transsexuality, specifically that transsexuals' sex and gender do not match. For example, a biological male who possessed "feminine" qualities or desired "feminine" actions or roles could be classified as a biological male who possessed a "feminine" gender.

Second-wave feminists found this a valuable distinction for their cause. If a man can possess a female gender because of his mannerisms and desires, then gender is socially produced and changeable. In 1975, feministic anthropologist Gayle Rubin used the phrase "sex-gender system" to describe "a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention."¹²⁶ She found the sex-gender system to be "part of social life which is the locus of the oppression of women."¹²⁷ Beyond Rubin, throughout the 1970s, second-wave feminists began to deploy the sex-gender distinction to avoid the conflation of women and their duties. The distinction provided a way for feminists to talk about the biological reality of sex without acknowledging its connection to any necessary behavior or roles.

By the mid-1970s, second-wave feminism developed a new aim to create a "genderless society, in which one's sexual anatomy is irrelevant to who one is, what one does, and with whom one makes love."¹²⁸ Though her most famous work, *The Second Sex* (1949), was published about a decade before second-wave feminism, Simone de Beauvoir's radical views on sex and gender provided the transition from second- to third-wave feminism. Beauvoir not only agreed with the usefulness of the sex-gender distinction but also fashioned the distinction in new and radical ways.

If gender is nothing more than culturally constructed expectations foisted upon a person, then, according to Beauvoir, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic of Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 165.

¹²⁷ Rubin, "The Traffic of Women," 159.

¹²⁸ Rubin, "The Traffic of Women," 204.

¹²⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage, 2011), 283.

She vigorously denied fixed roles for women. Describing a woman's natural state, Beauvoir says, "To give birth and to breast-feed are not activities but natural functions; they do not involve a project, which is why the woman finds no motive there to claim a higher meaning for her existence; she passively submits to her biological reality."¹³⁰

Abigail Favale presents Beauvoir's description of a woman as follows: "She is an autonomous freedom trapped in a body that is designed to house an other. Her only hope is to fight against her facticity, always—to become as much like a man as possible."¹³¹

As stated, Beauvoir was ahead of her time. Judith Butler was the next prominent feminist scholar to pick up on her views, and eventually Butler's name would become synonymous with contemporary feminism.

Judith Butler

Though Simone de Beauvoir undoubtedly influenced her, Judith Butler's writings confirm that Foucault was her primary guide, making her a necessary figure in the lineage of transgender ideology.¹³² Nietzsche provided a path to avoid truth, human nature, and objective morality. Foucault reappropriated Nietzsche's ideas and sexualized them to provide a critique of a heteronormative society. Butler was the recipient of these two streams of thought and utilized both. She received Foucault's sexualized version of Nietzschean denials of truth, nature, and morals as well as second-wave feminism's sex-gender distinction. These two influences spawned Butler's third-wave feminism. This section will show the similarities between Foucault and Butler, specifically, their focus on language as power and their rejection of heteronormativity.

¹³⁰ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 73.

¹³¹ Favale, *The Genesis of Gender*, 65.

¹³² By tracing a path from Nietzsche to Foucault to Butler, I am not intending to argue that Butler did not receive direct influence from Nietzsche. There are numerous clear indications that Butler benefitted directly from Nietzsche's ideas, without Foucault as her mediator. For example, Arthur Kroker declares that "Judith Butler is Nietzsche in drag" in a chapter titled "Nietzsche in Drag in the Theater of Judith Butler; see Arthur Kroker, *Body Drift: Butler, Hayles, Haraway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 33.

Butler follows Foucault to argue that language in general, and classifications in particular, result in subjugation. Speaking of Foucault, Butler avers, “He understood that even the most noxious terms could be owned, that the most injurious interpretations could also be the site of radical reoccupation and resignification.”¹³³ What Foucault argued regarding taxonomies in general, Butler argues regarding women in particular. On the first page of her most famous book, *Gender Trouble*, she attributes the foundation of her work to Foucault’s ideas: “Foucault points out that juridical systems of power produce the subjects they subsequently come to represent.”¹³⁴ Butler contends that Foucault’s work provides feminists with the resources needed to think beyond the structure of “man” and “woman.” She is convinced that “feminism” has no meaning because the word “female” has no meaning.¹³⁵ Her Foucauldian poststructuralist foundation was laid. Suppose Foucault was right to challenge classification language because of its connection to power. In that case, the classification of “woman” should be challenged and rejected because it subjugates women. For Butler, defining “woman” is a power activity. If “women” are identified and defined, then expectations of “women” will be set.

One of Butler’s most well-known arguments is that gender is “performative.” She utilizes the sex-gender distinction of second-wave feminism to contend that gender is merely a social construct and not tethered to biological realities. In *Gender Trouble*, she says that gender identity is “a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance or a natural sort of being.”¹³⁶ In other words, gender is doing, not being. So committed to this novel idea of “gender,” Butler argues that “drag” is a powerful expression of gender:

¹³³ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 50.

¹³⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 2.

¹³⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 4.

¹³⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 33.

What drag exposes is the “normal” constitution of gender presentation in which the gender performed is in many ways constituted by a set of disavowed attachments or identifications that constitute a different domain of the “unperformable.” The straight man becomes (mimes, cites, appropriates, assumes the status of) the man he “never” loved and “never” grieved”; the straight woman becomes the woman she “never” loved and “never” grieved. It is in this sense, then, that what is most apparently performed as gender is the sign and symptom of a pervasive disavowal.¹³⁷

Butler sees gender differences as similar to differences between individuals, such as eye color, hair color, or height. Just as there is no connection between eye color and biological sex, so also there is no connection between gender and biological sex. “The body, for [Butler], exists—but as a blank slate, devoid of its own meaning, upon which social norms are etched.”¹³⁸ To Butler, genders are accurate only to the extent they are performed.¹³⁹

Butler not only follows Foucault’s rejection of taxonomy language but also rejects it for the same reason—to challenge and reject heteronormativity. Like Foucault, a homosexual, Butler, in *Undoing Gender*, argues that every proposition should be appraised not by evaluating its truth but by assessing whether it upholds sexual norms. She rebukes feminists who disagree with her rejection of classification language, saying their resistance would “risk naturalizing heterosexual reproduction.”¹⁴⁰ Butler, like Foucault, would like to make the normalization of heterosexual relationships a thing of the past. In order to do so, she argues that the idea that humans are split into one of two sex categories and biologically complementary is socially constructed.¹⁴¹ Abigail Favale

¹³⁷ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 235-36.

¹³⁸ Favale, *The Genesis of Gender*, 75.

¹³⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 278-79.

¹⁴⁰ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 11.

¹⁴¹ Favale, *The Genesis of Gender*, 73.

asks, “How does [Butler] reach that conclusion, which cuts against both common sense and scientific consensus?” She answers, “In a word: Foucault.”¹⁴²

Foucault rejected classification language because it leads to power structures that harmed minorities, specifically sexual minorities. Butler takes Foucault’s idea and applies it to the concepts of sex and gender. Foucault rejected terminology like “homosexual,” “gay,” and “heterosexual.” Butler goes further, rejecting the very classification of “sex” and “gender” and even denying that a sex binary exists:

Gender can denote a unity of experience, of sex, gender, and desire, only when sex can be understood in some sense to necessitate gender—where gender is a psychic and/or cultural designation of the self—and desire—where desire is heterosexual and therefore differentiates itself through an oppositional relation to that other gender it desires. The internal coherence of unity of either gender, man or woman, thereby requires both a stable and oppositional heterosexuality. That institutional heterosexuality both requires and produces the univocity of each of the gendered terms that constitute the limit of gendered possibilities within an oppositional, binary gender system.¹⁴³

This is Butler’s verbose way of asserting that the existence of the sexual binary is nothing more than a means of preserving heteronormativity.¹⁴⁴ She has taken Foucault’s rejection of truth derived from language and applied it to humanity’s most fundamental and historical conventions. For Butler, a culture that ceases to subjugate sexual minorities is a culture that rejects the very ideas of man, woman, male, female, masculine, and feminine.

Where Simone de Beauvoir drove a wedge between “woman” and “female,” arguing that “woman” is a cultural fiction added to the biological reality of femaleness, Butler expands beyond the distinction, claiming that “female” is no longer a stable notion.¹⁴⁵ Whereas second-wave feminism distinguished between biology (sex) and expected social roles and activities (gender), resulting in the contention that gender is a

¹⁴² Favale, *The Genesis of Gender*, 73.

¹⁴³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 22.

¹⁴⁴ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 364.

¹⁴⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, ix.

social construct, third-wave feminism considers *both* sex and gender to be socially constructed identities. Butler claims, “If the immutable character of sex is constructed, perhaps this construct of ‘sex’ is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all.”¹⁴⁶ She believes that perhaps gender is all that has ever been, meaning performance is all that has ever distinguished the “sexes”; therefore, not only is gender socially constructed, but sex is as well. Hence, Butler finds it unintelligible to continue distinguishing sex from gender, and in doing so, she denies any ontological status of sex or gender beyond various acts performed.

Butler extends her argument to the beginning of life in *Bodies That Matter*. She contends that “sex assignment” (calling someone female or male) is a normative practice but is merely an illocutionary speech act by the doctor: the doctor’s declarative utterance makes infants girls or boys.¹⁴⁷ Butler contends that infants come in different varieties with differing genitals, yet any identity classification thrust upon them is in some sense oppressive.¹⁴⁸

The second-wave concept of gender drove a wedge between body and social role, and Butler’s third-wave work drove a further wedge between body and identity. The body, according to Butler, no longer has authority over one’s identity; even the taxonomy of “sex” has been constructed to subjugate women in a patriarchal culture. As radical as her teaching may seem, Butler’s influence is extensive. Favale says, “I would argue that most adherents of the gender paradigm have unwittingly adopted a de facto Foucauldian worldview, inherited, at least in part, through trickle-down Judith Butler.”¹⁴⁹ So

¹⁴⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 10-11.

¹⁴⁷ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 1.

¹⁴⁸ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 28-29.

¹⁴⁹ Favale, *The Genesis of Gender*, 73.

influential has Butler been that universities have almost universally re-branded the academic discipline “women’s studies” as “gender studies” in her wake.¹⁵⁰

Conclusion: The End of the Road

Judith Butler’s ideas have been adopted and utilized by transgender ideology advocates. As seen in chapter 2, transgender ideology agrees with Butler that biological realities have no authority over a person’s identity; however, it differs in understanding “gender” not as a social construct but, as Abigail Favale summarizes, “as the sex of the soul, the innate manhood or womanhood that may or may not ‘align’ with the sex of the body. In this understanding, gender is decidedly not a mere construct, but is rather a pre-social reality, the inner truth against which the body must be measured.”¹⁵¹ Therefore, transgender ideology is an adaptation of Butler’s work wherein the body remains impotent to define identity; however, rather than following Butler’s lead on gender, transgender ideology deviates—it considers gender the foundational identity marker of the individual. By “gender,” transgender advocates do not intend the socially constructed concept of second-wave feminism but a new form, where gender is the true inward identity of the person. Butler would never have called this notion “gender,” but she would agree that the inward sense of self is where one’s identity lives.

The rejection of the classification of “woman” would have been inconceivable in first- and second-wave feminism. Nonetheless, with Foucault and Butler’s assistance, any sex classification based on biology was obliterated in the third wave. Even the sex-gender distinction of the second wave included a tethering to the body, but now all identity-forming biological markers have been rejected. There is irony in this development. As feminism has progressed, it has become more, not less, harmful to

¹⁵⁰ Helen Pluckrose and James A. Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody* (Durham, NC: Pitchstone, 2020), 155.

¹⁵¹ Favale, *The Genesis of Gender*, 150-51.

women. Presumably, the bulwark figures of first- and second-wave feminism would be horrified to see “men becoming women” and being granted entrance into women’s restrooms, locker rooms, prisons, and shelters as well as given permission to compete in women’s sports. The word “gender” was initially utilized to empower women, but now it has been redefined and refashioned to erase them.

This chapter has traced the historical development of transgender ideology. Nietzsche denied truth, human nature, and morals. Foucault reappropriated and sexualized Nietzschean thought to challenge heteronormativity. Butler took the sex-gender distinction from second-wave feminism and combined it with Foucault’s work in language and power. The outcome is that the project Nietzsche began—to construct a society consistent with the death of god—has developed into a postmodern construction resulting in the denial of the very concept of “man,” “woman,” “masculine,” and “feminine.” Identity is now detached from any biological indicators.

Moreover, the concept of gender has evolved from (1) a synonym for biological sex to (2) a sex-gender distinction wherein sex is biological and gender is a social construct based on expected roles and activities to (3) the denial that sex and gender possess any biological realities whatsoever to (4) the acceptance and celebration of biological men and biological women mutilating their bodies to align with their inner sense of identity, cleverly titled “gender.” This progression is only possible because of the obliteration of truth, human nature, and objective morality. The project Nietzsche began nearly 150 years ago has culminated in an ideology that even he could not have imagined.

CHAPTER 4

THE INCOHERENCE OF TRANSGENDER IDEOLOGY: A PHILOSOPHICAL REBUTTAL

Thus far, I have explained the transgender phenomenon by (1) defining concepts involved and stressing the rapid cultural acceptance and celebration of transgender identities (chap. 2) and (2) tracing the path that allowed for the possibility of transgender ideology (chap. 3). I explained that from Nietzsche to Foucault to Butler, transgender ideology was made possible by influential intellectuals over the past two hundred years. Chapter 2 revealed the need for a response, and chapter 3 explained how we arrived at our current societal state. In this chapter and the next, I will support the thesis of this dissertation: at its foundation, transgender identities result from an ideology that affirms (1) the existence of gender identity and (2) that gender can, and sometimes does, misalign with biological sex. This chapter will show the incoherency of transgender ideology from a philosophical perspective, and the next chapter will show its heterodoxy from a theological perspective.

To argue this thesis, this chapter will make the following three contentions from a philosophical perspective: (1) transgender identities resulting from a misalignment between sex and gender expression are constructed on rigid gender stereotypes and generalities; therefore, they should be rejected; (2) gender identity is not a coherent concept; therefore, transgender identities resulting from a misalignment between sex and gender identity should also be rejected and shown to be, in fact, based on rigid gender stereotypes and generalities; (3) the classification of “gender” is no longer helpful and should be avoided where possible. Thus, the following key discussions treat gender expression, gender identity, and the classification of gender.

When one surveys the explanations offered by individuals who identify as transgender, it becomes clear that there are two reasons why they feel their sex and gender misalign. Sometimes an individual gives a “gender expression” explanation, other times a “gender identity” explanation, for their misalignment. Though these are two separate concepts, they both originate from the same place: rigid gender stereotypes and generalities. This chapter will deal with gender expression first.

Gender Expression and Rigid Stereotypes and Generalities

As discussed earlier, the LGBT advocacy group GLAAD defines gender expression as “external manifestations of gender, expressed through a person’s name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behavior, voice, and/or body characteristics.”¹ Nicholas Teich, who identifies as a transgender male, defines it similarly: “Gender expression is the external representation of one’s gender identity, usually expressed through feminine or masculine behaviors and signals such as clothing, hair, movement, voice or body characteristics.”² In other words, gender expression is how a male or female expresses himself or herself as a male or female. This definition of gender is a basic second-wave feminist understanding of gender. By distinguishing between sex and gender (expression), feminists of the 1960s called gender a social construct and argued that women do not need to live up to these expectations. Rather than a prescription of what should be, gender expression describes what is culturally expected. Not all men and women express masculinity and femininity in the same way. However, transgender ideology has argued *for* the very thing that second-wave feminism argued *against*—that cultural expectations and generalities define a person as a man or woman.

¹ GLAAD, “GLAAD Media Reference Guide: Transgender People,” accessed November 7, 2019, <https://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>.

² Nicholas Teich, *Transgender 101: A Simple Guide to a Complex Issue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 6.

When a transgender identity results from an individual's gender expression (e.g., clothing, interests, hobbies), unavoidably, a sex-based generality or a manufactured stereotype is used determinatively by the individual. For example, in a culture that has embraced transgender ideology, when a biological male expresses himself in a way that a given society has determined to be feminine, he may be persuaded that he is not male but female. This persuasion would bolster the artificial stereotypes that second-wave feminism fought against. Yet, many of these 1.6 million transgender people in the United States classify themselves as such based on stereotypes and generalities.

Nancy Pearcey recounts the story of a young man, Jonah Mix, who imagined that his failure to fit within the culture's expectations of maleness probably meant he was not a man. He believed that his body had no authority over his identity. Jonah reflects on his thoughts at the time: "If we are not men by our bodies, we are men by our actions."³ He was taught to believe that if he acted in a stereotypically masculine way, then he was a man, and if he acted in a stereotypically feminine way, then he was a woman. Likewise, in his book *When Harry Became Sally*, Ryan Anderson shares numerous personal accounts of detransition stories.⁴ Max's story is one of those stories. She shares that she expected that having a male body would cure all of the ways she felt inadequate as a woman. She says, "On some level when I was transitioning at 16, I had thought of 'being a woman' as everything I wasn't—pretty, compliant, content with the way I was treated as a woman and with my female body."⁵ For Jonah and Max, the foundation of their decision to transition was culturally created expectations for men and women.

³ Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2018), 197.

⁴ "Detransition" is the reversal of transgender identification. This detransition can happen in various spheres (e.g., social, medical, legal).

⁵ Ryan T. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment* (New York: Encounter Books, 2018), 57.

In his book *The Sissy Syndrome*, researcher Richard Green argues that stereotype-driven expectations are ubiquitous in all cultures. He recounts various parents' descriptions of their young sons: "He got in the girls' line instead of the boys' line at the drinking fountain He was playing with dolls, playing dress-up [H]e loves jewelry [H]is favorite characters are Cinderella [and] Snow White [H]e talks like a girl, sometimes walks like a girl, acts like a girl."⁶ Regarding transgender identities, Helen Joyce argues that it "is rare to read an account of a transkid that doesn't mention clothing, hair and toys. 'I didn't like playing with dolls, or wearing dresses, and I hated having long hair.'"⁷ Preston Sprinkle begins his book *Embodied* with a story about his friend Lesli, quoting from her explanation of her experience as a female child: "When all of the other little girls wanted to play tea or house, I wanted to play football At the age of four I proclaimed that Wonder Woman was going to be my wife and we would have super-powered children. I thought nothing of it."⁸ Though Lesli, at the age of 4, "thought nothing of it," transgender ideology did. Often today, the ways boys and girls express themselves in clothing, hobbies, or actions are interpreted as determinative of identity.

Walt Heyer, who identified as a transgender man for a time, offers another example. He describes how stereotypes led to his transgender identity. At a young age, his grandma withheld affirmations of him as a boy. However, he says, "she lavished delighted praise upon me when I was dressed as a girl Her actions planted the idea in me that I was born in the wrong body. She nourished and encouraged the idea, and over

⁶ Richard Green, *The Sissy Boy Syndrome: The Development of Homosexuality* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 32, quoted in Helen Joyce, *Trans: Gender Identity and the New Battle for Women's Rights* (London: Oneworld, 2021), 31.

⁷ Helen Joyce, *Trans: Gender Identity and the New Battle for Women's Rights* (London: Oneworld, 2021), 114.

⁸ Preston Sprinkle, *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2021), 17.

time it took on a life of its own.”⁹ Likewise, Crash, who also formerly identified as a transgender person, says that she and many like her transitioned because of societal pressure and rigid stereotypes and generalities:

Sometimes bad things happened to us just for being female in a culture where women were violated every day and sometimes bad things happened because we’re the wrong kind of woman, maybe too butch or “masculine” or loud or unemotional. One way or another, we didn’t fit in with what other people and our culture expected women to be. Sometimes our bodies themselves were deemed not female enough and treated as if they were freakish. That happened to be because I had traits like an adam’s apple, body hair, an angular face and so on, leading many to speculate on what sex I was. Eventually, other people’s judgments got inside my head and infected how I saw myself until I started questioning whether I was really female too.¹⁰

Perhaps the most obvious example of a stereotype-led transgender ideology manifesting itself in how individuals who identify as transgender often express themselves after transitions is Caitlyn Jenner. Once Bruce became Caitlyn, pants became dresses, loafers became heels, short hair became long hair, and his male silhouette became female. On the cover of *Vanity Fair*, Caitlyn appears in a tight revealing dress, with makeup and perfectly manicured nails.¹¹ Though Jenner felt like a woman trapped in a man’s body, the transition did not have to take such a stereotypical fashion. This stereotypically driven transition even upset some other individuals in the transgender community. Miranda Yardley, a self-described “transwoman,” commenting on Jenner’s *Vanity Fair* appearance, protested,

This image of Jenner as being not “a man becoming a woman” but . . . “a man becoming a man’s idea of what a woman should be” . . . [A]n idealized body is presented clothed in lingerie, the makeup is done to perfection, and every flaw is magically photoshopped out of existence. Pandering to the male gaze, the body language is coy, seductive, submissive. This is not liberation, this is not revolution, this is not life-affirming; this is the crass stereotyping of what it means to be a

⁹ Walt Heyer, “I Was a Transgender Woman,” *Public Discourse*, April 1, 2015, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/04/14688/>.

