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# Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science



THE BODY

## Identity and Difference: The

# Gender Debate



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### Identity and Difference: The Gender Debate

Over thirty years ago, French feminist Luce Irigaray, wrote: *"Sexual difference is one of the important questions of our age, if not in fact the burning issue. According to Heidegger, each age is preoccupied with one thing, and one alone. Sexual difference is probably that issue in our own age which could be our salvation on an intellectual level."* There is no question that Irigaray was right, especially now that the old debate about the relation between the sexes has been brought up into the more recent one about the relation between our "selves" and our bodies. Both debates, of course, stand or fall together, which is why we unite them in this single issue.

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FEATURE ARTICLE

## On the Masculine Genius

GREG BOTTARO

Many attempts have been made to define the feminine, and more recently, the masculine genius. Naturally, this is difficult enough in the contemporary context, so fraught is it with the dualism between the body and the spirit. By contrast, if we begin by looking at the human organism as a whole, we can actually study the physical body and find in it a deeper meaning since “the body and the body alone ... makes visible the invisible,” as John Paul II said.

We can link the basic paradigm for the masculine and feminine genius to the phenomenon of new life. The human contribution to procreation and gestation of new life necessitates a mother and a father. These human contributions are distinct, while equal in dignity, individually necessary and irreplaceable.

In the act of procreation, the man is pointed out of himself and the woman is focused within. It is within the body of the woman that both procreation and gestation take place, and it is “inwardness” that can help define the feminine genius. As the new person comes to existence within her body, a woman is wholly focused on this new person with all of her being. The developing baby consumes her attention from within.

A man is not as concerned about what is happening moment by moment with the developing child because it is not happening inside his body. Instead, his outward focus means that he is free to participate in the new life by ensuring the environment *outside and around the child* is safe. While a woman’s body is fine tuned for human connection, the man’s body is made for provision and protection. *A woman’s body is made to make human bodies inside of her and a man’s body is made to make human bodies outside of him.* The woman serves the child in proximity, while a man serves the child from a distance.

On the basis of these essential, mutually distinct and complementary differences, we can find a “genius” relative to each.

Just a word on the concept of “genius.” Many discussions of the feminine or masculine “geniuses” open themselves up to anecdotal rebuttals about particular men or women who defy the characterization. Here we do not define “genius” as something *essential* to each of the sexes, such as capacity for motherhood or fatherhood, but, rather as: “a set of characteristics, and proclivities that derive from those essential and mutually distinct capacities.” The

feminine genius, therefore, is the set of characteristics that a well-formed woman will display with a particular proclivity due to her capacity for motherhood. The masculine genius is the set of characteristics that a well-formed man will display with a particular proclivity due to his capacity for fatherhood.

As Cardinal Ratzinger wrote in his *Letter to Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and the World*,

It is appropriate ... to recall that the feminine values mentioned here [a capacity for the other] are above all human values: the human condition of man and woman created in the image of God is one and indivisible. It is only because women are more immediately attuned to these values that they are the reminder and the privileged sign of such values.

The same could be said for the masculine genius, which is a set of characteristics that are ultimately human values, attainable also by women. The integration of both sets of human values leads to human flourishing, beautifully exemplified by the father of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, described by her thus: “Hard as he was on himself, he was always affectionate towards us. His heart was exceptionally tender toward us. He lived for us alone. No mother’s heart could surpass his. Still with all that there was no weakness. All was just and well-regulated.”

With these preliminaries in mind, we will now turn to the masculine genius.

## The Developing Genius

### Conception through Childhood

Beginning *in utero*, testosterone triggers genes that will lead to a newborn boy’s behaviors. While newborn girls focus on faces and eye contact, boys are tuned in to movement.[1] Testosterone, vasopressin, and cortisol drive the urge towards aggression and competition. Regardless of cultural influence, boys will spend 65% of their free time in competitive activity while girls spend only 35% on the same. When given typically female toys like dolls, boys most likely turn them into weapons. They have been found to use domestic items as tools or weapons six times more than girls.[2] In the toddler male brain, the hypothalamus is forming to initiate competitive behavior and work towards victory. In this early play, bluffing, posturing, and fighting can be observed. Researchers have observed that by age two boys’ brains are better able to recognize social hierarchy and they are driven towards physical and social dominance.[3]

The male brain is more naturally suited to work with objects in the environment. By age five, the major cognitive difference between a boy’s brain and a girl’s brain is the ability to mentally rotate and manipulate objects.[4] The female brain can access these same circuits, but they have to be intentionally activated. These phenomena give boys a head start on learning how to manipulate their environments and ultimately best serve the external needs of a family.