¹⁰ Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, 73-74.

¹¹ Condé Nast, “Caitlyn Jenner: The Full Story,” *Vanity Fair*, June 1, 2015, <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2015/06/caitlyn-jenner-bruce-cover-annie-leibovitz>.

woman, meeting every reactionary, culturally conservative idea of what a woman should be; passive, objectified, dehumanized.¹²

Yardley keenly identifies the stereotypical male expectations placed on a woman's appearance. Elinor Burkett of *The New York Times* also commented on Jenner, saying, "This was the prelude to a new photo spread and interview in *Vanity Fair* that offered us a glimpse into Caitlyn Jenner's idea of a woman: a cleavage-boosting corset, sultry poses, thick mascara and the prospect of regular 'girls' nights' of banter about hair and makeup."¹³ Pearcey accurately underscores that "ironically," transgender identities "reinforce rigid gender stereotypes."¹⁴

More than mere gender stereotypes lead individuals to transition. There are general biological differences between the sexes that play a role. Statistics show that there are general differences between men and women in height, weight, athletic/physical ability, feelings of aggression, feelings of compassion, and much more.¹⁵ These are not stereotypes but generalities—physical and emotional differences between men and women, not based on societal expectations but on empirical observation. These differences should not surprise us. In fact, according to cardiologist Paula Johnson, "every cell has a sex—and what that means is that men and women are different down to the cellular and molecular level. It means that we're different across all of our organs, from our brains to our hearts, our lungs, our joints."¹⁶

¹² Miranda Yardley, "What Does It Mean to Be Caitlyn?," Medium, August 11, 2017, <https://medium.com/@mirandayardley/what-does-it-mean-to-be-caitlyn-31e11670a6c2>.

¹³ Elinor Burkett, "What Makes a Woman?," *The New York Times*, June 6, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/07/opinion/sunday/what-makes-a-woman.html>.

¹⁴ Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 198.

¹⁵ See John Archer and Barbara Lloyd, *Sex and Gender*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). This book was originally published in 1985. This research and its findings is dismissed by many trans advocates.

¹⁶ Paula Johnson, "His and Hers ... Health Care," TED, December 2013, video, 14:29, https://www.ted.com/talks/paula_johnson_his_and_hers_healthcare?language=en. For further discussion on clear biological differences between men and women see Katie J. McCoy, *To Be a Woman: The Confusion Over Female Identity and How Christians Can Respond*, (Brentwood, TN: B&H Publishing, 2023), 77-90.

Simon Baron-Cohen, professor of developmental psychology at the University of Cambridge, explains that “the female brain is predominantly hard-wired for empathy. The male brain is predominantly hard-wired for understanding and building systems.”¹⁷ J. Budziszewski, drawing on neuroscience research, highlights a “marked, pervasive, and consistent” difference in male and female brain structures. He imagines the brain makeup as “two complex mosaics—one male and one female—that are similar in many respects but very different in others.”¹⁸ Physical differences can be seen in athletic performance as well. For example, in track and field, female world record holders have significantly slower times than male world record holders.¹⁹ Moreover, female world records lag behind even Division III men’s times.²⁰ Nevertheless, statistical generalizations are averages and do not explain every man or woman. Budziszewski says, “Women are generally more talkative, but any given man may be more talkative than most women. Men are customarily more assertive, but any given woman may be more assertive than most men.”²¹ Importantly, then, if a girl shows more interest in a stereotypically “male activity,” doing so certainly does not indicate that something is wrong with the girl or that she is a boy trapped in a girl’s body.

When transgender ideology exploits gender expression differences, boys and girls become victims of manipulation based on generalities or stereotypes. Rather than

¹⁷ Simon Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference: Male and Female Brains and the Truth about Autism* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 1.

¹⁸ J. Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2014), 38-39.

¹⁹ For example, men’s 100 meter—9.58 seconds vs. women’s 100 meter—10.49 seconds; men’s 800 meter—1:40.91 vs. women’s 800 meter—1:53.28; men’s 4x400-meter relay—2:54.29 vs. women’s 4x400-meter relay—3:15.17. These time differences show an 8 to 10-percent difference between men and women world records.

²⁰ Matthew Mason, “The Authority of the Body: Discovering Natural Manhood and Womanhood,” *Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology* 4, no. 2 (2017): 47-48, https://www.academia.edu/37578788/The_Authority_of_the_Body_Discovering_Natural_Manhood_and_Womanhood.

²¹ J. Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex*, 49.

proposing a mismatch of sex and gender, a better explanation is the presence of a gender expression range. Perhaps a young boy's sex and gender do not misalign because he likes to play with dolls and do ballet. A better explanation would be that his sex and gender unavoidably align, yet the way he expresses his maleness does not fit rigid gender stereotypes or generalities between the sexes. Perhaps a teenage girl's sex and gender do not misalign because she is 6 feet, 3 inches tall and has a muscular structure that is more defined than most boys her age. A better explanation would be that her sex and gender align, though she is taller and more muscular than most boys her age.

If the events recorded in the book of Genesis occurred nowadays, Isaac and Rebekah might have told Jacob, who liked to cook with his mom while his brother did “manly” things outside, that he may be a girl (see Gen 27). Transgender ideology would have the father of the twelve tribes of Israel turn out to be a transgender woman. Transgender advocate Linda Tatro Herzer argues that Jacob “was definitely gender variant” based on these stereotypes.²² She also considers Joseph gender variant because he wore the rainbow coat, and Deborah as well, because she was doing more masculine duties like settling disputes.²³

Preston Sprinkle offers more biblical examples of non-stereotypical actions by men and women:

In the Bible, men often kiss other men (1 Sam 10:1) and cry (Gen 33:4). They are tender and called to be tenderhearted (Eph 4:32). They are profoundly emotional (the Psalms) and relational (1 Sam 18:1-5). They are called to turn the other cheek (Matt 5:39), to love—not kill—their enemies (Matt 5:44), to weep with those who weep (Rom 12:15), to raise up and teach children (Eph 6:4), to be sensitive (Eph 4:2), to be kind (Prov 11:17), and to be peace-makers (Matt 5:9), if they want to truly be men.

Biblical women also defy current stereotypes. Sure, the Proverbs 31 woman is an “excellent wife” who rises up early and “provides food for her household” (v. 15),

²² Linda Tatro Herzer, *Bible and the Transgender Experience: How Scripture Supports Gender Variance* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2016), 84. “Gender variance” is individual behavior or expression that does not match masculine or feminine gender norms.

²³ Herzer, *Bible and the Transgender Experience*, 89-92.

who makes “bed coverings” and “linen garments” (vv. 22, 24). But then she taps into her entrepreneurial skills and sells those linen garments for a profit after she “considers a field and buys it” (vv. 24, 16). She’s wise, hard-working, has strong arms, and engages in social justice in her spare time (v. 20).²⁴

To encourage a boy or girl, man or woman, to seek physical alteration, including costly and dangerous surgeries and treatments, because he or she is different from the average or does not fit within a culture’s stereotype seems naïve at best and evil at worst. When gender stereotypes become the rule, the measure by which we judge one’s sexed identity, they move from descriptions to prescriptions, from what is generally true to what must be so. Interestingly, these stereotypes change over time and space. Not long ago, men with earrings and women with tattoos were gender-based taboos; today in the West, neither receives a second look. Likewise, today, it is uncommon to see a boy’s room painted pink. In general, our culture has decided that blue is a boy color and pink is a girl color. However, this was not always the case. According to *Earnshaw’s Infants’ Department* in June of 1918, “The generally accepted rule is pink for the boys, and blue for the girls. The reason is that pink, being a more decided and strong color, is more suitable for the boy, while blue, which is more delicate and dainty, is prettier for the girl.”²⁵ Individual societies, within their own time and space, have generally accepted gender expressions.

There are vast differences between males and females. There are noticeable biological differences, some leading to general differences in secondary characteristics such as height, muscle structure, and general emotional tendencies. Men and women are not the same, yet a sensed sex-gender misalignment based on an expression that is only stereotypically factual is harmful and an undoing of what first- and second-wave feminists fought for, namely the protection and advancement of women. Jonah Mix

²⁴ Sprinkle, *Embodied*, 81.

²⁵ Jeanne Maglaty, “When Did Girls Start Wearing Pink?,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, April 7, 2011, smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/when-did-girls-start-wearing-pink-1370097.

appropriately contends, from personal experience, that when one takes their identity from their body, they “can engage in a range of diverse behaviors without threatening the security of [their] identity as a man or woman.”²⁶ Likewise, Max, after her female-to-male transition and subsequent regret, states, “I learned from connecting with other women, that womanhood could hold women like me.”²⁷

Helen Joyce rightly concludes that transgender ideology teaches that boys and girls are determined and defined by “where they fall on a scale from Barbie to G.I. Joe.”²⁸ Rebecca McLaughlin agrees: “For decades, feminists have been differentiating biological sex from cultural stereotypes, creating space for women to live as women in different ways. But if our bodies are removed from the equation, those stereotypes are all we have left.”²⁹ Transgender identities resulting from a misalignment between sex and gender expression are constructed on rigid gender stereotypes and generalities; therefore, they should be rejected. If the word “misalignment” were appropriately used, then it would only mean that a person’s sex is misaligned with cultural stereotypes and sex generalities. Any ideology that accepts and encourages the mutilating of one’s body based on stereotypes and generalities is an ideology that should be swiftly rejected.

Gender Identity and Its Incoherence

If gender expression is outward (i.e., the way a male or female shows their maleness or femaleness), then gender identity is inward (i.e., the way a person *feels* about their sexed identity). As noted earlier, gender identity is “a person’s internal, deeply held sense of their gender”;³⁰ it is the existential apprehension of a person’s authentic gender

²⁶ Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 198.

²⁷ Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, 57.

²⁸ Joyce, *Trans*, 117.

²⁹ Rebecca McLaughlin, *The Secular Creed: Engaging Five Contemporary Claims* (Austin, TX: The Gospel Coalition, 2021), 86.

³⁰ GLAAD, “GLAAD Media Reference Guide: Transgender People.”

distinctiveness. Many of the 1.6 million people in the United States who identify as transgender do so based on gender identity.

According to transgender advocate Nicholas Teich, even the non-transgender person has to choose a gender identity: “If you are not transgender . . . and you do identify with the biological sex you were labeled with at birth, then you might be called non-transgender or cisgender.”³¹ That is to say, everyone must choose some gendered identity. One is not merely identified passively by one’s biological sex; instead, one must actively identify with a gender. Austen Hartke, a self-identified transgender Christian, agrees and adds, “God created me with a body that was designed female when I was born—a body that I struggled to connect with for the first twenty-six years of my life and that I now finally feel at home in—but God also created me with a capacity for change and with a mind that identifies as male.”³² The transgender journey is about finding and claiming one’s true gender identity.

Teich offers a series of questions to help individuals find their gender identity. To men, he asks, “Let’s say an unfortunate accident leaves you without one or more of [the male] organs. You can no longer produce sperm. You’re still a man, right?” He continues, “How do you know?”³³ After producing the same line of questioning for women, Teich concludes, “By now you may be yelling out loud, ‘I just know! I’ve always known!’” He then insists, “That is probably the truest answer you can give. The proof of what gender you are lies within your brain.”³⁴ Similarly, Carey Callahan, a now de-transitioned woman, explains her thinking before she attempted to transition from female to male: “I had the idea that my body was wrong, that it was disgusting, that it

³¹ Teich, *Transgender 101*, 15.

³² Austen Hartke, *Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 2.

³³ Teich, *Transgender 101*, 1.

³⁴ Teich, *Transgender 101*, 2.

was incorrect and that it kept people from seeing the real me I just felt like kind of a hostility towards my body and so I didn't really care."³⁵ Story after story of transgender identities shows that a sensed misalignment between sex and gender identity is the most common form.

For Teich and transgender ideology at large, a man can *just know* he is a woman, and a woman can *just know* she is a man. However, one ought to ask if it is even possible for a man to *know* what it is like to be a woman or for a woman to *know* what it is like to be a man. The underlying assumption of transgender identities is that they can. However, the assertion that one can know what it is like to be something other than what he or she physically is should be challenged. Is it reasonable for a white woman to say she feels like a black woman or for a black man to feel like a white man? On what foundation could such claims be made? I have shown that a sensed misalignment between sex and gender expression is based on stereotypes and generalities and, therefore, should be rejected. Now, I address the incoherence of sensed misalignment between sex and gender identity.

Suppose reassignment surgeries, boys playing on girls' sports teams, and girls using boys' bathrooms are to be justified and understood as coherent by appealing to gender identity. In that case, there must be a way to verify the claims of transgender identity. In other words, we must understand what it means for a man to *feel* like a woman trapped in a man's body and vice versa. Framed epistemologically, we must understand how a man can *know* what it *feels* like to be a woman. To not cause individual harm or social absurdity, there ought to be some objectivity before deploying social, political, and medical answers to these cultural questions.³⁶

³⁵ Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, 67.

³⁶ Adam G. Cooper, *Life in the Flesh: An Anti-Gnostic Spiritual Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 190.

Though sympathy and care toward those struggling with gender dysphoria are essential, the veracity of transgender identity claims merits investigation. Under the banner of “trans-advocacy,” significant claims are being made. For example, Ann Travers argues that “the space available for girls with penises, boys with vulvas, and children who identify outside the gender binary entirely is fearfully contracted in North American culture.”³⁷ Sentences like this show an absurdity—a complete disconnect between language and reality. To say the words “girls with penises” and “boys with vulvas” is one thing, and then it is a whole other thing to try to secure legislation for gender-affirming health care (especially for minors), which constitutes legally protected abuse (and child abuse). The transgender movement, as Ryan Anderson says, “drips with ontological assertions” yet has nothing concrete to hang them on.³⁸

The claims of transgender identity based on a sex-gender identity misalignment beg the question “Can one *know* what it is *like* to be something one is not?” Can a human *know* what it is *like* to be a dog? Can a fish *know* what it is *like* to be a bird? Renowned contemporary philosopher Thomas Nagel says, “No.” His article “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” challenges physicalism as an adequate explanation for the mind-body problem.³⁹ The physicalist solution to the problem is a form of materialistic reductionism, which holds that mental processes are the sum of chemical and physical reactions in the brain; consciousness is a product of physical events. In an attempt to combat this thinking, Nagel uses a bat analogy to show that there is a subjective character of experience that physical explanations of the brain or observable behaviors cannot apprehend.

³⁷ Ann Travers, *The Trans Generation: How Trans Kids (and Their Parents) Are Creating a Gender Revolution* (New York: NYU Press, 2019), 88.

³⁸ Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, 29.

³⁹ Anderson briefly addresses Nagel’s work in Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, 104.

Nagel contends that “without some idea . . . of what the subjective character of experience is, we cannot know what is required of a physicalist theory.”⁴⁰ In other words, only one that *is* something can testify to what it is *like* to be that thing. Nagel argues that “no matter how the form may vary, the fact that an organism has conscious experience at all means, basically, that there is something it is like to be that organism.”⁴¹ Using bats for his illustration and assuming that bats have experience, Nagel proposes that there must be “something that it is like to be a bat.”⁴² However, only bats can know what it is like to be a bat. Certainly, objective facts regarding bats can be studied and understood; for example, “we know that most bats (the *Microchiroptera*, to be precise) perceive the external world primarily by sonar, or echolocation, detecting the reflections, from objects within range, of their own rapid, subtly modulated, high-frequency shrieks.”⁴³ However, these objective and observable truths about bats only indicate that we know things about bats, not what it is like to be a bat. For Nagel, “there is no reason to suppose that [being a bat] is subjectively like anything we can experience or imagine.”⁴⁴

Nagel argues that based only on our observations and imaginations, we humans can claim that we “know what it is like to be a bat; our own experience provides the basic material for our imagination, whose range is therefore limited.”⁴⁵ From the webbing on bats’ arms to their poor vision requiring sonar to their hanging upside down all day, we can observe bats and then imagine what it would be like to experience those things. However, observation certainly does not allow us humans to know what it is like

⁴⁰ Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?,” *Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (October 1974): 437.

⁴¹ Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?,” 436.

⁴² Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?,” 438.

⁴³ Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?,” 438.

⁴⁴ Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?,” 438.

⁴⁵ Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?,” 449.

to be a bat; on the contrary, “it tells me only what it would be like for me to behave as a bat behaves.”⁴⁶ This is not, however, the question at hand. The question Nagel is attempting to answer is what it is like for *a bat* to be a bat. Only if someone *were* a bat could they genuinely know what it feels like to be a bat.

Throughout history, many children have chosen to be bats for Halloween. In what way is it possible for those children to “feel like” bats? The only approach for a child to “feel like” a bat is to reflect on the bat’s physical characteristics and behaviors and emulate them. Some of these may include wings, the color black, flying frantically, high-frequency noises, and hanging upside down. Nevertheless, Nagel believes that we are restricted to the resources of our minds, “and those resources are inadequate to the task We cannot form more than a schematic conception of what it is like. For example, we may ascribe general types of experience on the basis of animal’s structure and behavior.”⁴⁷ Nagel concludes that we are unequipped to understand the subjective nature of experience without relying on observation and imagination.⁴⁸

Nagel’s findings do not only apply to humans and bats. If it is true that a being cannot know what it feels like to be something that it is not biologically, then a particular species of bat cannot know what it feels like to be a different species of bat. Furthermore, a human who is not, and has never been, blind or deaf cannot know what it feels like to be blind or deaf. An Irish person cannot know what it feels like to be Italian. A person who has always been underweight cannot know what it feels like to be overweight. There exists no objectivity to the claim that one knows what it feels like to be something that he or she physically is not.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?,” 439.

⁴⁷ Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?,” 439.

⁴⁸ Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?,” 439.

⁴⁹ There are alternative theories for how one could feel like something that they “bodily” are not. The most popular of these alternative theories is the “brain-sex theory.” This theory says that the body and the brain (biologically) can possess differing sexes. This would explain how a man with male genitals

Importantly, claims can possess different levels of ontological strength or weakness. A *Washington Post* story reported that 69-year-old Dutchman Emile Ratelband asked a court to change the date on his birth certificate from March 11, 1949, to March 11, 1969. He explained, “I want to change my age. My feeling about my body and about my mind is that I’m about 40 or 45.”⁵⁰ As odd as his request may be, it possesses at least some ontological substance. Emile does know what it feels like to be 40 or 45 because he has physically been 40 and 45. In other words, he has a foundation upon which to place his feelings, namely, the subjective experience of being 40-something. Likewise, a phantom-limb syndrome sufferer feels pain from a limb that is no longer present. Though his feelings are merely psychological, he at least possesses the experience of knowing what it is like to have pain in that limb.

By contrast, because transgender identities do not possess this subjective experience, there is no ontological strength to the claim that a man can know what it feels like to be a woman or vice versa. Andrew Walker clarifies “that feeling separate from one’s body is just that—a feeling.”⁵¹ He continues, “It’s also impossible for a man who thinks he’s a woman to be able to know for sure (or prove to anyone else) that his feelings are, in fact, ‘feminine.’”⁵² Helen Joyce agrees: “The only thing that these self-identified women have in common is that they are male. The central doctrine of gender-identity ideology—that your gender identity is what you say it is—necessarily precludes

could “know what it feels like” to be a woman. If “his” brain is “female,” then he can experience what females experience. The scientific research behind this theory lacks objectivity and clarity. For more on this theory and why it is suspect, see Sprinkle, *Embodied*, 127-41; J. Alan Branch, *Affirming God’s Image: Addressing the Transgender Question with Science and Scripture* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 68-80.

⁵⁰ Isaac Stanley-Becker, “A 69-Year-Old Man Asks to Be Declared 49, Claiming Age Is as Fluid as Gender,” *The Washington Post*, November 8, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2018/11/08/year-old-man-asks-be-declared-claiming-age-is-fluid-gender/>.

⁵¹ Andrew T. Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate: What Does the Bible Actually Say about Gender Identity?*, exp. and upd. ed. (Surrey, England: Good Book, 2022), 35.

⁵² Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate*, 35.

any objective delineation.”⁵³ Nevertheless, one of the core tenets of transgender ideology is the existence of gender identity. When this inner feeling of one’s true gender misaligns with biological sex, the result is a transgender identity. For this inner feeling to possess any rationality, any coherence whatsoever, the individual must have the ability to possess the feeling. Yet, men and women cannot know what it feels like to be the opposite sex because physically—biologically—they are not the opposite sex. Therefore, gender identity is an incoherent concept; it does not exist as an ontological classification but as an imaginative one and exists only in the way that a young boy can “feel like” Superman or a young girl can “feel like” Elsa from *Frozen* by emulating their dress and behavior.

Transgender identified pastor Justin Tanis admits the lack of ontological reality; nonetheless, he appeals for cultural reception: “Rather than policing one another or searching for a causal factor, I believe that our community will become stronger when we argue for each person’s right to self-determination of his/her own body We should be able to do this because it is right for us, not because we have been able to convince a doctor.”⁵⁴ However, if a man cannot feel like a woman in any coherent way, and vice versa, then why should culture bend to accept and celebrate the mutilation of bodies and the coercion of forcing language that misaligns with reality? It should not.

Suppose gender identity does not exist in reality. In that case, in order for transgender ideology to seem coherent, language must be systematically and relentlessly buttressed in order for it to appear coherent.⁵⁵ If individual gender self-identification is irrational, then for transgender ideology to be accepted and celebrated, society must choose to continually declare its rationality by manipulating language. This is why

⁵³ Joyce, *Trans*, 136.

⁵⁴ Justin Edward Tanis, *Trans-Gendered: Theology, Ministry, and Communities of Faith* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2003), 173.

⁵⁵ Abigail Favale, *The Genesis of Gender: A Christian Theory* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2022), 161.

preferred pronouns and making statements such as “not all women menstruate” are crucial to the cause. A culture’s understanding of reality must be forced by language, otherwise the irrationality will become evident. As McLaughlin says, if “transgender women are women . . . , then ‘woman’ has no meaning anymore.”⁵⁶

As a society, there is an inconsistent application to mind-body misalignments. As the West continues to accept and celebrate transgender identities, there exists virtually no support for a young anorexic girl to deprive herself of food because, in her mind, she is overweight. The body wins in that instance, and it is unhealthy for her to deprive herself of nutrition because her mind identifies with a different reality. In 2006, a woman in Raleigh, North Carolina, found a doctor willing to help her lose her eyesight.⁵⁷ She was not blind, yet since she was 6 years old, she always felt more comfortable at the thought of being blind. She said that she felt like a blind person trapped in a sighted person’s body. This condition is known as “body integrity identity disorder.”⁵⁸ The woman’s misalignment between her biological reality and her inner sense of identity led her to find a doctor who would help her lose sight. Denny Burk recounts the story: “Over the course of many months, he gave her numbing drops for her eyes followed by drops of drain cleaner. After about six months of this excruciating treatment, she did finally lose her eyesight. She is now blind.”⁵⁹ Burk concludes, “Most people hear that story and

⁵⁶ McLaughlin, *The Secular Creed*, 84.

⁵⁷ Ashton Edwards, “Woman Says She’s Happier than Ever after Fulfilling Lifelong Dream of Being Blind,” *Fox 13 Salt Lake City*, October 1, 2015, <http://fox13now.com/2015/10/01/woman-desperate-to-be-blind-had-drain-cleaner-poured-in-eyes-now-happier-than-ever>.

⁵⁸ Emma Barrow and Femi Oyeboade, “Body Integrity Identity Disorder: Clinical Features and Ethical Dimensions,” *BJPsych Advances* 25, no. 3 (May 2019): 187-95.

⁵⁹ Denny Burk, “The Transgender Test,” in *Beauty, Order, and Mystery: A Christian Vision of Human Sexuality*, ed. Gerald L. Hiestand and Todd A. Wilson, Center for Pastor Theologians Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 96.

conclude that her mind was at odds with reality and that it is immoral and wrong to destroy healthy organs to accommodate that woman's misperception about herself."⁶⁰

Similarly, the story of Rachel Dolezal shows the inconsistent application of mind-body misalignments in the West. In 2015, Dolezal was a black-identifying woman and president of a local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). However, she was found to have lied about her race. She was entirely of white European descent but had altered her image to appear black, even changing her name to Nkechi Amare Diallo. When her lie was revealed, she was forced to resign from the NAACP and was fired from her job.⁶¹ Dolezal explained that she felt she was born with the essence of who she was, "whether it matches my anatomy and complexion or not."⁶² She continued, "I've never questioned being a girl or woman, for example, but whiteness has always felt foreign to me, for as long as I can remember. I didn't choose to feel this way or be this way, I just am. What other choice is there than to be exactly who we are?"⁶³ In 2015, well into transgender ideology's influence, one might expect Dolezal to be accepted and celebrated for finding her true identity; however, when her actual race was revealed, she was not praised as trans-racial but vilified for appropriating black culture. For example, Denene Millner, in an article titled "Why Rachel Dolezal Can Never Be Black," explains that "Dolezal is still a white lady with fussy hair and a bad tan."⁶⁴ She exclaims, "Blackness is all up in the bones—in the sinew."⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Burk, "The Transgender Test," 96.

⁶¹ Joyce, *Trans*, 140.

⁶² Denene Millner, "Why Rachel Dolezal Can Never Be Black," *NPR*, March 3, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/03/03/518184030/why-rachel-dolezal-can-never-be-black>.

⁶³ Millner, "Why Rachel Dolezal Can Never Be Black."

⁶⁴ Millner, "Why Rachel Dolezal Can Never Be Black."

⁶⁵ Millner, "Why Rachel Dolezal Can Never Be Black."

This is an odd response in a transgender-saturated culture. Perhaps one could argue that Dolezal's offense is that she claimed to be a race that has been historically victimized even though she has not experienced the victimization herself. However, could not the same argument be used for men who identify as women? Historically, women have been mistreated and denied legal representation. There seems to be a double standard. Maleness and femaleness seem malleable, but not race, even though both are deeply biologically determined. A simple comparison of the public response to Caitlyn Jenner on the one hand and to Rachel Dolezal on the other highlights the double standard. If biology is the deciding factor in other mind-body misalignments (e.g., anorexia, body integrity identity disorder, transracialism), then one ought to ask why sex-gender misalignments, which are also mind-body misalignments, are decided upon psychological and internal factors.

The two core tenets of transgender ideology are (1) the existence of gender identity and (2) that gender can, and sometimes does, misalign with biological sex. So far, this chapter has shown that transgender identities based on a sensed misalignment of sex and gender expression are strictly constructed upon rigid gender stereotypes and generalities; therefore, they should be rejected. Also, this chapter has argued that gender identity does not exist in any intelligible sense; therefore, sex-gender identity misalignments should be rejected. However, if transgender ideology is as widespread as the statistics indicate, then why are so many claiming a sex-gender identity misalignment? If gender identity does not exist ontologically, then to what can we attribute the inner feelings of over a million transgender people in the United States?

If a man cannot know what it feels like to be a woman (i.e., if that feeling is not an ontological possibility), then on what can his feeling be based? Put simply, stereotypes and generalities. If gender identity does not exist, then claims of gender identity are based, once again, on rigid gender stereotypes and generalities, just as gender expression has been shown to do. The observance of gender expression in society fuels

the internal sense of transgender identities. In fact, in the absence of a coherent ontological experience, no other fuel exists. Therefore, no sensible argument can be offered against the contention that an individual's gender and sex necessarily match, regardless of where on the spectrum a person's expression resides, without the perpetuation of rigid stereotypes and generalities. Consequently, transgender ideology is an incoherent notion. While masculine and feminine gender expressions will vary from person to person, one's true identity as male or female will always be connected to their biological sex, and no rational alternative exists.

This ontological clarity does not mean that a person experiencing gender dysphoria has fabricated their feelings; it does, however, mean that the person's understanding of what it feels like to be the opposite sex can only come from the observation of how that gender is expressed in culture. A woman who says, "I feel like a man" can only make such a claim based on her observations of men in a given society—men's interests, clothing, and mannerisms. This is why when a man transitions to identifying as a woman, it is not and cannot be merely an internal action. Rather, he adopts the stereotypes and generalities from his observance of women. Therefore, the construction of one's gender—in opposition to one's sex—based on the masculinity or femininity of expression reinforces rigid stereotypes and generalities. Likewise, if gender identity has no ontological reality, and if this felt identity can only result from observing gender expression, then we have regressed again to stereotypes and generalities.

Gender Is No Longer a Helpful Concept

Much of the absurdity present surrounding transgender ideology is caused by confidently spoken language that is void of meaning. A cursory reading of transgender literature reveals much confusion about gender. Even once gender expression has been revealed to be constructed on stereotypes and generalities, and gender identity has been exposed to be an incoherent concept, confusion about gender remains. Much of the

socially coerced language required in society regarding preferred pronouns and personal identities is caused by the hollow nature of the classification of “gender.”

I presented a brief account of the genesis of the sex-gender distinction in chapter 3. Nevertheless, to assess the need for gender classification or the lack thereof, I must provide additional details on this matter. First, some review. Until the 1960s, gender was a grammatical classification used in languages such as Spanish and French to demarcate masculine and feminine nouns. In the 1960s, the idea that humans possessed not only sex but also gender gained popularity in feminist philosophy. Feminist Mari Mikkola defines the sex-gender distinction this way:

Speakers ordinarily seem to think that “gender” and “sex” are coextensive: woman and men are human females and males, respectively, and the former is just the politically correct way to talk about the latter. Feminists typically disagree and many have historically endorsed a sex/gender distinction. Its standard formulation holds that “sex” denotes human females and males, and depends on biological features (chromosomes, sex organs, hormones, other physical features). Then again, “gender” denotes women and men and depends on social factors (social roles, positions, behavior, self-ascription).⁶⁶

Mikkola simplifies the feminist approach to the distinction—“male” and “female” are sex terms; “man” and “woman” are gender terms.

The traditional definition of “man” was an “adult male,” and the traditional definition of “woman” was an “adult female.” This view is appropriately called “traditional” because, as Tomas Bogardus explains, “the Oxford English Dictionary’s first three senses of *woman* refer to adult female humans, and similarly for *man*. We’re told that the word *woman* comes from an Old English word *wīfmann*, meaning ‘female human’: *wīf* (which meant female, not wife) modifying *mann* (which meant human, generically).”⁶⁷ Even second-wave feminists, like Simone de Beauvoir, held that

⁶⁶ Mari Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice: Dehumanization and Its Role in Feminist Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 23.

⁶⁷ Tomas Bogardus, “Evaluating Arguments for the Sex/Gender Distinction,” *Philosophia* 48, no. 3 (July 2020): para. 5.

“woman” was tied to biological realities.⁶⁸ Perhaps the most significant contribution of second-wave feminism was the sex-gender distinction. However, that distinction was not intended initially to confuse biological realities but to fight societal expectations concerning women. Yet third-wave feminism, influenced heavily by Judith Butler, revised the meaning of gender. To summarize, “gender” was once a grammatical term. It was used as a human classification, yet distinguished from sex, to separate biological sex from the cultural expectations placed on men and women. Finally, a more radicalized version was proposed by third-wave feminists.

Butler took the sex-gender distinction, designed by feminists to challenge rigid expectations of women, and radicalized it. She utilized the sex-gender distinction of second-wave feminism to contend that gender is merely a social construct and not tethered to biological realities. In *Gender Trouble*, she says that gender is “a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance or a natural sort of being.”⁶⁹ In other words, gender is doing, not being. To Butler, genders are accurate only to the extent they are performed.⁷⁰ Elinor Burkett agrees that biological realities do not define gender, but what makes a woman for her is not performance but experience. She believes being a woman means having accumulated experiences and enduring certain injustices.⁷¹ Feminist Gayle Rubin agrees with Butler and Burkett but revises the definition slightly. Rather than performative (Butler) or experiential (Burkett), Gayle emphasizes the particular type of experience that defines a “woman” as that of oppression and subordination.⁷² What was once a

⁶⁸ See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage, 2011), 59.

⁶⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 33.

⁷⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 278-79.

⁷¹ Burkett, “What Makes a Woman?”

⁷² Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic of Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 159.

grammatical classification and then distinguished from sex and applied to humans was finally purported as something that one can become.

Central to evaluating the need for the classification “gender” is recognizing why feminism adopted the sex-gender distinction in the first place. The aim was equal legal representation, and the fight was against biological determinism—the belief that a woman’s biology should determine her role in society. By separating sex and gender, feminists could argue that a woman’s biology does not confine her to specific activities in life but that gender (the way a person expresses their sex) can, and often does, vary. As outlined in chapter 3, one example of biological determinism is that of Patrick Geddes and John Arthur Thompson in 1889.⁷³ They argued that social, psychological, and behavioral traits were metabolic. Women, being anabolic, tend to conserve energy, causing them to be more passive, sluggish, stable, and uninterested in politics. On the other hand, men, being katabolic, tend to be more aggressive, eager, passionate, and interested in political and social issues.⁷⁴ These arguments denied women’s voting power, workforce participation, and other social activities.

Toril Moi avers, “The feminists who first appropriated the sex/gender distinction for their own political purposes were looking for a strong defense against biological determinism, and in many cases the sex/gender distinction delivered precisely that.”⁷⁵ Likewise, Jennifer Saul explains that “one key reason for the [sex/gender distinction] was to draw attention to the thought that biology is not destiny: the sex we’re

⁷³ See Toril Moi, *What Is a Woman? And Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5.

⁷⁴ Mari Mikkola, “Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, Fall 2022 ed., Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, last modified January 18, 2022, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/feminism-gender/>.

⁷⁵ Moi, *What Is a Woman?*, 5.

born with needn't determine the sort of life we live."⁷⁶ Additionally, Mikkola articulates that "the main feministic motivation for making this distinction was to counter biological determinism or the view that biology is destiny To counter this kind of biological determinism, feminists have argued that behavioral and psychological differences have social, rather than biological, causes."⁷⁷

Feminists universally accept that the sex-gender distinction was adopted to counter biological determinism; therefore, the sex-gender distinction was a pragmatic endeavor. Bogardus, summarizing the feminist perspective, says, "Whether or not the traditional, biological definitions of womanhood and manhood are actually true, we ought to speak as though they are false, in order to prevent the spread of this pernicious doctrine of biological determinism."⁷⁸ In other words, the sex-gender distinction was helpful in combatting the misappropriation of women's biological reality and social status.

The sex-gender distinction, once utilized for a successful battle against biological determinism and the subjugation of women, has become the cause of much absurdity. The continuation of this distinction has led to the redefining of "gender" numerous times over. Indeed, Abigail Favale identifies four unique iterations: First, the "un-woke" definition sees gender "as a simple synonym for biological sex."⁷⁹ Second, thanks to second-wave feminism, the term was defined as the social and cultural accessories of each sex, specifically the cultural expectations based on stereotypes and generalities. Favale credits Judith Butler with the third definition: "Gender is entirely a

⁷⁶ Jennifer Saul, "Politically Significant Terms and Philosophy of Language," in *Out from the Shadows: Analytical Feminist Contributions to Traditional Philosophy*, ed. Sharon Crasnow and Anita Superson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 196.

⁷⁷ Mikkola, "Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

⁷⁸ Bogardus, "Evaluating Arguments for the Sex/Gender Distinction," para. 11.

⁷⁹ Favale, *The Genesis of Gender*, 150.

social construct, a complex fiction that we inherit and then repeatedly reenact.”⁸⁰ Fourth and finally, transgender ideology has offered its novel definition: “gender” is the sex of the soul, “the innate manhood or womanhood that may or may not ‘align’ with the sex of the body.”⁸¹ This latest understanding of “gender” is no longer a social construct, as it was in Butler’s third wave, but is a determinative inner truth.

Although these definitions are all regularly used in common vernacular, they are contradictory. How can society use “gender” to describe a social construct and, at the same time, use “gender” to describe a person’s inward and true identity? Using the University of Oregon’s human resources website as an example, Favale shows the absurdity of the circularly self-referential way the word is used today.⁸² The website offers a “Trans Glossary,” defining “gender identity” as “a person’s sense of their own gender.”⁸³ However, no entry is listed in the glossary for “gender.” It gives definitions for “gender expression,”⁸⁴ “gender identity,”⁸⁵ “gender role,”⁸⁶ and “genderqueer,”⁸⁷ but it never defines “gender.” Likewise, Sam Killermann, in his book *A Guide to Gender* (a

⁸⁰ Favale, *The Genesis of Gender*, 150.

⁸¹ Favale, *The Genesis of Gender*, 150-51.

⁸² Favale, *The Genesis of Gender*, 152.

⁸³ University of Oregon Human Resources, “Trans Glossary 101,” accessed November 29, 2022, <https://hr.uoregon.edu/trans-glossary-101>.

⁸⁴ Gender expression: “How one presents oneself and one’s gender to the world via dress, mannerisms, hairstyle, vocal intonation, body language, etc. This may or may not coincide with, or indicate one’s gender identity. Many utilize gender expression in an attempt to determine the gender/sex of another individual. However, a person’s gender expression may not always match their gender identity.”

⁸⁵ Gender identity: “A person’s sense of their own gender. It may or may not conform to their assigned sex. It may include some combination of masculine and/or feminine characteristics.”

⁸⁶ Gender role: “The unfortunate, social expectation of how an individual should act, think, and feel based upon one’s perceived or assigned gender. The social expectation that an individual must be defined as man or woman. Gender roles include behavior characterized as feminine or masculine according to culturally prevalent or stereotypic standards. A person’s gender role can also break the traditional and stereotypical binary gender expectations.”

⁸⁷ Genderqueer: “A gender identity and/or gender expression that does not fit within traditional cultural expectations of the gender binary system. Sometimes this includes a political agenda to challenge gender stereotypes and the gender binary system. Genderqueer individuals may or may not pursue any physical changes, such as hormonal or surgical intervention, and may not identify as transgender.”

book designed to help those with gender-related questions make sense of the concept), offers a glossary. In addition to the entries in the University of Oregon's "Trans Glossary," Killermann offers definitions for "gender binary,"⁸⁸ "genderfluid,"⁸⁹ "gender neutrois,"⁹⁰ "gender non-conforming,"⁹¹ "gender normative/gender straight,"⁹² and "gender variant."⁹³ Yet, he never offers a definition for "gender."

How can any of these definitions, which include the word "gender," be understood in any rational way if the term "gender" is never defined? The term "gender" has become a word empty of meaning. Appending an adjective to an undefined word renders the term/phrase vacuous; it means everything and, therefore, nothing. "Gender" has become only a shell that must be filled with whatever one decides, yet without any filling, there exists no logical, rational definition. Because "gender" is undefined, no reason exists to continue the sex-gender distinction. Though feminists effectively used the distinction for their cause, the confusion that this distinction has caused in our current day is not worth the continuation of the distinction. Why not continue to attack any perpetuating traces of biological determinism while rejecting "gender" terminology that

⁸⁸ Gender binary: "The idea that there are only two genders and that every person is one of those two."

⁸⁹ Genderfluid: "A gender identity best described as a dynamic mix of boy and girl. A person who is gender fluid may always feel like a mix of the two traditional genders, but may feel more man some days, and more woman other days."

⁹⁰ Gender neutrois: "A person with no (or very little) connection to the traditional system of gender, no personal alignment with the concepts of either man or woman, and/or someone who sees themselves as existing without gender. Sometimes called gender neutrois, gender neutral, or genderless."

⁹¹ Gender non-conforming: "A gender expression descriptor that indicates a non-traditional gender presentation (masculine woman or feminine man)."

⁹² Gender normative/gender straight: "Someone whose gender presentation, whether by nature or by choice, conforms with society's gender-based expectations."