### Discovering the Female

Beginning around age nine, the most significant development in the male brain involves a twenty-fold increase of testosterone.[5] The male hypothalamus, where the neural circuits for

sexual pursuit are located, grows twice as large as a female's. Here develops the physiological correlate to the characteristic of the masculine genius to pursue and initiate.

The increase of testosterone, along with vasopressin and cortisol, also makes the male brain more sensitive to threats against status or territory. The male's sympathetic nervous response (the "flight-or-fight" system) is fueled by this combination of hormones.[6] These changes give rise to behaviors typically observed in a teenage boy such as a greater need for privacy—personal domain to have control over—and conflict with authority. While discipline is necessary, looking through the lens of the masculine genius deepens our understanding of misunderstood behaviors.

Teenage boys also learn how to better anticipate threats in the environment posed by other people. Vasopressin works in the male brain to interpret aggression in others' faces. Even neutral faces will be interpreted more frequently as negative or aggressive when vasopressin is increased.[7] (Girls, by contrast, will interpret neutral faces as friendlier under the influence of increased vasopressin.) The amygdala and hypothalamus in the male brain are primed with greater sensitivity to hormonal increases, leading to aggressive alertness and activation of the sympathetic nervous system.[8]

## Procreation

As testosterone increases, visual circuits relay information about a woman's fertility through unconsciously perceived traits. The hypothalamus takes over much of a man's behavior at this point, as everything in his brain is geared towards procreation. The drive towards fatherhood is imprinted in the man's brain. Olfactory receptors are tuned in to pheromones that communicate beneficial traits in a woman for sexual compatibility and the generation of children. Sensory neural circuits connect to the release of oxytocin and an increase of testosterone, further amplifying the drive towards bonding. [9] Due to his increased ability to take risks, lower fear of consequences, and greater drive towards finding a mate, a man is built to initiate sexual relationships.

Physiologically, the sexual encounter ends for a man at the point of ejaculation, while for the woman this moment is potentially the beginning of what will happen in her body. Whereas the man's brain is tuned into the fertility of a woman, his desire being amplified when his neural circuits detect her pheromones, the woman's brain is tuned into the personal character traits of a man, ones which give her a sense of whether or not he will remain committed to providing for and protecting the potential child born of an encounter. Though these character traits may become distorted in some way, they are typically strength, courage, leadership, loyalty, and respectability. These are the very same traits men are neurologically disposed to observe and attempt to emulate in their environment from boyhood.

## Parenting

Throughout the process of gestation and birthing a child, the changes in a man's brain are not as obvious as they are in a woman's brain; but in some ways they are just as drastic. Fathers have emotional, physical, and hormonal changes that occur along with those in mothers. During the last stage of pregnancy, male testosterone levels decrease over 20% and prolactin levels increase 33%.[10] Researchers believe that pheromones released by the mother help to initiate these shifts in the father's brain. Prolactin helps fathers respond more sensitively to their newborn babies. Their hearing sensitivity increases as does their empathic response.[11] The ability to tend to the new baby does not come as quickly for the father as it does for the mother. Even though it is not immediately active, the father's brain is wired to experience the

same attunement for the baby, even if it is not manifested in the same way. The more contact he has with the baby, however, the greater the effect of dopamine and oxytocin in increasing bonding and the ability to feel greater empathy for his new child.[12] His amygdala, anterior cingulate cortex, and insula will respond with greater sensitivity to the cries of a new baby as time goes on.

This is a fascinating neurological correlate to the observation made by JPII in *Mulieris Dignitatem*:

This unique contact with the new human being developing within the mother gives rise to an attitude towards human beings—not only towards her own child, but every human being—which profoundly marks the woman’s personality. It is commonly thought that women are more capable than men of paying attention to another person, and that motherhood develops this predisposition even more. The man—even with all his sharing in parenthood—always remains “outside” the process of pregnancy and the baby’s birth; *in many ways he has to learn his own “fatherhood” from the mother.* (emphasis added)

A man who is already attuned to his wife will follow her lead in being attuned to the child, and as contact increases, so does his ability to develop his own empathy and tenderness. A man’s brain changes, in some ways developing the characteristics women have at the outset, as his disposition towards his own child grows. He becomes a better father for it.