⁹³ Gender variant: "Someone who either by nature or by choice does not conform to gender-based expectations of society." Sam Killermann, *A Guide to Gender: The Social Justice Advocate's Handbook* (Austin, TX: Impetus Books, 2017), 263-64.

has produced more perplexity than lucidity? Bogardus agrees and concludes that “the sex/gender distinction is simply not required to resist biological determinism.”⁹⁴

Gender as an undefined or a constantly shifting term is no longer a helpful category. Any attempt to separate biological realities from rigid cultural restrictions can be done without it. Prior to the 1960s, before “gender” was ever used to describe human characteristics, society possessed words to communicate stereotypical expectations of men and women. The words “masculinity” and “femininity” predate the sex-gender distinction and appropriately apply pressure against biological determinism.⁹⁵ For example, the word “masculine” accomplishes the task of describing a cultural generality, even when applied to a woman, without the need for gender. The career of a mechanic could be described as a “masculine” one without questioning the “gender” of a female mechanic. Likewise, the “stay-at-home” parent may be described as a “feminine” task, yet the “gender” of a stay-at-home dad need not be questioned.

The absurdity surrounding the understanding and usage of the word “gender” has rendered the word unconstructive and unhelpful; therefore, it should be avoided. A society wherein the historically agreed-upon definition of sex as a biological reality is recognized, wherein “masculinity” and “femininity” are the words used to describe stereotypical differences between the sexes, and wherein the term “gender” is avoided is a less confusing and more understandable culture.

Conclusion

Transgender ideology purports a vision that proves to be incoherent. The two foundational tenets of transgender ideology are (1) the existence of gender identity and (2) that gender can, and sometimes does, misalign with biological sex. According to

⁹⁴ Bogardus, “Evaluating Arguments for the Sex/Gender Distinction,” para. 18.

⁹⁵ “Masculine” refers to qualities or appearances that are traditionally associated with men. “Feminine” refers to qualities that are traditionally associated with women.

transgender literature, gender comes in two forms: gender expression and gender identity. This chapter has demonstrated that transgender identities resulting from either are possible only if rigid stereotypes are perpetuated. Also, this chapter has logically proven the incoherence of gender identity because a man cannot, in any rational sense, know what it feels like to be a woman and a woman cannot, in any rational sense, know what it feels like to be a man. If gender expression is based on rigid stereotypes and gender identity is not a rational concept, then gender identities necessarily rely on the very same stereotypes. Therefore, from a philosophical perspective, the very foundation of transgender ideology is unintelligible. The confusion surrounding the concept of “gender” is one of the crowning achievements of transgender ideology. Today, the term is used in numerous ways, even if contradictory. Hence, finally, this chapter has demonstrated the meaninglessness of using the term “gender” today and has advocated that the term be avoided.

CHAPTER 5

THE HETERODOXY OF TRANSGENDER IDEOLOGY: A THEOLOGICAL REBUTTAL

The thesis of this dissertation is that the core tenets of transgender ideology are philosophically incoherent and theologically heterodox. In chapter 4, I demonstrated, on philosophical grounds, the incoherence of gender identity and the impossibility of sex-gender misalignment. However, a faithful Christian response to transgender ideology must offer more than a philosophical rebuttal. While human reason and logical analysis provide compelling arguments against transgender ideology, Christian theological anthropology offers a far more captivating and comprehensive response. Therefore, in the present chapter, I will complement the previous chapter by offering a thoroughly Christian perspective. If the Lord is the creator, designer, sustainer, and command-giver, then Scripture offers far more than philosophy ever could regarding matters of the human body. Hence, in this chapter, I will first establish the Gnostic foundations of transgender ideology, then I will offer a theological vision of the created body that demonstrates the goodness and direction of sexed human embodiment. Doing so will show that the core tenets of transgender ideology are heterodox and, therefore, should be rejected.

The Gnostic Underpinnings of Transgender Ideology

To underscore the blunt disparity between transgender ideology—with its sharp mind-body split—and a biblically faithful theology of the body, it is advantageous to demonstrate the Gnostic underpinnings of transgender ideology. If the severity of the physical and non-physical separation in transgender ideology can be emphasized and tied to Gnosticism, then its heterodoxy becomes clearer.

Gnosticism Old and New

As I will demonstrate, the sharp mind-body dualism required for transgender identities is beyond any biblically faithful dualism. The ideology's extreme dualism finds its roots in Gnosticism. Though a recent phenomenon, transgender ideology is little more than a newly clothed version of this ancient heterodoxy. Robert P. George has produced helpful research on the Gnostic nature of transgender identities.¹ He correctly contends that a loving and profitable treatment of the transgender revolution will likely be accomplished by showing the failures of Gnostic philosophy.

Gnosticism can be difficult to isolate because it is a phenomenon with diverse attitudes and predispositions. Arthur Darby Nock, an expert in ancient Gnosticism, summarizes the phenomenon in three axioms: Gnosticism is “a preoccupation with the problem of evil, a sense of alienation and recoil from man's environment, and a desire for special and intimate knowledge of the secrets of the universe.”² Nock considers these elements to be “psychological factors.”³ N. T. Wright believes that four significant elements characterize Gnosticism. The first is “cosmological dualism”: “the world of space, time and matter is secondary and/or shabby, dangerous and/or downright wicked.”⁴ The second element is the belief that a secondary deity made this world. The third proposes that “the solution is to escape, to some kind of Platonic heaven.”⁵ The fourth and final element is the “escape route . . . [of] *gnosis*.”⁶ In other words, Wright

¹ Robert P. George, “Gnostic Liberalism,” *First Things*, December 2016, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2016/12/gnostic-liberalism>; Patrick Lee and Robert P. George, *Body-Self Dualism in Contemporary Ethics and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

² Arthur Darby Nock, “Harvard Theological Review: Gnosticism,” in *Studies in Early Christianity: A Collection of Scholarly Essays*, vol. 5, *Gnosticism in the Early Church*, ed. Everett Ferguson, David Scholer, and Paul Corby Finney (New York: Garland, 1993), 2.

³ Nock, “Harvard Theological Review: Gnosticism,” 2.

⁴ Tom Wright, *Creation, Power and Truth: The Gospel in a World of Cultural Confusion* (London: SPCK, 2017), 6.

⁵ Wright, *Creation, Power and Truth*, 6.

⁶ Wright, *Creation, Power and Truth*, 6.

characterizes Gnosticism as an escapist pursuit of self-discovery. The Gnostic seeks knowledge only found within the individual and therefore shuns—and must shun—the physical world as a lesser reality—if it is even reality at all. Wright concludes, “When we ‘discover’ this ‘true inner self,’ we must do whatever it dictates, even if it means ignoring the norms of the ‘unenlightened’ society all around us.”⁷ Nock and Wright, in differing language, describe the core of Gnosticism in the same way. They identify the ancient heresy as a hostile rejection of the physical and hopeful pursuit of the non-physical. The Gnostic subverts the body and empties it of its intrinsic meaning, no longer assigning authority to it. Adam Cooper argues that the Gnostic “regarded the body as a plaything in a cosmic, spiritual game.”⁸ Accordingly, ancient Gnosticism was passionately dualistic and highly anthropocentric.⁹ It focused religiously on human persons, yet not the physical but the non-physical, because only in the non-physical can true identity be found.

Gnosticism has morphed over the centuries. The philosophy exists today but looks different; the dualistic core remains, but its desires have changed. Ancient Gnosticism was considered theistic—its dualism tethered to a deity. However, by separating the good (the spiritual) from the bad (the physical), the Gnostic believed himself to decipher between the true deity and a lesser deity. The most ancient forms of Gnosticism were primarily Christian in appearance. Though ultimately incongruent with Scripture, Gnosticism acknowledged metaphysical realities and the revelation of Scripture as more or less meaningful.¹⁰ Cooper observes that the old form “wrongly opposed God and the material world as two essentially unrelated realities, but it still

⁷ Wright, *Creation, Power and Truth*, 9.

⁸ Adam G. Cooper, *Life in the Flesh: An Anti-Gnostic Spiritual Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2.

⁹ Nock, “Harvard Theological Review: Gnosticism,” 7.

¹⁰ Cooper, *Life in the Flesh*, 2.

regarded them as realities.”¹¹ The contemporary strain, however, is far more metaphysically nihilistic. Taking Nietzsche’s announcement of the death of god seriously, neo-Gnosticism asserts that “humanity alone, and what humanity makes of itself and the world by its own will-power, is real.”¹² Therefore, the newer version is apathetic to the divine. If ancient Gnosticism pursued “real truth” in the spiritual world, the new Gnosticism creates “self-truth” in the physical world. Oliver O’Donovan adds that “western moral thought since the enlightenment has been predominantly ‘voluntarist’ in its assumptions. That is to say, it has understood morality as the creation of man’s will, by which he imposes order on his life, both individualistically and socially.”¹³ What O’Donovan calls “voluntarist,” the belief that a person’s will creates reality, is tantamount to neo-Gnosticism’s claims of self-truth in the physical world.

Eric Voegelin and Hans Jonas, scholars of ancient Gnosticism, independently offer analyses of its contemporary form.¹⁴ Adam Cooper amalgamates their judgments into five features:

Both catalog such features as antinomian: the rejection of any binding or overarching ontological and moral norms; psychologism: a spirituality of feeling and a preoccupation with experience and inner consciousness; moral and ontological reductionism: the collapsing of all distinctions into broad, non-distinct categories; self-construction: the manipulation of reality by the individual or the social unit towards practical or utopic ends; and of course, dualism: the disruption between man and total reality, a disdain for humanity’s real situation, a hatred of our inherently enfleshed, limited life, and a subsequent rejection of our supernatural calling.¹⁵

¹¹ Cooper, *Life in the Flesh*, 2.

¹² Cooper, *Life in the Flesh*, 2-3.

¹³ Oliver O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Leicester: Eerdmans, 1994), 16.

¹⁴ Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon, 1963), 320-40; Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2004).

¹⁵ Cooper, *Life in the Flesh*, 3.

These five features can adequately reduce to two—deconstruction and reconstruction. Antinomianism, dualism, and ontological reductionism are deconstructive; they seek to take what was a historical given and critically deconstruct it. Psychologism and self-construction are reconstructive; they reconstruct new norms in place of the old.

Appropriately, Wright calls neo-Gnosticism the “cult of self-discovery.”¹⁶ Such self-discovery is the commonality—the intersection—of the old and new versions of Gnosticism. He describes neo-Gnosticism as “a religion of self-discovery in which one acquires the ‘knowledge,’ or *gnosis*, that one is already a spark of light, and can thereby escape from the wicked world of space, time and matter, and enjoy a private and detached spirituality in the present and an escapist heaven hereafter.”¹⁷ Neo-Gnosticism is not entirely different from its ancient form; both seek escape from physical guardrails to the free utopia of self-determined reality.

The repudiation of the physical creates tremendous confusion for the enfleshed human. If the true self is not accessible in the physical but in the will (the desire), then what can the body communicate? At best, little. At worst, nothing. The belittling of the body necessarily reduces the body to a handmaid of the will. “For the neo-Gnostic,” George says, “the body serves at the pleasure of the conscious self, to which it is subject, and so mutilations and other procedures pose no inherent moral problem.”¹⁸ As a result, the most fundamental characteristic of the human body—its sex—is cast into the subjective. If the truth is inaccessible in the physical, then the body cannot be trusted, and basic norms—like sex—that were once revealed by the flesh are subjected to a higher authority—one’s will.

¹⁶ Wright, *Creation, Power and Truth*, 15.

¹⁷ Wright, *Creation, Power and Truth*, 17.

¹⁸ George, “Gnostic Liberalism.”

Further investigation will clarify that transgender ideology finds its foundation—its source—in this ancient yet freshly clothed philosophy. The most fundamental characteristic of the deconstruction and reconstruction of neo-Gnosticism is a sharp mind-body split that becomes a body-person split, exemplified in transgender ideology, with numerous supporting examples to follow.

Transgender Ideology and Its Sharp Mind-Body Split

On February 17, 2016, 70-year-old Bill Rohr, an orthopedic surgeon and long-time family man, became Kathryn (Kate) Rohr. After sex reassignment surgery, Rohr told his story via *The Washington Post*: “Something just told me, I’m the other half of the population.”¹⁹ The article quotes pediatric endocrinologist and transgender advocate Norman Spack as saying, “One patient once told me, sexual orientation is who you go to bed with, gender identity is who you go to bed as.”²⁰ In transgender ideology, “gender” is not established by the body—one’s biology—but by how one internally identifies. Matter, then, does not dictate who one is; rather, something other, something non-material, possesses that power. The definition of “gender identity” offered by transgender advocates indicates that one’s body does not contribute to the identity of one’s person. Nicholas Teich argues, “Gender identity is one’s internal sense of who they are; being a woman or man, boy or girl, or between or beyond these genders.”²¹ In *A Guide to Gender*, Sam Killermann defines “gender” in a more blatantly Cartesian way: “[It’s] how you, in your head, experience and define your gender, based on how much you align (or

¹⁹ Amy Ellis Nutt, “Truth and Transgender at 70: A Story of Enduring Love,” *The Washington Post*, April 21, 2016, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/national/2016/04/21/truth-and-transgender-at-70/>.

²⁰ Nutt, “Truth and Transgender at 70.”

²¹ Nicholas Teich, *Transgender 101: A Simple Guide to a Complex Issue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 6.

don't align) with what you understand your options for gender to be."²² Killermann continues, "Gender identity is all about how you think about yourself."²³

To better understand the type of dualism necessary for transgender identities, an appraisal of two short quotes will prove profitable. Chaz Bono, a transgender activist and entertainer (born Chastity Bono to entertainer parents Sonny and Cher), teaches that "there's a gender in your brain and a gender in your body. For 99 percent of people, those things are in alignment. For transgender people, they're mismatched. That's all it is. It's not complicated, it's not a neurosis. It's a mix-up. It's a birth defect, like a cleft palate."²⁴ Therefore, according to Bono, humans are made up of a sharply split mind-body dichotomy. The two are entirely disconnected—even, sometimes, not sharing maleness or femaleness. The second constructive quote is a well-known transgender slogan, yet the origin is unknown: "Some men are born in their bodies, others have to fight for it."²⁵ The body is severed from the person so long as that body neglects to reflect the perceived gender of the mind correctly. The sharp body-person dualism is unmistakable.

Adrian Dalton, a self-proclaimed "drag queen born in a female body," was asked how she first experienced feelings of gender dysphoria. She answered, "I finally became aware that I actually felt like a male who was trapped in a female body."²⁶ Her usage of the word "trapped" is significant. A paraphrase of her response could read, "The 'I' that I know I am was stuck in a body that was not my own." In order for these words to not be dismissed as simply those of a confused individual, Princeton University English professor Gayle Salamon similarly states: "I seek to challenge the notion that the

²² Sam Killermann, *A Guide to Gender: The Social Justice Advocate's Handbook* (Austin, TX: Impetus Books, 2017), 72.

²³ Killermann, *A Guide to Gender*, 72.

²⁴ Vaughan Roberts, *Transgender*, Talking Points (Surrey, UK: Good Book, 2016), 12.

²⁵ Roberts, *Transgender*, 12.

²⁶ Adrian Dalton, "A Drag Queen Born in a Female Body," in *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation*, ed. Kate Bornstein and S. Bear Bergman (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2010), 94.

materiality of the body is something to which we have unmediated access, something of which we can have epistemological certainty, and contend that such epistemological uncertainty can have great use, both ethically and politically, in the lives of the non-normatively gendered.”²⁷ Salamon’s goal, as stated, is to permanently and severely release the body from the mind so that ethical and political ramifications might ensue, including the elimination of sex-distinct spaces and activities.

Transgender identities result from the belief that there need not be a connection or correspondence between the body and the mind. The 2012 documentary *I Am Not My Body* tells the story of Jessica Savano, a male-to-female transsexual. Jessica expresses, “I know I’m not my body. I’m a spiritual being.”²⁸ While auditioning for a transsexual movie role, Savano reads from his script, “Why are you even looking at my penis anyway? I am a woman!” The ideological thrust of the movie is to de-normalize the idea that the body dictates sexed-identity. The sharp dualistic split is so pronounced that the character in the movie yells at another to stop looking at the body because to do so is to miss the truth intentionally. Nancy Pearcey summarizes the issue at hand thus: “The transgender narrative completely disassociates gender from biological sex.”²⁹

Sam Killermann illustrates the piercing split between mind and body in what he calls the “genderbread person,” his version of what is historically known as the “gingerbread man.”³⁰ The illustration portrays a gingerbread man with three separate and specific segments. From top to bottom: in the head is a brain (labelled “identity”); in the chest is a heart (“attraction”); in the genital area are male, female, and transgender

²⁷ Gayle Salamon, *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 1.

²⁸ *I Am Not My Body*, directed by Mark Williams, April 3, 2012, YouTube video, 50:02, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3UkRk21txE&ab_channel=MarkWilliams.

²⁹ Nancy R. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2018), 197.

³⁰ Killermann, *A Guide to Gender*, 80.

symbols (“sex”). Each segment has a spectrum from male to female or feminine to masculine. Killermann is attempting to demonstrate that for each segment, there are many genuine and appropriate options. Furthermore, the spectrums need not match. Just because one’s sex is male does not follow that one’s identity is male or masculine—it can appropriately be whatever the mind has determined.

Transgender advocates are not ashamed of such robust dualism; instead, it is the center of the movement’s moral code. In 2018, *The New York Times* ran Kwame Anthony Appiah’s article “Should I Go to a Gender-Reveal Party?”³¹ The opening sentences answer the question: “A close relation is pregnant with her first child and is having a gender-reveal party. She is overjoyed with the addition to our family, as am I. However, I am adamantly opposed to attending the gender-reveal party because it violates my moral code.” Appiah, using ethical terminology, illustrates an important aspect of transgender identities: the mind is epistemic; therefore, reality rests on the will of the mind. The result is an ethical system constructed by and contingent on alignment with such determination. The ethical person, as it were, finds his or her grounding in correspondence with the mental. Attending a gender-reveal party is against Appiah’s moral code because supporting a physical-based gender identity is unethical. Why? Because a chasm separates the mind and body in such a significant way that the split has become a body-person rupture.

Transgender ideology’s sharp dualistic split has led to “label language” to decipher between traditional norms and new, more appropriate norms. Until recently, it was universally accepted that the biological sex of a newborn child determined its gender. In fact, until recently, there was no need to differentiate between sex and gender. However, in the present day, it is now commonplace to describe biological sex as

³¹ Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Should I Go to a Gender-Reveal Party?,” *The New York Times*, September 25, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/25/magazine/should-i-go-to-a-gender-reveal-party.html>.

“assigned gender” or “assigned sex” given at birth.³² The semantics are curious, but

Teich clarifies why such language is essential:

I use it because many transpeople feel that they were born the gender they identify as; in other words, a male-to-female transperson might say that she was biologically always female, because her brain was wired to be that way, and the brain is a part of biology. So, instead of always saying “born male” to refer to someone like her, I might differentiate by saying that she was “labeled male at birth” by a doctor, midwife, parents, and so on.³³

Therefore, if one is “mislabeled” at birth, self-discovery becomes an attempt to find and affirm the truth of one’s identity. Furthermore, what used to be called “sex reassignment surgery” is today most commonly referred to as “affirmation” or “confirmation” surgery.³⁴ If the body is valid only for initial labeling yet the mind is competent to renounce such labeling and then affirm another, then the sharp dualistic thread that ran through Gnosticism in its ancient and contemporary forms is present in transgender identities as well.

To distinguish between mind and body is no error; the distinction is philosophically and theologically supported. However, with Gnosticism and transgender identities alike, the error lies in the extreme elevation of one over the other. For example, in the 2016 video *Boy or Girl?*, a self-described “non-binary” woman says, “It doesn’t matter what living, meat skeleton you’ve been born in; it’s what you feel that defines you.”³⁵ Oliver O’Donovan summarizes the dualistic transgender narrative thus: “The body is an accident that has befallen the real me; the real me has a true sex,” and “the

³² University of Washington Medicine, “LGBTQ+ Inclusion: Glossary,” accessed February 4, 2023, <https://www.uwmedicine.org/practitioner-resource/lgbtq/lgbtq-inclusion-glossary>.

³³ Teich, *Transgender 101*, 4-5.

³⁴ Denver Health, “Gender Affirming Surgery,” accessed February 4, 2023, <https://www.denverhealth.org/services/lgbtq-services/gender-affirming-surgery>.

³⁵ *Boy or Girl?*, produced by BBC The Social, October 24, 2016, YouTube video, 1:40, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udl-Go8KK2Q&ab_channel=BBCTheSocial.

body is an object set over against the personal subject located in the thinking-feeling mind.”³⁶

Nancy Pearcey explains that whereas modernism believes that the physical ought to determine values, postmodernism understands that values ought to determine the physical. In short, the two frameworks disagree on the primary realm—the physical or the non-physical. Pearcey clarifies, “Gender has become a postmodern upper-story concept—indefinable, manipulable, fluid, and severed from any connection to biological facts in the lower story.”³⁷ This worldview is precisely how Judith Butler can state that it is impossible to name the body without committing an act of violence.³⁸ Adam Cooper explains Butler, saying, “For her, to identify oneself as a man or woman, to accept that our bodies outwardly symbolize an inner reality, is to play a lie.”³⁹

Summary and Final Thoughts

Ancient Gnostic dualism has reached the twenty-first century in fresh, new packaging. Following the Gnostic lead, transgender ideology declares, “Matter doesn’t matter.” According to Pearcey, today’s transgender movement “is ancient Gnosticism in a new garb.”⁴⁰ Gene Veith adds, “The public has drifted into what is essentially a Gnostic worldview, in which the material universe is considered to be void of any significance. That the natural function of sexuality is to engender children must not be allowed to limit

³⁶ Oliver O’Donovan, *Transsexualism and Christian Marriage* (Bramcote, UK: Grove Books, 1982), 12.

³⁷ Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 202.

³⁸ See Judith Butler, “Burning Acts, Injurious Speech,” in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 43-70.

³⁹ Cooper, *Life in the Flesh*, 208.

⁴⁰ Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 196.

our sexual behavior. And if man desires to be a woman, or vice versa, the body itself is subject to reconstruction.”⁴¹

The devaluing of the material world, especially the human body, renders transgender ideology as heterodox as Gnosticism. A faithful Christian response requires a rebuttal that emphasizes the value of the material world and the human body.

Unfortunately, there seems to be an undersupplied theology of the human body present in the church today. A 2016 Lifeway Research study found that only 54 percent of evangelical believers consider it morally wrong to identify with a different gender.⁴²

However, suppose the response to these discouraging numbers only argues for what Christians should be against. In that case, the result, Timothy Tennent says, “is that the society perceives the church to be merely against a range of behaviors or actions, but they have no compelling vision of what we are for.”⁴³ Therefore, a faithful Christian response to transgender ideology should include a positive vision of the body rather than merely prohibitions against particular actions. Hence, in the next section, I will provide a theological vision of the created body that demonstrates the goodness and direction of sexed human embodiment.⁴⁴

The Value and Meaning of the Body

Whereas transgender ideology devalues the body, Christian theology emphasizes the value and meaning of the created body. If theological anthropology

⁴¹ Gene Edward Veith, *Post-Christian: A Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 26.

⁴² Lisa Cannon Green, “Where Evangelicals Stand on Transgender Morality,” *Christianity Today*, July 14, 2016, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2016/july/where-evangelicals-stand-on-transgender-morality-lifeway.html>.

⁴³ Timothy C. Tennent, *For the Body: Recovering a Theology of Gender, Sexuality, and the Human Body* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), xx.

⁴⁴ A study of Deut 22:5, 1 Cor 6:12-20, and 1 Cor 11:2-16 would demonstrate explicit biblical prohibitions against defying cultural norms of the sexes to present as the opposite sex. Space does not allow for such a study. Instead, the theological argument presented in this chapter will provide a positive vision of the body.

demonstrates the value and meaning of the human body, then the core tenets of transgender ideology are proven to be heterodox. The existence of gender identity, as opposed to an identity discovered from and determined by the body, will prove theologically unfaithful. Likewise, a sex-gender misalignment will be exposed as theologically heterodox because it devalues the body and undermines the goodness of God's creation. To prove these points, I will argue that (1) sexed human embodiment is the natural state of human existence, not an anomaly; (2) God's created order shows the goodness and meaning of the image bearer's sexed embodiment; and (3) a biblical worldview, including a clear distinction between creator and creation, permits humans' authority *in* and *with* their bodies but not *over* their bodies. These theological arguments will provide ample evidence that any attempt to thwart one's sexed identity is an affront to God's good design and, therefore, should be rejected.

Sexed Embodiment Is the Natural State of Human Existence

A Christian response to a sharp dualistic split between physical and non-physical should not be a wholesale argument against dualism. The relationship between the physical and non-physical should be considered. The Bible does teach that persons consist of two distinct parts—the physical and the non-physical. Scripture's most apparent witness to the duality of the physical and non-physical is its teaching on the intermediate state. Scripture reveals the reality of death and human existence between death and bodily resurrection. Human beings do not cease to exist between death and resurrection but persist in a non-physical state. John Cooper suggests, "There must be enough duality in human nature so that God can sustain Moses, Paul, and my mother in

fellowship with him even though they are currently without their earthly bodies.”⁴⁵ The apostle Paul affirms the intermediate state:

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. (2 Cor 5:1-9)⁴⁶

For those who die before the Lord returns, there will be a time when they will be with the Lord yet without their bodies. The reality of human existence apart from embodiment is evident. Undoubtedly, therefore, some form of dualism is, in fact, a theological reality. However, Christian theological anthropology purports that the physical and non-physical form an integrated unity—in accord with the title of Marc Cortez’s book *Embodied Souls, Ensouled Bodies*.⁴⁷ The unity of the physical and non-physical is what John Cooper calls “holistic dualism.”⁴⁸ Rather than utterly divorcing the physical from the non-physical, as transgender ideology does, the biblical witness unifies the two, forming a whole. David’s prayer underscores both distinction and unity: “O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my *soul* thirsts for you; my *flesh* faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water” (Ps 63:1; emphasis added). David presents the physical and the non-physical as distinguishable yet unified in human persons.

⁴⁵ John Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), xvi.

⁴⁶ Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations come from the *English Standard Version*.

⁴⁷ Marc Cortez, *Embodied Souls, Ensouled Bodies: An Exercise in Christological Anthropology and Its Significance for the Mind/Body Debate* (London: T&T Clark, 2011).

⁴⁸ Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*, xvi.

Though human persons are comprised of both the physical and the non-physical and though these two aspects will be temporarily separated in the intermediate state, disembodiment is *not* the natural state of human existence. The intermediate state is, by definition, between two states. Scripture describes not only the intermediate state but also what follows, and Paul describes the related events of Christ's return:

I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. (1 Cor 15:50-53)

If the disembodied existence of humans is only temporary and, given eternity, extremely temporary, then the intermediate state shows not only a physical and non-physical dualism but also that physical embodiment is the natural state of human existence. Gregg Allison is correct; C. S. Lewis was wrong when he said, "The fact that we have bodies is the oldest joke there is."⁴⁹ Embodiment is no joke. Paul is troubled at the thought of being "naked" and "unclothed" in the intermediate state and longs for the day when he will be re-embodied at the second coming of Christ (2 Cor 5:3-4). Humans were not created with the hope of becoming "discarnate souls, naked wraiths, disembodied ghosts, when [they] die."⁵⁰ "Instead," John Kleinig says, "we long to overcome all that now oppresses and distresses us in our bodies by becoming even more fully embodied."⁵¹

It is not, however, merely the intermediate state that highlights embodiment as the natural state of human existence. Jesus's incarnation and resurrection emphasize this fact as well. As Cortez avers, "Christology is absolutely central to any adequate

⁴⁹ Gregg R. Allison, *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2021), 26; C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960), 101.

⁵⁰ John W. Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made: A Protestant Theology of the Body* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 113.

⁵¹ Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made*, 113.

knowledge of the human person.”⁵² If the Son is the perfect image of God (John 14:8-9; 2 Cor 4:4; Heb 1:3) and if human persons are created in God’s image, then the Son’s incarnation is integral to understanding true humanity. “If we Christ followers,” Allison argues, “are being transformed into his image (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18), and if we will be fully conformed into his image when we experience the resurrection of our body (1 Cor 15:47-49), then we should pay attention to the Son ‘in the flesh’ (John 1:14; Rom 8:3).”⁵³ At creation, God decided to fashion the human body as the proper vessel for his redemptive plan of sending his Son to save his people from their sins.⁵⁴ If the flesh were not God’s ultimate plan for human existence, then it is odd that he chose the human body to accomplish such a grand plan.⁵⁵

The Son was not merely embodied—*he* was embodied. The Father did not send the Son simply in a body but in a *sexed* body. Jesus entered human history as a male; we call him the “God-Man.”⁵⁶ Indeed, he came to be the second Adam, a human male (Rom 5:12-21). If Jesus is the perfect image of God and yet was sent as a sexed human, then not only is the flesh a purposeful part of God’s creation but sex—maleness and femaleness—is as well. If maleness and femaleness are an unfortunate result of a fallen world, then one would expect that the messiah would have come in a sexless body. That the messiah was enfleshed in a sexed body indicates that a sexed embodiment is the natural state of human existence. However, we have more than a sexed-embodied messiah; we have a sexed-embodied *resurrected* messiah.

⁵² Marc Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology: A Constructive Account of Humanity in the Light of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2017), 19.

⁵³ Allison, *Embodied*, 114.

⁵⁴ Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made*, 25.

⁵⁵ “Flesh” here is synonymous with body, rather than “sinful flesh.”

⁵⁶ See Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology*, 190-211; Cortez, *Theological Anthropology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), 41-67.

On the day Jesus returns, the dead in Christ—those who exist as disembodied beings—will be re-embodied with new and imperishable bodies. McLaughlin proclaims, “The promise of Christianity is not the promise of an everlasting, incorporeal soul. It’s the promise of a resurrected body.”⁵⁷ Even today, “we groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:23b). Therefore, disembodiment is temporary and unnatural. Indeed, disembodiment only exists because of the fall (Gen 3); the natural state of human existence is an embodied existence. Both before physical death as well as after physical resurrection (for eternity future), human existence is an embodied experience. The sharp separation of physical from non-physical is a foreign concept to orthodox Christian theology.

Of course, before human persons could receive resurrected bodies, Christ himself had to rise from the dead. Christ’s bodily resurrection is of no minor significance to the Christian response to transgender ideology. Christians know the significance of Christ’s resurrection for salvation, as it was proof of his victory over sin and death.⁵⁸ However, the event of Christ’s resurrection also combats neo-Gnostic transgender ideology. If the physical world is subordinate to the spiritual, then making sense of Christ’s bodily resurrection is unsustainable. Christian ethics hangs upon the resurrection of Christ from the dead. O’Donovan says, “Before God raised Jesus from the dead, the hope that we call ‘gnostic,’ the hope for redemption *from* creation rather than for the redemption *of* creation, might have appeared to be the only possible hope.”⁵⁹ “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead,” Paul declares (1 Cor 15:20a). Therefore, contrary to neo-Gnostic transgender ideology, true salvation is not *from* the body but *of* the body.

⁵⁷ Rebecca McLaughlin, *The Secular Creed: Engaging Five Contemporary Claims* (Austin, TX: The Gospel Coalition, 2021), 101.

⁵⁸ See Rom 1:3-4.

⁵⁹ O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 14.

Christ did not rise merely in a physical body but in a *sexed* physical body. In the apostle John's vision, even Jesus, in his resurrected body, is male:

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. (Rev 1:12-16)⁶⁰

John uses repetitive masculine pronouns to describe Jesus's resurrected state. If Christ's resurrected embodiment is sexed and is the perfect representation of God's image, then it is reliable to suppose that all humanity will live in a sexed eternal state. Some, however, claim that resurrected human bodies will be genderless or sexless.⁶¹ Proponents of this view would argue that Jesus's transformed body must still possess the same identity as his pre-resurrected state but that he no longer possesses the same *male* identity as before.

Galatians 3:28 has been used to argue for a sexless/genderless afterlife: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."⁶² Thomas Schreiner warns, "We must beware lest Paul's statement in 3:28 becomes untethered from the rest of what he wrote, so that it is wrested from its context and becomes the pretext for modern social agendas."⁶³ However,

⁶⁰ John's vision is highly apocalyptic and therefore nuance should be noted ("hairs of his head were white," "eyes were like a flame of fire," "feet were like burnished bronze,"), yet the maleness of Jesus is affirmed throughout the biblical witness and therefore seems to be a literal description of his sexed identity after his resurrection. See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 88-93; and G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 205-19.

⁶¹ Verna Harrison lists Clement of Alexandria, Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, and Maximus the Confessor as all holding this position; see Verna E. F. Harrison, "The Maleness of Christ," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (1998): 111.

⁶² For arguments using Galatians 3:28 to prove a sexless afterlife, see Robert Song, *Covenant and Calling: Towards a Theology of Same-Sex Relationships* (London: SCM Press, 2014), 48; and James M. Childs, "Transsexualism: Some Theological and Ethical Perspectives" *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 48, no. 1 (Spring, 2009): 30-31.

⁶³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 259.

arguments using Galatians 3:28 to prove a sexless/genderless afterlife do exactly that; they strip Paul's words from their context.⁶⁴ Paul describes the union that believers have with Christ. Such union is not only for the Jew, the free, and the male, but for all in Christ, including the Gentile, the slave, and the female. When Paul says, "there is no male and female," he is no more talking about sexed identity in the resurrected state than in the pre-resurrected state. For Paul to say "there is no male and female" without a stated context involving the resurrected state, which he does not include, would mean that he is abolishing all sexed identity in his day—which, of course, he does not.⁶⁵ Paul's point is that Christian unity does not come about by human achievement, but rather by union with Christ. Leon Morris asserts that "all believers are one in Christ Jesus and the unity is the important thing. It does not matter whether a given believer is Jew, Greek, slave, free, male, female—all are one. It is the unity that counts, not the subdivisions into which believers may be divided."⁶⁶

The most popular argument for a genderless and sexless Christ—and, therefore, all humans—in the resurrected state follows this form:

1. There is no marriage in heaven.
2. Marriage is most significantly about sexual reproduction.
3. Sexual reproduction necessitates sex differences.
4. Therefore, there are no sex differences in the resurrected state.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ For a survey of the history of interpretation of Galatians 3:28, including interpretations that the afterlife is sexless/genderless, see Dennis Ronald MacDonald, *There Is No Male and Female: The Fate of a Dominical Saying in Paul and Gnosticism*, Harvard Dissertations in Religion, vol. 20 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 1-16.

⁶⁵ See G. Walter Hanson, *Galatians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, vol. 9 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1994), 110-14.

⁶⁶ Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Character of Christian Freedom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 123.

⁶⁷ See Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, 45.

Jesus seems to teach that there will be no marriage in the resurrection (Matt 22:30), though even this is debatable.⁶⁸ However, he says nothing about the cessation (or abolition) of sexed embodiment. Indeed, non-married males and females are still males and females; therefore, tethering a lack of marriage to a lack of sexed identity would be a blatant overreach. Contrary to the argument against resurrected sexed identity from Matthew 22, there are good reasons to believe that humanity's resurrected state will be that of sexed embodiment.

There are three reasons why it is more likely that post-resurrection human bodies are sexed.⁶⁹ First, sex difference is a central aspect of God's pre-fall creation (Gen 1:26-27; 2:18-24); therefore, unless biblical witness plainly articulates that sexed identity will be no more in the resurrected state, it should be assumed that sex will be a part of our eternal existence. Herman Bavinck believes that new creation is a matter of restoration, not new substances: "Christianity does not introduce a single substantial foreign element into the creation. It creates no new cosmos but rather makes the cosmos new. It restores what was corrupted by sin."⁷⁰ If this is true, then sexless humanity in the resurrection is unimaginable. Rather, maleness and femaleness will not cease to exist but will be perfected. Furthermore, Paul relies heavily on Genesis 1-3 when describing the resurrection of human bodies in 1 Corinthians 15:35-58, thereby reiterating the goodness of sexed identity in the resurrected state.

Second, since Jesus was male before his resurrection and since sexed identity is a part of perfected human identity, then it is appropriate to conclude that Jesus remains male in his resurrected state. Third, the apostle John promises that when Christ appears,

⁶⁸ For discussion on perspectives on marriage in the afterlife, see Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 220-21; Ed Glasscock, *Matthew: Moody Gospel Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 434-35.

⁶⁹ See Preston Sprinkle, *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2021), 75-76.

⁷⁰ Herman Bavinck, "Common Grace," trans. Raymond C. van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24 (1989): 61.

“we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2). If Christ’s resurrected state is that of sexed embodiment, then becoming like him in our own resurrected state should include the sexed identity that we had in our pre-resurrected state.

The intermediate and resurrected states of humanity as well as the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus show that sexed human embodiment is the natural state of human existence. If disembodiment is only temporary and if human resurrected identity—like that of Jesus—will be sexed, then the core tenets of transgender ideology prove to be heterodox. Christian anthropology shows humanity’s natural state to be that of sexed embodiment; therefore, the existence of gender identity and sex-gender misalignment is an insult to Christian anthropology, for both gender identity and sex-gender misalignment rip identity away from the body and place all authority in the mind. The anthropological truths outlined in this section are sufficient to prove the thesis of this dissertation. However, there are additional theological truths that prove the heterodoxy of transgender ideology. Hence, in the next section, I will argue that the created order demonstrates the meaning and goodness that God has placed on human sexed embodiment.

God’s Created Order and the Goodness and Meaning of the Image Bearer’s Sexed Embodiment

A significant contributing factor to today’s growing approval of transgender ideology is that society lacks an understanding of design and purpose. The ideas of Charles Darwin have influenced postmodern man. By embracing materialism, Darwin needed to argue that the appearance of a telos is merely an illusion; hence, he contended that living structures are the result of “blind, undirected forces.”⁷¹ Darwin’s most famous contemporary disciple, Richard Dawkins, agrees: “Natural selection, the blind

⁷¹ Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 23.

unconscious automatic process which Darwin discovered . . . , has no purpose in mind.”⁷²

If Darwin and Dawkins are correct, then ethical prescriptions cannot result from how things are. For example, Camille Paglia, a popular self-identified transgender author, applies this form of materialism to the ethics of transgender identities: “Fate, not God, has given us this flesh. We have absolute claim to our bodies and may do with them as we see fit.”⁷³ Charles Taylor calls this profound collapse of the transcendent in the modern mind the “malaise of immanence.”⁷⁴

The problem, Taylor says, is that “the cosmos is no longer seen as the embodiment of meaningful order which can define the good for us.”⁷⁵ He distinguishes between two worldviews: mimesis and poiesis. He describes the mimesis worldview as one where the world has meaning and a given order and thus requires humans to discover such order and live according to it. The poiesis worldview sees the world as raw material utilized to create meaning and purpose by the individual.⁷⁶ It is simple logic, according to Nancy Pearcey: “If nature does not reveal God’s will, then it is a morally neutral realm where humans may impose their will.”⁷⁷ When a society believes the body lacks a telos and is merely a collection of physical systems, there remains no authoritative order for the “oughts” of life. Though postmodern society uses ethical language in discourse, if an underlying meaning or purpose to life is stripped away, then all that is left is what

⁷² Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe without Design* (New York: Norton, 1980), 5.

⁷³ Camille Paglia, “Rebel Love: Homosexuality,” in *Vamps and Tramps: New Essays* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 71.

⁷⁴ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2018), 308.

⁷⁵ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 148-49.

⁷⁶ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 97-99.

⁷⁷ Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 24.

Alasdair MacIntyre calls “emotivism,” an assumption that “all morals are nothing but expressions of preference” or “expressions of attitudes or feelings.”⁷⁸

For Adam Cooper, “Christian ethics has always held that moral obligation may be discerned by examining the fundamental inclinations and teleological goods of human nature, that is, by defining human nature not statically but as a trajectory of actualization, oriented towards its own fulfillment and perfection.”⁷⁹ In other words, man functions most appropriately when he lives in the designed way. Thomas Aquinas believed this was, alongside Scripture’s witness, the epistemology of the ethical. He said, *bonum praesupponit verum*, which means, “the good presupposes the true.”⁸⁰ Simply put, only by knowing the true can one choose the good. Josef Pieper agrees: “All obligation is based on being. Reality is the foundation of ethics. The good is that which accords with reality.”⁸¹

Oliver O’Donovan agrees that ethics is only possible where such order exists: “Only if the order which we think we see, or something like it, is really present in the world, can there be ‘evangelical’ ethics. Only so, indeed, can there be a Christian, rather than a gnostic, gospel at all.”⁸² In fact, McLaughlin exclaims, “Stripped of belief in a creator God, modern secular thinking cannot give us a coherent account of what a human being is, why we are more than a collection of cells, or how we are different from animals. No wonder it can’t tell us what it means to be male or female.”⁸³ Without consideration of the created world, a Christian ethic can be nothing more than a Gnostic

12. ⁷⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007),

⁷⁹ Cooper, *Life in the Flesh*, 143.