Fathers’ sympathetic nervous systems are not activated to the same extent as mothers’ when children are playing, and so they take risks with their children, entrusting them to masculine strength and confidence in ways that typically surprise new mothers. This type of play has been shown to form self-confidence in boys and girls as well as the ability to socially engage in healthier ways with peers.[13] Men’s voices have also been shown to register differently for children, especially in areas of attention and obedience.

## The Communicating Genius

### Neural Connectivity

The feminine genius correlates with greater trans-hemispheric communication. Women are better able to connect feelings to words and use language to express interior experiences and memories.[14] This helps them communicate verbally with others, which builds relationships.

Greater connectivity also gives women a much deeper sense of intuition. Intuition is differentiated from rational analysis as a method of understanding. It allows women to communicate with a kind of *transrational* understanding of another person’s needs or experience.[15] Here is another way that a woman’s body is made to make persons inside of it. Through intuition, the female brain is able to understand the needs or experience of a baby, either pre-born in the womb or post-natal, before the child develops the use of rationally based language. My wife (without necessarily knowing how) will immediately know why our baby is crying, while I have to think through a checklist to figure out what the problem might be.

There is less connectivity between the right and left hemispheres in the male brain. This allows for greater *compartmentalization*. At the same time, there is actually more connection between the front and back of each hemisphere in the male brain. These two realities

contribute to the masculine genius. Men are better at spatial organization and abstract thinking, both of which utilize intra-hemispheric communication. These qualities dispose a man to make decisions and solve problems that are related to the external environment. Intra-hemispheric frontal-lobe modulation is more natural for men, which makes it easier to detach from the emotional considerations of a situation.[16] These qualities generally predispose a man toward a greater use of unemotional, rational thinking. At times when a certain emotional distance is required to make decisions for the wellbeing of a family, a man's brain is particularly well suited.

It is important to note that the feminine complement to the masculine trait of rationality is not *irrationality*, but *transrationality*, as described above. Far from being a weakness, the fact that the female brain is less physiologically dependent on rationality than the male brain indicates that women are *not limited* by the need to communicate with structured and rational constructs. Women, indeed, could be said to be more sophisticated in the way they communicate. Unfortunately, our world has come to elevate the idea of rational above the idea of intuitive. Albert Einstein is quoted as saying, "the intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant." [17] We have come to worship the servant and defile the sacred gift. Still, as we elevate the qualities of the feminine genius to their proper dignity, we must do the same for those qualities proper to the masculine genius.

## Conclusion

These are the physiological realities of every healthy man and woman, whether or not a new person is actually conceived. As a woman is totally focused within on the new person developing in her body, knowing how to care for new life intuitively and transrationally, man is built to forge the way forward, providing for the needs of mother and child, and protecting against any outside threat to either. Together, man and woman form the unity that God intended for the sacred collaboration of creating new life. These observations identify only a few of the physiological realities that illuminate what it means to be male and female. It is a step towards a truly integrated model of the human person as male and female.

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Keep reading! Click [here](#) to read our next article, *The Trans-Industrial Complex*.



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FEATURE ARTICLE

## The Trans-Industrial Complex

MARY HASSON

*The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.*

Former President Barack Obama used Martin Luther King’s words to project the progressive agenda as morally superior and inevitable. Gender ideologues wrap their efforts in similar packaging. They employ civil rights language to suggest that the drive for “full inclusion” of “sexual and gender minorities” reflects the grassroots uprising of an oppressed community, a spontaneous movement towards the “right side of history.”

It’s not true.

The growing cultural acceptance of sexual and gender diversity is neither organic nor inevitable. Rather, as I have described elsewhere, it is the result of a “top-down, ideological movement...bent on dismantling the natural family, marginalizing or muzzling religious belief, particularly Christianity, and exalting personal ‘will’ and autonomy above everything (except the state, of course).” Ideologues working alone lack the power to embed their beliefs in the culture. But when ideologues join forces with cultural and economic power players—philanthropists, transnational corporations, governments, international organizations, thought-leaders, and advocacy groups, all drawn together by a confluence of interests—the results are transformative. And disastrous. The harm extends beyond the confused and suffering individuals ensnared by the “gender web,” to the cultural and social institutions collapsing amidst anthropological deceit and moral chaos.