⁸⁰ Eleonor Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003), 3-4.

⁸¹ Josef Pieper, *Living the Truth: The Truth of All Things and Reality and the Good* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 111.

⁸² O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 36.

⁸³ McLaughlin, *The Secular Creed*, 95.

attempt at a non-physical, spiritual ethic. Therefore, a Christian ethic must always consider the created world—the facts of biology. The way creation is, not humanity’s handling of it, determines how humans ought to behave.⁸⁴

In Colossians 1:15-20, the apostle Paul, while offering a Christological discourse, includes a critical description of the order that exists in creation:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Paul communicates that all things were created by Christ (“created through him”), that all things were created for a purpose (“for him”), and that Christ holds all things together to accomplish their purpose (“in him all things hold together”). Furthermore, Paul connects creation to reconciliation. O’Donovan observes that “the wholeness of the universe depends on its being a created universe, and thereafter on its being reconciled, brought back into the order of its creation.”⁸⁵ Therefore, any imperative that Paul offers in his letters is tethered to these five truths: (1) this is a created world; (2) it was created for a purpose; (3) sin has infected and affected humanity’s directional treatment of it; (4) one day, it will be restored to its created order; and (5) God’s children are commanded to live now in accordance with that purpose.

God’s created order communicates purpose. Humans have eyes for seeing, noses for smelling, and ears for hearing. Sex is as biologically concrete as eyes, noses, and ears, and males are created to be men and females, women. A purpose-driven, teleological view necessarily denies the dichotomy between body and person. The body

⁸⁴ O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 17.

⁸⁵ O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 32.

and person form, what Pearcey calls, a “psycho-physical unity.”⁸⁶ There is grave danger in disconnecting biology from self-identity. According to Joseph Ratzinger, “Whenever biology is subtracted from humanity, humanity itself is negated.”⁸⁷ Therefore, gender-dysphoric persons cannot seek freedom from the body in order to discover themselves; instead, they can celebrate their “embodied existence as a good gift from God. Instead of escaping from the body, the goal is to live in harmony with it.”⁸⁸ Embodied persons should not harm their bodies; instead, they should love, celebrate, and worship God with their bodies. Created order demonstrates that matter matters.

Church history is filled with attempts and failures to understand Scripture properly. One common thread found in historical heterodoxies is the failure of the church to recognize the inherent goodness of God’s creation. Asceticism and other legalistic practices have existed as long as the church, and these practices are an affront to the goodness of God’s creation. If what God created as blessings are considered dangers to avoid, then the very purposes of God are undermined. The book of Genesis unmistakably communicates the goodness of God’s creation by recording God’s declaration of its goodness six times, followed by an announcement after the creation of Adam and Eve that it was “very good.” Therefore, Paul opposes teachings that run contrary to the goodness of God’s creation:

Why . . . do you submit to regulations—“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. (Col 2:21-23)

Similarly, Paul writes, “For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and

⁸⁶ Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 23.

⁸⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, “Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine and Piety in Faith and Theology as a Whole,” *Communio* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 157.

⁸⁸ Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 211.

prayer” (1 Tim 4:4-5). Only in a world that lacks order, are all human actions ethically neutral. If there is order or design, then all human actions and behaviors are either natural or unnatural, healthy or unhealthy, fruitful or unfruitful. Scripture communicates meticulous order in God’s creation. Indeed, the creation of man and woman is the pinnacle of God’s good design; therefore the sex of God’s image bearers, themselves, possess order and design.

The creation of His image-bearers is the pinnacle of God’s good design.

The first two truths recorded concerning humanity are (1) that they were created in God’s image and (2) that they were created male and female (Gen 1:26-27). These two truths are integral to a proper theology of the body and the human person. The phrase “image of God” is not applied to all of God’s creation but only to God’s creation of man and woman. Genesis 2 deepens this phrase by explaining man’s physical and non-physical integration. When God made man, he “formed the man of dust from the ground” and “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature” (Gen 2:7). Immediately, the merging of the physical and the non-physical is visible. “While all creatures display vestiges of God,” Bavinck contends, “only a human being is the image of God. And he is such totally, in soul and body, in all his faculties and powers, in all conditions and relations.”⁸⁹ God did not, however, create generic body-soul persons; instead, he created them male and female (Gen 1:26-27). He was pleased with his design of the man and the women, calling his creation after day six “very good” (Gen 1:31).

To consider man and woman as image bearers of God is to consider the body not merely as a “biological category but supremely as a theological category, designed for God’s revelatory and saving purposes.”⁹⁰ It is necessary to begin with the image of

⁸⁹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 555.

⁹⁰ Tennent, *For the Body*, 14.

God as the foundational truth about humanity. With any other starting point, we fail to recognize “the *imago Dei* as a declaration that God intended to create human persons to be the physical means through which he would manifest his own divine presence in the world.”⁹¹ The full scope of the image of God is not in view in this dissertation but the image of God as it communicates truths about the body.

The very words the triune God used to communicate how humans were created in his image are instructive: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’” (Gen 1:26a). “Image” (*tselem*) and “likeness” (*demut*) are Hebrew words that have a wider context than their usage in Genesis 1. *Tselem* most often describes “three-dimensional cult statues of various false gods.”⁹² *Demut* is used less frequently in reference to idols but functions in much the same way as *tselem*.⁹³ Understanding what Genesis means by the image of God requires a general consideration of how idols operated in the ancient world. Idols were more than mere wood or stone that symbolized a pagan god. Instead, idols were understood as expressions of divine presence in creation.⁹⁴ Man would form the raw material into the desired shape, yet through some religious ceremony, the pagan god was thought to permeate its presence into the raw material. According to José Faur, the correct understating of idols in the ancient world “was the identification of a god with his idol.”⁹⁵ The concepts of *tselem* and *demut* in Genesis are to be understood against the backdrop of that ancient practice. Therefore, the *imago Dei* that God assigned to humans communicated that “God intended to create

⁹¹ Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology*, 109.

⁹² J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 25.

⁹³ Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology*, 108.

⁹⁴ Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology*, 109.

⁹⁵ José Faur, “The Biblical Idea of Idolatry,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 69, no. 1 (1978): 7.

human persons to be the physical means through which he would manifest his own divine presence in the world.”⁹⁶

The language of Genesis 1 adds significance to the physical reality of God’s image bearers. If God fashions his representatives in such a way as to represent and glorify him, then the physical form that he gives them is more than a coincidence or afterthought. The God who instilled his image upon humanity did so with the intent that they would live and operate in the physical form assigned to them. Every command the Lord gives to his children in Scripture requires that they possess a body. The cultural mandate (Gen 1:28), Allison argues, “is accomplished by, and only by, embodied image bearers.”⁹⁷

In addition, the Pauline Epistles are filled with exhortations about how the body should be treated. Paul appeals to God’s people to present their “bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to the God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1). Importantly, “spiritual” worship is practiced in “physical” bodies. Indeed, the body is dynamic to the creator. Paul frequently rehearses this truth. His first letter to the Corinthians contains abundant evidence that sexual immorality was widespread in the church, and Paul’s response was founded on the intended purpose of the body—not to practice sexual immorality but to worship and serve the Lord (1 Cor 6:13, 19-20). Hence, Paul’s exhortation was not merely prohibitive but also constitutive of the intended purpose of the body—worship and service.

According to Paul, the pursuit of sanctification is holistic—including both the physical and the non-physical. Paul prays, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole *spirit* and *soul* and *body* be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:23; emphasis added). Additionally, Paul

⁹⁶ Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology*, 109.

⁹⁷ Allison, *Embodied*, 33.

urges the Corinthians to cleanse themselves from “every defilement of *body* and *spirit*, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of the Lord” (2 Cor 7:1; emphasis added). Therefore, a comprehensive view of sanctification is holistic and includes both the physical and the non-physical. It is no wonder why the Lord declares his creation “very good” on the day he creates his physical image bearers. The physical body is essential to all that he has purposed and commanded for his children.

The value the Lord places on human bodies is immeasurable. There was only one segment of his creation in which the Lord chose to display his image—embodied human persons. Human bodies are a gift to human persons, and they ought to receive them as a gift. Timothy Tennent explains that Michelangelo’s painting of the creation of Adam displays the “dignity and glory of the embodied, physical creation.”⁹⁸ By depicting Adam uncovered rather than covered in shame, Michelangelo displays God’s approval of Adam and his raw physicality. However, after the fall of Adam and Eve, God continues to show his care for their bodies by covering their shame: “And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them” (Gen 3:21). Jesus, the Son of God in the flesh, continued to show the value of the body by caring for the physical, bodily needs of many. John Kleinig offers a list of particular instances of Jesus’s physical care for bodies:

[Jesus] touched an unclean leper to cleanse him (Matt 8:3). He touched Peter’s mother-in-law to heal her fever (Matt 8:15) as well as the severed ear of a disciple to reattach it (Luke 22:50-51). He touched the eyes of blind people to give them sight (Matt 9:29; 20:34) as well as the tongue and ears of a mute man to restore his speech (Matt 7:33). He touched the coffin of the widow’s son in Nain to resuscitate him (Luke 7:14) and took a dead girl and an exorcized boy by their hands to revive them (Matt 9:25; Mark 9:27).⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Tennent, *For the Body*, 7.

⁹⁹ Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made*, 63.

There remains no question of Scripture’s view of the human body. The Lord regards human bodies in the highest possible manner. Yet, God’s meticulous design runs deeper than human bodies in general. He fashioned all image-bearers into either male or female.

God’s good design includes the separation of His image-bearers into male and female. The first two truths recorded concerning humanity are (1) that they were created in God’s image and (2) that they were created male and female (Gen 1:26-27). So far, this section has shown how the image of God adds value and purpose to human embodiment. Nevertheless, it is not merely *that* image bearers are embodied but also *how* they are embodied. The second truth revealed about humanity in Genesis is that they were created as sexed creatures—man and woman. The first two chapters of the Old Testament—as well as the rest of God’s Word—describe only two categories of image bearers. So foundational is sex to personhood that it is understandably the first thing one notices when someone meets a new person. Old Testament scholar Phyllis Bird argues that sexual identity is the “constitutive differentiation.”¹⁰⁰ She adds that sex “plays and fundamental role in the identity formation of every individual” and that sex “must be regarded as an essential datum in any attempt to define the human being and the nature of humankind—and thus provides a primary test for false notions of generic humanity.”

Recognizing another’s sex is simple, as only two possible categories exist. Martin Luther, in “The Estate of Marriage,” describes the only two classifications of humanity:

God divided humanity into two classes, namely male and female, or a he and she. . . . Therefore each of us must have the kind of body God has created for us. I cannot make myself a woman, nor can you make yourself a man; we do not have that power. But we are exactly as he created us; I am a man and you a woman. Moreover, he wills to have his excellent handiwork honored as his divine creation, and not despised. The man is not to despise or scoff at the woman nor her body, nor

¹⁰⁰ Phyllis A. Bird, “Bone of My Bone and Flesh of My Flesh,” *Theology Today* 50, no. 4 (January 1994): 521-34.

the woman the man. But each should honor the other's image and body as a divine and good creation that is well pleasing unto God himself.¹⁰¹

Binary ordering in God's creation is not unique to image bearers. Allison demonstrates the binary pattern of creation in Genesis: "Nothing and something; creator and creature; heaven and earth; light and darkness; day and night; evening and morning; waters above and waters below; dry land and waters; sun and moon; work and rest; tree of life and tree of knowledge; and good and evil."¹⁰² Hence, the sexual binary is not arbitrary but a significant element of God's created order. Humanity has no other option other than maleness or femaleness, which is an intended part of God's good design.

Gametes—mature reproductive cells—define sex. There are only two types: small gametes called sperm, produced by males, and large gametes called eggs, produced by females. Sexologist and neuroscientist Debra Soh contends, "There are no intermediate types of gametes between egg and sperm cells."¹⁰³ Cardiologist Paula Johnson says, "Every cell has a sex—and what that means is that men and women are different down to the cellular and molecular level. It means that we're different across all of our organs, from our brains to our hearts, our lungs, our joints."¹⁰⁴ Therefore, sex is binary and not a spectrum. "If this is the case," Adam Cooper states, "then Christian theology is necessarily precluded from following any moves to demystify the sexual body and reduce sexual difference to a matter of mere biological function or subjective orientation."¹⁰⁵ If sexual identity is present at the molecular level, then distinguishing sex

¹⁰¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 45, *Christian in Society II*, ed. Walther I. Brandt American ed. (St. Louis, MO: Fortress Press, 1955), 17-18.

¹⁰² Allison, *Embodied*, 43.

¹⁰³ Debra Soh, *The End of Gender: Debunking the Myths about Sex and Identity in Our Society* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2020), 17.

¹⁰⁴ Paula Johnson, "His and Hers ... Health Care," TED, December 2013, video, 14:29, https://www.ted.com/talks/paula_johnson_his_and_hers_healthcare?language=en.

¹⁰⁵ Cooper, *Life in the Flesh*, 208.

from gender in any way where the non-physical has more authority than the physical is not only theologically heterodox but also scientifically non-sensical.

It is commonplace for transgender advocates to weaponize intersex conditions in an attempt to rebut the binary nature of creation. However, intersex conditions pose no threat to the veracity of God's binary design of humanity. Megan DeFranza confesses that the existence of intersex conditions caused her to conclude that a person's gender identity is a more authentic expression than their biology:

Still, if I am going to be honest, I must admit that it wasn't meeting transgender people that got me thinking differently about gender identity. I didn't reconsider transgender experiences until I learned about the complexity of human biology, until I met people who would have been labeled "transgender" were it not for some biological difference of sex development that could be verified by a physician. I needed a scientist to prove to me that bodies come in more varieties than the simple categories of male (XY chromosomes) or female (XX chromosomes) that I learned in eighth-grade health class.¹⁰⁶

DeFranza's argument is popular because it scientifically explains a psychological phenomenon. According to this line of reasoning, the biological conditions that cause some to have abnormal chromosomal configurations prove the existence of a sex spectrum. Therefore, as it were, gender is a more accurate portrayal of personal identity. However, if intersex conditions are real, then how do they pose no danger to the binary sexual order of humanity? If some people possess chromosomal structures that are not clearly male or female, then does that not prove that there are more than two sexes or that sex is a spectrum?

The answer is that intersex does not mean "neither male nor female." There are sixteen different intersex classifications, otherwise known as "differences of sex development." Many transgender advocates use a statistic that reports that 1.7 percent of the population is intersex.¹⁰⁷ Though technically accurate, the statistic does not prove that

¹⁰⁶ Megan K. DeFranza, "Good News for Gender Minorities," in *Understanding Transgender Identities: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 150.

¹⁰⁷ Sprinkle, *Embodied*, 118.

1.7 percent of the population is “neither male nor female.” This statistic, Preston Sprinkle says, “includes various conditions where there is little to no difficulty in identifying a person as male or female by any standard of biology.”¹⁰⁸ Leonard Sax reports that 99 percent of people with any intersex condition are male or female, clearly and unmistakably.¹⁰⁹ The result is that only one percent of those with intersex conditions have a biological sex that remains ambiguous. That means only 1 percent of 1.7 percent (.00017%) of the population is sexually ambiguous.

Soh explains the biological factors present in a typical intersex situation:

Girls with congenital adrenal hyperplasia are exposed to unusually high levels of testosterone in the womb. When they are born, they may have genitalia that are ambiguous, such as a clitoris that is longer than average or labia that looks like a scrotum. They have ovaries that will produce eggs, typical of girls who are not intersex.¹¹⁰

Even in the rarest of circumstances, where a person has both XX and XY chromosomes, with full male and female anatomy, the person does not exist as *neither* male *nor* female but as having *both* male *and* female chromosomes.¹¹¹ There is no third sex, and there is no spectrum of sex. Instead, scarce conditions (1 percent of the 1.7 percent of the population) lead to a chromosomal structure that makes a person’s sex anatomically ambiguous.

Intersex conditions and transgender identities should not be linked on a conceptual level. A person who has a biological intersex disorder and a person who has

¹⁰⁸ Sprinkle, *Embodied*, 118.

¹⁰⁹ Leonard Sax, “How Common Is Intersex? A Response to Anne Fausto-Sterling,” *Journal of Sex Research* 39, no. 3 (August 2002): 174-78.

¹¹⁰ Soh, *The End of Gender*, 24.

¹¹¹ Zachary Elliot, founder of The Paradox Institute, argues against the contention that intersex conditions prove the existence of more than two sexes. He argues that chromosomes are not sexes. His research shows that the presence of the SRY gene categorically leads to the male sex and in the absence of the SRY gene, female sex. Therefore, according to Elliot, no matter the intersex condition, the presence or absence of the SRY gene will determine sex as either male or female and never a third sex. See Zachary Elliot, “Chromosomes Are Not Sexes,” published October 1, 2022, video, 3:45, <https://www.theparadoxinstitute.com/watch/chromosomes-are-not-sexes>.

no biological condition but has an internal gender identity mismatch with their biological reality are two completely different ontological realities. In order for someone to link the two in an intellectually honest way, one would have to argue that intersex people, those with a biological condition affecting their sexual clarity, are the only people who could be called “transgender.” Yet this is, of course, not the claim transgender advocates intend to make.

The biblical account is clear that God created image bearers in the form of two sexes. I have shown that God’s creation is good and that he called his creation of man and woman “very good.” Consequently, his choice of a sexual binary is good and reaches the very core of the human person. All of human life is lived in a sexed body, and nothing is done outside of a sexed body. Robert Jewett affirms this reality:

Sexuality permeates one’s individual being to its very depth; it conditions every facet of one’s life as a person. As the self is always aware of itself as an “I,” so this “I” is always aware of itself as himself or herself. Our self-knowledge is indissolubly bound up not simply with our human being but with our sexual being. At the human level there is no “I and thou” per se, but only “I” who is male or female confronting the “thou,” the “other,” who is also male and female.¹¹²

Therefore, not only is the body immeasurably valuable to human life but also the value of the body is inseparably linked to a sexed identity, and sexed human embodiment, as the only form of human embodiment, also displays the goodness of sexual differences.

The Lord created man and woman, not on accident but for purpose:

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (Gen 1:28-31)

¹¹² Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female: A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 172.

God’s very plan and purpose for his creation are contingent on there being two distinguishable sexes. His command for humankind to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” necessitates a differentiation of humanity into two valuable and complementary sexes. There are many differences among human beings—height, weight, hair color, eye color, and much more. However, only sexual difference makes reproduction possible. One’s sex is not something one can create from raw material but is received from a God who “has woven sexual difference into the fabric of creation.”¹¹³ Therefore, sexual difference is a blessing to humanity and glorifying to God.

Beyond differences in reproductive organs, men and women remain dissimilar in clear and observable ways. Of course, as image bearers, male and female similarities outweigh differences. Nevertheless, distinguishing between male and female is essential as it highlights the goodness of diversity in God’s created order. Even before one observes empirical differences between the sexes, a clear distinction is evident at creation. In an article titled “The Authority of the Body: Discovering Natural Manhood and Womanhood,” Matthew Mason identifies five differences between men and women evident at creation, as explained in Genesis 1 and 2:

1. The man and the woman are different in the order of their creation (Adam, then Eve).
2. The man and the woman are different in the manner of their creation (dust vs. rib).
3. The man and the woman are different in the location of their creation (outside the garden vs. inside the garden).
4. The man and the woman are different in their relationship to the broader creation (leader vs. helper).
5. The man and the woman are different in their relationship to their offspring (Eve conceived; Adam did not).¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Todd Wilson, “Mere Sexuality,” in *Beauty, Order, and Mystery: A Christian Vision of Human Sexuality*, ed. Gerald L. Hiestand and Todd A. Wilson, Center for Pastor Theologians Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017), 7-19.

¹¹⁴ Matthew Mason, “The Authority of the Body: Discovering Natural Manhood and Womanhood,” *Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology* 4, no. 2 (2017): 54-57,

The Lord did not merely create two humans or even two image bearers; he created a man and a woman, and even in the brief creation narrative, their differences are apparent. Indeed, the list of differences would be far lengthier if all of Scripture was considered, not to mention biological and sociological differences that can be studied and observed in modern times. It is not the intention of this section to cover a wide range of biological, sociological, or psychological differences between the sexes. However, two examples, one internal and one external, will assist in highlighting God’s grand and diverse design in man and woman. Internally, as described in chapter 4, men and women have different constitution. “The female brain,” Simon Baron-Cohen says, “is predominantly hard-wired for empathy.” The male brain, on the other hand, “is predominantly hard-wired for understanding and building systems.”¹¹⁵ Fittingly, J. Budziszewski reports that women “tend to have higher survey scores than men in nurturance or tendermindedness, trustfulness, and anxiousness. In various ways, they show greater sensitivity to emotion.”¹¹⁶ Men show the reverse pattern; they have “much higher scores in assertiveness, they are more open to new ideas, and they are more interested in excitement.”¹¹⁷

According to neuroscientist Larry Cahill, brain organization is best imagined as “two complex mosaics—one male and one female—that are similar in many respects but very different in others. The way that information is processed through the two mosaics, and the behaviors that each produce, could be identical or strikingly different,

https://www.academia.edu/37578788/The_Authority_of_the_Body_Discovering_Natural_Manhood_and_Womanhood.

¹¹⁵ Simon Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference: Male and Female Brains and the Truth about Autism* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 1.

¹¹⁶ J. Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2014), 47.

¹¹⁷ Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex*, 48.

depending on a host of parameters.”¹¹⁸ These differences affect many aspects of behavior, including “emotion, memory, vision, hearing, processing faces, pain perception, navigation, neurotransmitter levels, stress hormone action on the brain, and disease.”¹¹⁹ Mason illustrates the differences between the sexes by reflecting on a person walking into two rooms at a party. “The first is full of women, the second, men. Instinctively, it is obvious that the tone and atmosphere of the rooms feel different, and different again from a room containing a mix of men and women.”¹²⁰ Experientially, we know this is true. The general behavioral differences between men and women are tangible, and it is no wonder children respond differently to men and women at the earliest stages of life.¹²¹ With little lived experience, young children can sense a marked difference between the sexes.

The composition of the brain is one internal example of the clear and distinguishable differences between the sexes, and the face is an external example. Julian Marias believes that the face reveals the most noticeable differences between the sexes.¹²² Likewise, Roger Scruton believes the face reveals the person as a sexed individual. The face displays an explicit and intended diversity between the sexes. Scruton asks, “Why do eyes, mouth, nose and brow transfix us, when they are so little relation to the sexual prowess and bodily perfection of their bearer?”¹²³ He answers that “the face is the primary expression of consciousness, and to see in the face the object of sexual attraction is to find the focus which all attraction requires—the focus on another’s existence, as a being who can be aware of me.” Marias agrees and concludes that the face, though

¹¹⁸ Larry Cahill, “Why Sex Matters for Neuroscience,” *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 7, no. 6 (June 2006): 477-84.

¹¹⁹ Cahill, “Why Sex Matters for Neuroscience,” 477-84.

¹²⁰ Mason, “The Authority of the Body,” 48.

¹²¹ Julian Marias, *Metaphysical Anthropology: The Empirical Structure of Human Life* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1971), 141.

¹²² Marias, *Metaphysical Anthropology*, 141-51.

¹²³ Roger Scruton, *The Face of God* (New York: Continuum, 2014), 23.

“minimally sexual,” is “maximally sexual; it is precisely that portion of human reality in which the male or female becomes present.”¹²⁴ Mason clarifies, “Once infancy has passed, there is rarely any confusion whether one is looking at the face of a girl or a boy.”¹²⁵

Caitlyn Jenner, our culture’s most famous self-identified transgender person, appeared on the cover of *Vanity Fair* wearing entirely feminine apparel.¹²⁶ However, the dress, the hair, the jewelry, the heels, and the makeup were not enough to hide that Caitlyn was simply a feminized version of Bruce. His face could not be hidden, and his face told the story. Though his face was “feminized” through reconstructive surgery to make him look more feminine than before, Bruce’s disappearance was impossible.¹²⁷ More recently, in December 2022, TikTok star Dylan Mulvaney, a self-described transwoman, underwent facial reconstruction surgery. The already feminized Mulvaney concluded that his face was not allowing him to fully be the “her” he believed himself to be. Mulvaney announced and revealed his facial transition on TikTok: “I’m so happy. It’s still me. It’s just a little bit softer of a version.”¹²⁸ Jenner, Mulvaney, and thousands of others who have had the same reconstructive surgery affirm the power of the face’s story. By electing for the surgery, they admit that their natural bodily order says something about themselves, yet they do not like what it says.

¹²⁴ Marias, *Metaphysical Anthropology*, 144.

¹²⁵ Mason, “The Authority of the Body,” 50.

¹²⁶ Condé Nast, “Caitlyn Jenner: The Full Story,” *Vanity Fair*, June 1, 2015, <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2015/06/caitlyn-jenner-bruce-cover-annie-leibovitz>.

¹²⁷ Andrew Walker made a similar argument regarding Caitlyn’s hands. See Andrew Walker, “The Hidden Hands of Caitlyn Jenner,” *The Gospel Coalition*, November 22, 2017, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/hidden-hands-of-caitlyn-jenner/>.

¹²⁸ Miguel A. Melendez, “Dylan Mulvaney Reveals Her Face after Feminization Surgery in Glamorous Video,” *Entertainment Tonight*, January 27, 2023, <https://www.etonline.com/dylan-mulvaney-reveals-her-face-after-feminization-surgery-in-glamorous-video-198104>.

There are essential differences between men and women. Brain composition and facial construction are just two examples. However, they are only *predominately* true, not *exclusively* true. Just as most men are taller than most women, we have all seen examples of tall women and short men. Two mistakes are either to take predominately true things and treat them as exclusively true or to take predominately true things and strip them of any significance. To treat predominately true as exclusively true is to create rigid gender stereotypes, as addressed in chapter 4. To downplay general differences between men and women is to blind oneself to God's diverse design of the sexes. There remains a reasonable middle ground between these two extreme poles. The inherent differences woven into the biological and psychological makeups of both sexes can be both predominately true (though not always true) and simultaneously a glorious reality demonstrating the diversity of God's good design.

In summary, the value of the human body has been evidenced through a study of the two most foundational truths about humanity: (1) they were created in God's image, and (2) they were created as man and woman. These two truths show that embodiment, beyond the fact that it is the natural state of human existence, is not an accident but the manner God has chosen to image himself to his creation. Furthermore, the embodiment he has chosen for humanity is not uniform but diverse. Embodied image-bearing is never general but specific—either man or woman. The human body's value and the sexes' design show transgender ideology to be heterodox. The concept of gender identity is an insult to God's grand design of human embodiment. Gender identity renders the body unnecessary for personal identity. It reduces human identity to the realm of the non-physical. Of course, any attempt to mutilate the body to correspond with an internal sense of self is an affront to the body God gifted to the individual. Hence, if gender identity is not coherent (chap. 4) and is heterodox (chap. 5), then a sex-gender misalignment based on the assumption of gender identity is equally incoherent and heterodox.

Sex and gender ought to remain connected. In chapter 4, I argued that the concept of gender is no longer helpful and, therefore, should be avoided wherever possible. The lack of clarity surrounding what any given person intends when they use the word creates confusion that should be avoided. As explained in chapter 4, the first iteration of “gender” was a grammatical term, and the second iteration of “gender” was used to describe social expectations placed on the sexes. Nevertheless, gender was still understood as tied to biological sex. The third iteration was deemed a “social construct.” Third-wave feminists argued that “gender” is a socially constructed category utterly disconnected from biological sex. Transgender ideology benefited greatly from this third iteration and morphed the concept further to describe the internally present identity of an individual. Therefore, transgender ideology typically uses “gender” as a synonym for “gender identity.” However, within transgender ideology, the term “gender” can sometimes be used to denote “gender expression.”

Although I argue for the abandonment of “gender” altogether, most conservative Christian scholars would argue that “gender” can still be a proper term as long as a clear definition is given. For example, Alan Branch declares, “the gift of gender is an intricate part of the image of God.”¹²⁹ Three sentences later, he amalgamates “gender” with “sexuality” when he writes, “Genesis 1:27 affirms that sexuality is not an accident of nature, nor is it simply a biological phenomenon. Instead, sexual identity and function are part of God’s will for his image-bearers.”¹³⁰ Branch, therefore, connects biological sex and gender identity as if they are one concept. He sees “gender identity” as the deeply embedded sexed identity, tied to biology, that is lived out in the person. If “gender” is a helpful category we must use, then I agree with Branch’s conclusion that it

¹²⁹ J. Alan Branch, *Affirming God’s Image: Addressing the Transgender Question with Science and Scripture* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 41.

¹³⁰ Branch, *Affirming God’s Image*, 41.

is inextricably tied to biological sex. Therefore, I find Sprinkle’s assessment of gender in Genesis 1 confusing and unhelpful. He writes, “The categories of male and female in Genesis 1 describe biological sex, not gender identity or gender role.”¹³¹ Indeed, biological categories are in view in Genesis 1; however, if gender identity and biological sex are inextricably linked (i.e., if one’s gender identity is necessarily tied to one’s biological sex), then demarcating them at all is inappropriate and unhelpful. Mason agrees: “Bodily sex and personal gender are not separate things; they are harmonious, the one present and expressed in the other.”¹³² Elsewhere, Mason argues, “Our gender (masculine or feminine), although shaped by culture and tradition, is inscribed in our bodies and blossoms forth from the root of our biological sex. Our bodies, therefore, give us our gender identity, which is inextricably linked to our bodily form as male or female.”¹³³

The next best solution to abandoning the concept of gender altogether is to use the word but to clearly state that sex and gender are connected without the possibility of disconnecting. Ironically, transgender identities prove this. When a transgender individual undergoes bodily surgery, they make the argument. There is an inherent and deep desire to have body and mind, or physical and non-physical, agree. When a person undergoes “reassignment surgery,” they assume their body speaks to their identity as male or female. Yet they erroneously believe that they—absent from their body—have autonomous authority over the body. But the truth is the converse: the body holds the authority. In the next section, I will show this to be the case.

¹³¹ Sprinkle, *Embodied*, 65.

¹³² Mason, “The Authority of the Body,” 50.

¹³³ Matthew Mason, “The Wounded It Heals: Gender Dysphoria and the Resurrection of the Body,” in Hiestand and Wilson, *Beauty, Order, and Mystery*, 139.

A Biblical Worldview and the Authority of the Body

The chasm between transgender ideology and the Christian worldview cannot be overestimated. According to Paul’s description of fallen humanity, there are only two worldviews:

Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the God of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Rom 1:22-25)

Either there is a creator, and a distinction between creator and creation (Twoism) or there is not (Oneism). Either the creator is worshipped (Twoism) or the creation (Oneism).

There are only two ways one can make sense of the world. There are only two possible answers to the ultimate metaphysical question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” Either the universe—the physical world—just happened (Oneism) or an uncreated creator caused it (Twoism). Either the physical world is all there is or it is not.

British theologian Colin Gunton says,

There are, probably, ultimately only two possible answers to the question of origins, and they recur at different places in all ages: [either] that the universe is the result of creation by a free personal agent, or that in some way or another, it creates itself. The two answers are not finally compatible, and require a choice, either between them or an attitude of agnostic refusal to decide.¹³⁴

Peter Jones names these two divergent systems: Oneism and Twoism.¹³⁵ Though Paul does not use the terminology that Jones does, the two are describing the same thing. What Paul describes as those who “exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Rom 1:25) is what Peter Jones calls Oneism. Those who worship and serve the creation rather than the creator either deny the

¹³⁴ Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 3-4.

¹³⁵ Peter Jones, *The Other Worldview: Exposing Christianity’s Greatest Threat* (Bellingham, WA: Kirkdale Press, 2015), 12.

existence of a creator or at least live like there is not one. Twoism is what Jones calls the acknowledgment of the existence of a creator and the distinction between the creator and the creation.

Oneism, Jones explains, “sees the world as self-creating (or perpetually existing) and self-explanatory.”¹³⁶ He continues, “There’s one kind of existence, which, in one way or another, we worship as divine (or of ultimate importance), even if that means worshipping ourselves.”¹³⁷ “Oneism” refers to the worldview that there is only “one” thing—the universe, the physical world. “Twoism,” on the other hand, is a worldview that sees reality as two things—the creator and his creation. Scripture presents a transcendent God who creates the universe from nothing. Therefore, there is God, and then there is everything else—there are “two things.” “There are only two worldviews,” Old Testament scholar John Oswalt explains, “the biblical one . . . and the other one.”¹³⁸ These two worldviews are incompatible. They cannot be confused or blended; there is either one or two.

These two irreconcilable worldviews lead to two divergent ethical systems. Oneism necessarily turns inward for truth; indeed it cannot turn outward as there is nothing outward to turn toward. All that is left is inward. Conversely, Twoism must turn outward. If there is a creator and everything else is created, including the human subject, then truth must be found in the creator who designed his creation for specific ends. The consideration of three evolving cultures over the last few centuries is advantageous to explain where and why culture looks where it does to find truth: (1) pre-Enlightenment or pre-modern culture (before the seventeenth century); (2) Enlightenment or modern culture (seventeenth century through the 1950s); and (3) post-Enlightenment or

¹³⁶ Jones, *The Other Worldview*, 12.

¹³⁷ Jones, *The Other Worldview*, 12.

¹³⁸ John N. Oswalt, *The Bible among the Myths: Unique Revelation or Just Ancient Literature?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 28.

postmodern culture (1960s to the present). In these broad movements, one can discern epistemological shifts resulting in an ethical revolution. First, the pre-modern culture was characterized as a religious culture wherein individuals relied on the transcendent for truth and guidance. Whether it followed monotheistic religion or pagan cult, human life was most commonly in submission to the supernatural for truth. Second, the Enlightenment brought a modern culture where the transcendent was no longer necessary for truth. Scientific observation and method became supreme. Rather than submission to a deity for truth, human beings popularly studied creation—the physical world—for truth and guidance. What was true is what could be proven with observation and testing. Though significant, the shift from pre-modern to modern did not affect the necessity of searching outside self to receive the truth.

Third, the reliance on a source outside of self was abolished in postmodern culture; looking became introspective. Instead of searching outside self, one now searches inside self to find truth. Disenfranchised by both the divine and the scientific, postmodern culture turned to the only remaining option—the self. When humans began looking to the self as the ultimate truth source, any order that was once understood to be present in creation was abandoned. Transgender ideology can only exist where a total disregard for the authority of the divine and the physical has taken place. The two worldviews present behind transgender ideology (Oneism) and the Christian response to transgender ideology (Twoism) is the difference between authority. Matthew Mason explains, “The way our culture views freedom, choice and humanness, means that the individual will is utterly sovereign over nature, including our sexuate nature. Therefore, the self is regarded as highly malleable, in accordance with the dictates of the sovereign will.”¹³⁹ However, Christians know that their human reality is received. God has inscribed sexual identity in human bodies at creation. Oliver O’Donovan explains that the

¹³⁹ Mason, “The Authority of the Body,” 40.

order present in individual human identity comes from the Lord, who made it for himself and sustains and directs its existence.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, the Christian response to transgender ideology must begin with the broadest of metaphysical questions. Why is there something rather than nothing? If the answer includes a sovereign, creative Lord who has designed the physical world, including sexed image bearers, for his glory and humanity's good, then transgender ideology is proven heterodox before one addresses any further questions.

Humans possess bodily authority.¹⁴¹ However, whereas transgender ideology envisions human authority *over* the body, faithful theological anthropology envisions human authority *in* and *with* the body. On the one hand, Scripture gives humanity much freedom—but never complete autonomy—over their bodies. From diet and exercise to piercings and tattoos, humans enjoy freedom in and with their bodies. To be sure, Scripture does command against gluttony, adultery, and cultic worship, among other things, yet there remains much freedom beyond explicit biblical prohibitions. On the other hand, the body itself has authority over human life. A man five feet nine inches tall is not six feet tall and cannot make himself six feet tall. Likewise, the human body cannot fly, and no amount of cosmetic alterations can provide a way for the human body to fly. Death is the most obvious example of the body's authority. A woman may eat as healthy as possible and work out as much as humanly possible, yet she cannot elude death. The body has authority that cannot be thwarted. Indeed, humans have much bodily freedom but do not have ultimate authority over their bodies. Andrew Walker summarizes, “As creatures, we can't rewrite the blueprint of our design out of our own will. A plane's engine cannot decide to be a wheel, because the wheel is defined with a different purpose

¹⁴⁰ O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 31.

¹⁴¹ “Bodily authority” refers to the ability that humans have to make decisions that will affect their bodies.

in mind. We have neither the authority nor the ability to rewrite or reconfigure how God made his world.”¹⁴² Humans have authority *in* and *with* their bodies, but not *over* them.

God gifts a person’s sex in and through the body. Just as a man cannot make his body fly with cosmetic alterations, though he may create wing-like appendages, so also a man cannot become a woman with cosmetic alterations, though he may create a feminine-looking physique. Tony Reinke explains,

Chromosomes cannot be re-engineered, removed, or scrubbed from the software of our bodies. It may be possible for a “trans woman” to “pass” for a woman on the street at a visual level, but it is not possible for a man to morph himself into a biological woman with all the experiences and functions of natural femaleness. The biological narrative doesn’t exist.¹⁴³

The attempt to change the body’s design is an indictment of God’s good design. To attempt reassignment surgery is to participate in the mutilation of the flesh that God so graciously gifted. Image bearers do not have this type of authority over their bodies. As humanity lives with broken bodies, the goal is to return to the Lord’s created intention of sexed embodiment rather than attempting to undermine it.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the heterodoxy of transgender ideology. Its core tenets are out of alignment with faithful Christian theological anthropology. The existence of gender identity, as transgender ideology defines it, places the non-physical above the physical. It reduces the body to an accident at best and a plight at worst. The existence of a sex-gender misalignment is proven heterodox on the same grounds. Transgender ideology is nothing less than the most recent strain of Gnostic heresy. The sharp mind-body split, resulting in a body-person split, cannot coexist with faithful theological

¹⁴² Andrew T. Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate: What Does the Bible Actually Say about Gender Identity?*, exp. and upd. ed. (Surrey, England: Good Book, 2022), 53.

¹⁴³ Tony Reinke, “All of Us Sinners, None of Us Freaks: Christian Convictions for the Transgender Age,” *Desiring God*, August 6, 2016, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/all-of-us-sinners-none-of-us-freaks>.

anthropology. God’s creation of man and woman as sexed and embodied beings places too much value on the physical body to render it non-authoritative for personal identity. So valuable is embodiment that it is the natural state of human existence. So valuable is embodiment that God sent his Son in the flesh to save humanity and raised him in a resurrected embodied state. The New Testament witness presents a God committed to his image bearers as male and female, not only in their current state but also in their resurrected state. This reality is instructive to humanity’s pre-resurrected state. If we will be raised in a sexed embodiment, then we know something about the ethics of attempting to devalue, or attempting to change, our sexed identity. Matthew Mason concludes, “This body, given to me by my creator according to his original purpose, including its biological sex and the personal gender identity that entails, is the body that will rise on the last day—transformed, powerful, immortal, and glorious beyond my imagining.”¹⁴⁴ If Mason’s assessment is accurate, then those who have undergone sex reassignment surgery will live in their resurrected state in their original sexed body. Those in Christ who have undergone sex reassignment surgery will live eternally in their glorious resurrected bodies that bear the sexed identity of God’s original order and purpose; they will be perfectly comfortable and satisfied. Just as the cripple will walk again, the transgender person will feel whole in their originally created sexed identity. Any attempt to thwart this eternal reality in the pre-resurrected state is theologically heterodox and should, therefore, be rejected.

There is one God, the creator of heaven and earth. He has made himself known in and through his Son Jesus Christ, who was crucified yet rose again. It is through him that new creation awaits. Creation, in the present form, will be put in proper order—bodies will be perfected, the pain will cease, and any sensed misalignment between mind and body will be realigned. N. T. Wright says, “This is good news indeed for those

¹⁴⁴ Mason, “The Wounded It Heals,” 143.

trapped within the gnostic assumptions of post-Enlightenment modernity.”¹⁴⁵ The good news is that the Christian response is for more than just Christians. If ethics is based on creation, then it is for all creation. Oliver O’Donovan says, “Thus Christian moral judgments in principle address every man. They are not something which the Christian has opted into and which he might as well, quite as sensibly, have opted out of.”¹⁴⁶ Sin is the rejection of created order; thus, living within the created order is not only glorifying to God but also good for humanity. Therefore, “our embodied hope, which the Spirit grants to our embodied desire, must transform our present bodily practices.”¹⁴⁷ A loving plea to God’s image bearers to live in conformity with the created order, which is for their good, is an essential part of the Christian response to transgender ideology and one that God’s people ought to communicate eagerly and bravely.