Gender ideology’s sweep through the culture is the culmination of strategies implemented decades ago—strategies that have brought the gender revolution to the brink of a terrible victory.[1]

### ‘Trans’ Is Not the Goal

It’s critical to begin, as Stephen Covey says, with the end in mind.

Gender ideology emerged from radical feminism, “gay liberation,” the sexual revolution, and

queer theory (although its philosophical roots lie deeper, in atheism, Marxism, and nihilism). Antithetical to Christianity, gender ideology repudiates the person as a unity of body and soul, created male or female and made for relationship. It rejects the meaning of sexuality, marriage, and the natural family and rebels against “gender and sexual normativity.” Theorists like Judith Butler claim that sexual difference and gender are social constructions; by “doing” and “undoing” gender, the person creates and recreates an identity, from a spectrum of identities.

Gender ideology takes a sledgehammer to the person, human nature, family, and religion.

In his recent book, *Martin Duberman*, historian and radical “gay liberation” activist from the 70s, rails against LGBTQ “assimilation” tactics and “appalling exemptions for religious conscience.” He reminds the “straight left” and “gay left” of the movement’s original goals: to destroy the nuclear family, erase morality (whether based in religion or natural law), and create a “new utopia in the area of psychosexual transformation...a gender revolution in which ‘male’ and ‘female’ have become outmoded differentiations....”

Radical feminists had similar aims. In 1970, Marxist-feminist *Shulamith Firestone* wrote that “[t]he end goal of feminist revolution must be...not just the elimination of male *privilege* but of the sex distinction itself.” Then “the tyranny of the biological family would be broken,” “unobstructed pansexuality” would replace heterosexuality, and “all forms of sexuality would be allowed and indulged.” Firestone argued that “[u]nless revolution uproots the basic social organization, the biological family...the tapeworm of exploitation will never be annihilated.”

The end goal of gender ideology, then, is *not to integrate* LGBTQ-identified people and relationships into current society, mirroring the social norm of heterosexual males and females who marry and have children, but to *subvert and destroy* that society. In the resulting utopia, every individual (from childhood on) would be free to self-identify beyond the male-female binary, and free to engage in consensual sexual activity, unrestricted by sex, gender, number of persons, marital status, or even age (post-puberty).

Technological developments (from contraception to surrogacy to “gender confirmation” techniques), combined with social disruption, have made these ideological imaginings terribly real. *But the ideologues are not done.* The quest to normalize transgender and non-binary identities is merely gender ideology’s latest frontier, not its final destination. Firestone’s utopia—pansexuality, fluid sexual identity, unrestricted sexual indulgence, and the end of kinship and biological ties—dances on the imaginary horizon.

## Corrupting Language, Obscuring Truth

*George Orwell* wrote, “[I]f thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought,” and “if you control the language, you control the argument.” Gender ideologues have both corrupted our language and controlled the argument. No need for Soviet-style mass indoctrination sessions to change cultural beliefs about the person, sexuality, and family—ideologues need only redefine words (or invent new ones), speak the new language, and insist that everyone else do the same (which is why ideologues seek to repress dissent).

Words shape our assumptions and our thinking. To “make sense of the alphabet soup” (LGBTQ+), one activist *notes*, and to be as “respectful and accurate as possible,” *everyone* needs to learn new “vocabulary definitions.” “Misgendering” others or getting their pronouns wrong violates their “most basic need...to feel safe and to exist in public spaces.” (Errant pronouns apparently can zap a person out of existence.) So LGBTQ activists *produce* glossaries, lists of

definitions, and media guides (defining words and story parameters for journalists). Medical and psychological professional organizations and state and local laws *formalize* the new gender definitions and courts *legitimize* them, declaring “transgender boys” (girls) *are* boys. The institutional policies of universities, public schools, companies, health care groups, governments, media, churches, and other organizations *disseminate* the new vocabulary and shape constituents’ thinking.

Often accompanied by images of the “Genderbread Person,” the “Gender Unicorn,” or the “Gender Elephant,” gender definitions effectively deconstruct the person into a jumble of parts (gender expression, gender identity, sex assigned at birth, sexual orientation, romantic orientation). The person becomes his (or her, or zir...) own project, always under construction, with ever-evolving gender identities and sexualities. (“Family” consequently degenerates into “any person(s) who plays a significant role in an individual’s life.”)