¹⁴⁵ Wright, *Creation, Power and Truth*, 33.

¹⁴⁶ O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 17.

¹⁴⁷ Beth Felker Jones, “Embodied from Creation Through Redemption: Placing Gender and Sexuality in Theological Context,” in Hiestand and Wilson, *Beauty, Order, and Mystery*, 28.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Transgender identities may be a recent phenomenon, but it is not a fringe subject. With over 1.4 million adults in the United States claiming a sex-gender misalignment, Christians cannot remain uninformed or ill-informed. Transgender ideology has affected large swaths of Western culture, and the magnitude of the ideology's influence has left no part of modern life untouched. Popular culture, politics, education, business, and medicine have all been affected and infected by this peculiar movement. Christians seeking to live faithfully under the authority of God's Word in doctrine and practice require resources to assist them in investigating and responding to cultural occurrences such as transgender ideology. This dissertation was designed to serve that purpose.

A faithful Christian response to transgender ideology is the rejection of its core tenets. At its foundation, transgender identities result from an ideology that affirms (1) the existence of gender identity and (2) that gender can, and sometimes does, misalign with biological sex. Though beneficial, either a philosophical or a theological rebuttal is less compelling than a combination of the two. Through an investigation of transgender ideology, I have shown that its core tenets are philosophically incoherent and theologically heterodox. Philosophically, (1) gender identity is an incoherent concept, and (2) sex and gender cannot misalign in any rational way. In fact, the concept of "gender" is nearly void of meaning; it is no longer a helpful category and, therefore, should be avoided. Theologically, (1) gender identity is an affront to God's purposeful design of embodied image bearers, and (2) sex and gender cannot misalign without undermining the value and authority God has placed on sexed image bearers.

Chapter 2 provided definitions of key concepts within transgender ideology: sex, gender, gender expression, and gender identity. Integral to understanding the movement's core beliefs is an apprehension of the progression of the concept of gender; hence, an investigation of this progression was offered. Within the last seventy years, the concept of gender evolved from being a grammatical term to being a synonym for biological sex to being separated from sex and deemed a social construct to—ultimately—being understood as an internal sense of identity. When one separates gender from sex and places a person's identity inside a person's self-perception, sex-gender misalignments became a possibility. The number of self-reported misalignments has grown steadily over the past decade. It has been reinforced by popular transitions such as those of Bruce Jenner and Ellen Page, leading to a cultural acceptance of the ideology that could not have been imagined in decades past. Beyond the provision of key definitions, the secondary purpose of chapter 2 was to show the prevalence of transgender ideology in popular culture, politics, education, business, and medicine as well as stress the need for a Christian response.

Whereas chapter 2 asked and answered the question “Where are we?” chapter 3 asked and addressed the critical and supplementary question “How did we get here?” Transgender ideology did not appear out of nowhere. The postmodern person is uniquely equipped to understand and accept the premises of transgender ideology. In order to show the genealogy of worldview that allowed the West to arrive at a place where transgender ideology is plausible, I traced the progression of ideas from Friedrich Nietzsche to Michel Foucault to feminism and Judith Butler.

Nietzsche, the divine coroner, declaring the death of god, encouraged his contemporaries to live in line with the pronouncements of Enlightenment philosophy. His exhortations were not gleeful. He did not relish in the death of god; instead, he yearned for consistency between metaphysics and morals. Nietzsche's approach was twofold: (1) dismantle truth, nature, and morals; and (2) appeal for self-creation. Correctly, he

concluded that without god, there is no truth, human nature, or objective morals. Therefore, if there is no god and yet humans still live like truth, nature, and morals exist, then humans have unknowingly enslaved themselves to moral codes based on false assumptions. Nietzsche's quest was to prove that life without god should look very different from life with god. One would assume that after persuasively exposing the consequences of god's death, he would naturally argue for a nihilistic worldview; however, this was not the way. Although, in his view, there is no meaning, order, or telos to this life, Nietzsche argued that instead of accepting a meaningless existence, people could and should create their own meaning, order, and telos. He presented humans as plastic creatures, void of a fixed identity yet capable of creating a life that seeks their own greatness—becoming “supermen” (*Übermenschen*). “Will to power” was Nietzsche's preferred approach—making oneself into the person one desires to be by sheer will. By demolishing fixed, objective truth and replacing it with unfixed, subjective experience, Nietzsche began the process of bringing modern man into postmodern times.

Michel Foucault, greatly influenced by Nietzsche's work, followed the same twofold approach, reappropriating and sexualizing it for his own purposes. Foucault became Nietzsche's messenger to a Western culture experiencing the early stages of the sexual revolution. By rejecting truth, nature, and morals, Foucault presented identity categories in language as oppressive. He sought to highlight the subjective nature of language and illustrate how language taxonomies led to the controlling of human bodies. Whereas Nietzsche argued against objective moral claims, Foucault took his argument further and attacked language. By evaluating historical examples of madness and discipline, Foucault emphasized the subjective nature of taxonomies. Labeling someone “mad” in past societies produced little effect on the “madman.” However, in more contemporary times, the “madman” was controlled by forced admittance into an asylum. Furthermore, Foucault believed the criteria for considering a person mad had changed over time and is therefore subjective.

Foucault made a sexual pivot. In his book *The History of Sexuality*, he argued that the classification of “sex” itself is a taxonomy designed to group people artificially in order to control them. Although he was a homosexual, Foucault even rejected the classification of “homosexual” for himself. He believed that such a label was employed only to normalize heteronormativity and thereby reckon him and others like him as “abnormal” in an attempt to control their bodies by telling them what they can and cannot do with their bodies. Foucault believed that by normalizing the confession of sin, Christianity was primarily to blame for this phenomenon. He fashioned Nietzsche’s dismantling of truth, nature, and morals for his own sexual purposes. Additionally, like Nietzsche, Foucault rejected nihilism and appealed to self-creation. Firmly believing that modern man does not discover the self but rather invents the self, Foucault compared the lives of humans to the creation of a work of art.

No discipline has utilized Foucault more than gender studies. The path presented in chapter 3 flows from Nietzsche to Foucault to feminism. Just as Foucault fashioned Nietzsche’s arguments for sexual purposes, feminism employed Foucault’s arguments for gender purposes. Chapter 3 offered a brief history of feminism to show how Foucault’s arguments became convenient for the feminist cause. Three waves of feminism, assisted by Foucault’s ideas, led directly to transgender ideology and the societal plausibility of gender identity and sex-gender mismatches. First-wave feminism (1850-1920) was a battle for equal rights for women. Attempting to gain further ground, second-wave feminism (1960s-1980s) applied a sex-gender distinction to provide an alternative to biological determinism. By this time, women had gained many legal rights; however, most roles in society that men historically filled remained unavailable to women. The sex-gender distinction provided an avenue for separating one’s biology from one’s role in society. The distinction created was the differentiation between biology and society’s expected roles of the sexes.

Third-wave feminism (1990s) benefited from the second wave's sex-gender distinction and added psychologists' work with transsexuals to show the arbitrary nature of sex and gender. Judith Butler is synonymous with third-wave feminism. Butler made her allegiance to Foucault unmistakably clear in her early writings. She considered Foucault's work on language as oppression vital to feminism's fight for equality. By combining second-wave feminism's sex-gender distinction with Foucault's work in language and oppression, Butler concluded that both sex and gender are subjective and that taxonomies as such are created to preserve heteronormativity and keep women subjected to men. Butler famously argued that gender is performative and as equally determinative of identity as biological sex; therefore, one's sex and gender are linked to the role that one decides to play in society. One's sexed identity is a performance to be acted out. Butler did not applaud such a view of sex and gender; instead, she merely observed how sex and gender taxonomies were used in modern society. For her, the sexual binary is only for the purpose of oppression and, therefore, should be rejected wholesale. As a result, Butler drove a sharp and wide wedge between body and identity. The body, in her view, has no say in a person's identity. What began, in the first wave, as a battle for women's legal rights to equality led to, in the third wave, a complete erasure of sex and gender classifications.

It is clear how a society filled with universities where Judith Butler's books appear in every undergraduate gender studies syllabus of courses taught by those indoctrinated in her worldview for decades has resulted in a society where the concept of gender identity and a sex-gender mismatch is a plausible notion. Whereas Foucault sexualized Nietzsche and Butler "genderized" Foucault, transgender ideology internalized Butler. That is, transgender ideology capitalized on Butler's argument that the body is impotent to define reality, and it redefined "gender" once again. Rather than understanding it as a grammatical term, a synonym for sex, or a social construct, transgender ideology redefined "gender" as an inward reality. Whereas Butler viewed

gender as a relic of the past that serves no common good, transgender advocates believe that gender is the core of a person's identity. A society where a man can claim to be a woman trapped in a man's body and have his claim taken seriously can only result from a long line of thought stemming from centuries past. Hence, the cause of the transgender phenomenon is discovered by tracing a path from Friedrich Nietzsche to Michel Foucault to feminism and Judith Butler.

Chapters 4 and 5 provided philosophical and theological rebuttals to transgender ideology. Chapter 4 showed that the core tenets of transgender ideology are incoherent on philosophical grounds. The claims that sex-gender misalignments are a reality and that the inward sense of self is constitutive of identity were shown to be incoherent on two grounds. First, sex-gender misalignments caused by gender expression are based on rigid stereotypes and generalities. Much of transgender advocacy today relies on the very rigid stereotypes and generalities that first- and second-wave feminism fought against. Men and women today are frequently encouraged to consider a possible sex-gender mismatch if their looks, interests, and hobbies do not align with cultural expectations. Preserving such harsh stereotypes harms individuals whose looks and interests do not fit neatly into stereotypical masculine or feminine categories.

Second, sex-gender misalignments caused by gender identity are also founded on rigid gender stereotypes and generalities. If gender identity was a reality (i.e., a natural and coherent inward sense of identity), then perhaps gender identity could be the cause of a legitimate sex-gender misalignment. However, the concept of gender identity is incoherent. For one's gender identity to mismatch with one's biological sex, one would have to possess the ability to feel like something that one is physically not. For gender identity to be real, one must know what it feels like to be a member of the opposite sex. Chapter 4 spent significant space considering Thomas Nagel's "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" Nagel used the subjective differences between humans and bats to prove that one cannot know what it is like to be a bat. At best, a human can observe a bat and then act

like a bat. Perhaps while wearing black, hanging upside down, and making high-pitched noises, one might say, “I feel like a bat.” However, such a statement can only mean that one is behaving in a way consistent with their observation of a bat’s behavior. A human cannot subjectively experience what a bat does and, therefore, cannot coherently know what it is like to be a bat.

Similarly, though men and women are far more alike than humans are to bats, a man cannot know what it feels like to be a woman, and a woman cannot know what it feels like to be a man. The sexes do not possess the subjective experience of being the opposite sex; therefore, any internal feeling that exists to the contrary can only be caused by observations and lived out as imitations. Accordingly, the concept of gender identity that misaligns with biological sex—that is, the internal feeling of being a member of the opposite sex—cannot be a reality.

Moreover, if gender identity cannot be a legitimate cause for sex-gender misalignment, then gender stereotypes and generalities are all that remain for any feelings of misalignment. If a man cannot know what it feels like to be a woman, then the only reason he could feel such a misalignment is cultural expectations about his looks, behavior, hobbies, or interests. Therefore, whether a supposed misalignment is said to be caused by gender expression or gender identity, the perceived misalignment can only, rationally speaking, be caused by the observation and application of rigid gender stereotypes and generalities. Even if gender identity and, therefore, sex-gender misalignments were coherent, chapter 4 also exposed the inconsistencies in application of sex-gender misalignments and other mind-body misalignments. Anorexia, body integrity identity disorders, and transracial identities are all treated by popular culture as examples of incoherent concepts where the mind must appropriately be subordinate to the body. No doctor tells an anorexic young woman that her mind is authoritative over her body, allowing her to starve herself. Similarly, no doctor tells a man with body integrity identity disorder that cutting off a healthy limb is a rational option. Also, American universities

do not allow for a Caucasian student's transracial identity to affect their reported admittance/graduation demographics.

Chapter 4 also argued that "gender" is no longer a helpful term. The many iterations of "gender" confuse an already gender-confused culture. Any given person will use the term and intend any one of five different meanings: (1) a grammatical term, (2) a synonym for biological sex, (3) a description of cultural expectations placed on the sexes, (4) an indication of the way sexed identity is expressed in culture, or (5) an indication of one's internal sense of sexed self. Disappointingly, most transgender literature does not bother to define "gender." Instead, complementary terms are defined: "gender identity," "gender role," and "genderqueer," and more. The lack of a shared definition of "gender" renders usage of the term unhelpful at best and confusing at worst. The term "sex" is sufficient for the task. Every human has biological sex, and though they express their sexed identity in differing ways, an additional term, like "gender," with all of its divergent meanings, is unnecessary and only causes more confusion. Therefore, Christians should attempt to avoid using the term for greater clarity.

Chapter 4 offered sufficient evidence that the core tenets of transgender ideology are philosophically incoherent. As a necessary supplement to chapter 4, chapter 5 provided a theological rebuttal. Transgender ideology is not only philosophically incoherent but also theologically heterodox. To prove this point, chapter 5 took on two parts. First, it exposed the Gnostic underpinning of transgender ideology. Providing evidence that transgender ideology is the most recent strain of Gnosticism underscores the heterodoxy of its sharp mind-body dualistic philosophy. Transgender ideology has adopted a Gnostic view of the material world, where the body is devalued and subjugated as a part of the material world.

Second, chapter 5 offered a faithful theological anthropology by presenting several theological truths to support a high view of the body. Scripture does not support a Gnostic sharp mind-body split. Indeed, God's Word presents both a holistic unity of

physical and non-physical and sexed embodiment as the natural state of human existence. Even Christology reveals the value of sexed embodiment, as Christ entered human history as an embodied male and rose from the dead as an embodied male. Like Christ, God's children will rise in sexed bodies to live in eternity, not as disembodied spirits but as sexed embodied persons. Far from irrelevant or secondary, the physical world presents a created order that is the foundation for Christian ethics. A significant contributing factor to a society that has accepted the core tenets of transgender ideology is the lack of a sense of the transcendent. If God has created humans in physical form for a purpose, then the physical order is the foundation for ethics in the flesh.

Chapter 5 observed the first two aspects of humanity as outlined in Genesis 1: (1) they were created in the image of God, and (2) they were created as man and woman. These two core realities show the value of the human body. All humans are created in God's image with inherent dignity, value, and worth, and every one of them lives life in a sexed body. All of humanity can be placed into two categories: man or woman. Never has an image bearer existed outside of sexed embodiment. God's good design includes the blessed diversity of the sexes.

Chapter 5 further highlighted three intentional and purposeful differences between men and women: chromosomes, constitution, and faces. These differences display the goodness of the diversity of the sexes. Those who undergo reassignment surgery prove the goodness of bodily differences. Requesting and receiving surgery to reform one's physical body to match one's inward feelings only proves the importance of the body. Those transitioning often use stereotypically masculine or feminine features to match their sensed identity. Therefore, even those who most undervalue the body show the value and meaning of the body by undertaking harmful surgeries. However, if God's intention to create men and women with bodies in his image and likeness speaks to the value and meaning of the human body, then any effort to mutilate the flesh is an affront to his excellent design.

Finally, chapter 5 proved the authority that the body possesses. There are only two ways one can make sense of the world. There are only two possible answers to the ultimate metaphysical question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” Either the universe—the physical world—just happened or an uncreated creator caused it. Either the physical world is all there is, or it is not. These two worldviews can be called “Oneism” and “Twoism.” “Oneism” believes that all that exists is the physical world. “Twoism” believes that two categories exist: the creator and the created world. Ethics flows from how one sees the world. If the physical world is all there is, then humans have the authority to do with the material as they see fit. However, if a creator created the physical world, then the physical world has meaning and purpose and the creator can reveal and command its purpose and meaning. Christianity is a “Twoism” worldview. There is a creator, and he created the physical and non-physical worlds for his glory and for his creation’s good.

Postmodern culture has learned to look inside for ultimate questions; however, faithful Christian theology teaches that one must submit to the transcendent, outside oneself, for answers to life’s ultimate questions. Only in a society that looks inside for answers can transgender ideology exist. Faithful Christian theology does not allow for the core tenets of transgender ideology because the body has too much value and carries too much authority to be jettisoned for matters of personal identity. Human bodies have authority over persons because humans are not the creator of their bodies but receive their bodies as a gift from the creator. Though persons have some authority in and with their bodies, they do not have the authority to mutilate or attempt to alter one of the core realities of the body—its sexed identity. The body and sexual differentiation are gifts to be enjoyed and tools for worship and service, not raw materials to be morphed by one’s will.

Just as the core tenets of transgender ideology are found philosophically incoherent, they are also theologically heterodox. The existence of gender identity, as

transgender ideology defines it, fashions the physical as subordinate to the non-physical. It reduces the body to an accident at best and a plight at worst. The existence of a sex-gender misalignment is found heterodox on the same grounds. God has placed far too much value, meaning, and authority in and through the body for gender identity or sex-gender misalignments to be consistent with faithful Christian anthropology. The Lord has not given humans the authority or the ability to change their sexed identity, and any attempt to do so is an insult to his good physical design. The gospel hope includes the restoration of physical bodies. For eternity, God's children—regardless of ailment, disease, or dysphoria—will live in glory with their creator in their God-created sexed body and be fully satisfied. God's created order, especially his creation of embodied image bearers, is good for his creation. Living in conformity with his created order is an essential part of the Christian life and, by extension, an essential part of the Christian response to transgender ideology.

A continued faithful Christian response to transgender ideology will benefit from further research in brain-sex theory and brain-testing, as well as more testimonies from those who have detransitioned. Additionally, there is a necessity for more pastoral theology to better care for those with gender dysphoria and those who have already undergone sex reassignment surgery. Fundamental practical questions exist for pastors and ministry leaders. What does a care plan include for a Christian who has previously undertaken reassignment surgery? How does a medically transitioned, professing, repentant Christian receive the indispensable community they need in a setting where no one else can fully empathize with their situation? Academic endeavors will be genuinely beneficial only with the hard work of pastoral application, and local pastors need the academy's help for this practical work.

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ABSTRACT

HOW SHOULD WE THEN RESPOND? A CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO TRANSGENDER IDEOLOGY

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In this dissertation, I argue for the rejection of the core tenets of transgender ideology. At their foundation, transgender identities result from an ideology that affirms (1) the existence of gender identity and (2) that gender can, and sometimes does, misalign with biological sex. I offer both a philosophical and theological rebuttal to these assertions. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to this study. In chapter 2, I present an overview of today's transgender cultural moment. I define key terms and describe the impact that transgender ideology has had on popular culture, politics, education, business, and medicine. In chapter 3, I offer an explanation of how American society arrived at a place where transgender identities are understood as rational. I argue that the path stretching from Friedrich Nietzsche to Michel Foucault to feminism to Judith Butler has led to a denial of human nature and morals, as well as a redefinition of sex and gender. These denials and redefinitions result in the philosophical and theological heterodoxies present in transgender ideology. In chapter 4, I present a philosophical rebuttal to such heterodoxies. I argue that sex and gender cannot misalign in any rational way without the employment of rigid gender stereotypes. By using Thomas Nagle's article "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" I show that a person cannot claim to be a member of the opposite biological sex in any rational way. Additionally, I contend that "gender" has become too broad and diverse a category and is, therefore, confusing and unhelpful in modern

discourse. In chapter 5, I move beyond the philosophical and contend theologically. I demonstrate the gnostic nature of transgender ideology's sharp mind-body split and juxtapose it with the value and meaning that Scripture communicates about the human body. I argue that sexed-embodiment is the natural state of human existence and is therefore good as a part of God's created order. I contend that any attempt to change God's created order (the attempt to change a person's sex/gender identity) is an affront to God's authority and an endeavor to usurp God's good intentions for His image-bearers. Chapter 6 concludes this study.

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