The burgeoning lexicon reinforces gender ideology’s faulty anthropology and distorted science. Biological sex is fast disappearing, subsumed under bureaucratic definitions of “gender.” For example, although medicine defines *biological sex* “based on the binary roles that males and females play in reproduction,” the University of California (Davis) now defines “sex” as an arbitrary “medically constructed categorization...assigned based on the appearance of the genitalia.” California *regulations* on “Transgender Rights in the Workplace,” redefine “sex” as “gender” or “gender identity.” Public and private school policies typically reference not biological sex but “gender assigned at birth.” Anne Arundel County (MD) public schools further obscure reality: their transgender “Guidelines” acknowledge only a student’s “Legal Gender Marker,” defined as “‘sex’ assigned at birth...the designation of the student as ‘male’ or ‘female’ appearing on the Student’s Evidence-of-Birth document.”

Gender ideology changes everyday language too. The spate of transgender “men” (women) giving birth spawns concepts like “chestfeeding” (“men” don’t “breastfeed”) and “pregnant people” (“men” and “non-binary” people get pregnant too). Some parents raise “theybies”—gender-neutral children who will declare a gender when they are older. Occasionally, even ideologues go overboard, however. When Planned Parenthood of Kentucky tweeted a new biological ‘fact’ (“Some men have a uterus”), one Twitter wag replied, “I want to play this game too...some ducks have antlers.”

## Rainbow-Colored Money

Massive cultural change requires massive amounts of money. The gender revolution is not a grassroots uprising—a mere 3% of LGBTQ-identified persons contribute \$35 or more to support LGBTQ causes. Rather, the funding priorities of a small number of extraordinarily wealthy individuals, personally invested in the LGBTQ agenda, drive the ideological bus. Leveraging their wealth and connections, they create LGBTQ-focused private foundations and bully corporate America into submission. (Recall gay tech mogul Tim Gill’s open contempt for religious opponents of the LGBTQ agenda, as he swore to “punish the wicked.”) According to annual reports by *Funders* for LGBTQ Issues, in 2016, “United States-based foundations and corporations awarded... \$202.3 million to support organizations and programs addressing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer issues,” with three out of four dollars going to LGBTQ *advocacy*—lawsuits, lobbying, and more. Campaigns to block religious exemptions garnered \$2.8 million, while initiatives to woo religious support for the LGBTQ agenda topped \$3 million. Funding for transgender issues increased 22% in 2016, reaching \$16.8 million. (“Anonymous” funders donated \$17 million in addition to the \$202 million from foundations and corporations.) These amounts represent donations *for just one year*.

# Social Institutions: LGBTQ Change Agents

Big money opens doors (or pays for lawyers to force them open). For decades, gender ideologues have collaborated with wealth and power to pursue a highly successful strategy for cultural transformation: enlisting trusted social institutions (the military, schools, small business, doctors, and churches) as change agents. For example, America's military ranks consistently among the most trusted social institutions; roughly three out of four Americans place a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of trust in the military (Gallup 2018). The left has spent millions advocating (and suing) for gay, lesbian, and transgender-identified persons to be allowed to serve openly in the military, although this issue affects a fraction of LGBTQ-identified persons. Why? Not to fulfill the dreams of a few. The goal is to normalize "gender and sexual minorities" by highlighting their integration in the military (no matter how it affects military readiness).

Similarly, small businesses enjoy high social trust with two out of three Americans. But small businesses are vulnerable to local and regional economic pressures, a fact not lost on LGBTQ litigators. They bring high-profile lawsuits targeting small businesses—Christian bakers, printers, and photographers—in order to intimidate *all* small businesses into backing the LGBTQ agenda. (Or face bankrupting boycotts, fines, or lawsuits.)

Gender activists trade on the small business community's credibility through a partnership between the Small Business Association and the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC). "Visibility is power," says Justin Nelson, NGLCC co-founder. "Companies realize backlash is more likely to come from *not* being in the LGBT community," explained Nelson. "That's a sea change." The NGLCC has "certified" nearly a thousand businesses as "LGBT-owned small businesses," making them eligible for corporate "diversity and inclusion" programs and state *set-asides*, which give preference to businesses owned by veterans, women, and minorities—and LGBTs.

Big businesses—like Facebook, Google, Amazon, Nike, and others—enjoy less social trust, but have immense power to shape public attitudes through advertising, sponsorships, and financial muscle. LGBTQ-themed advertising has exploded the past five years, particularly around "Pride month" (June), which is "very profitable from a company's perspective," according to market analysts. "In 2017 alone, LGBT consumer buying power was over \$917 billion," NGLCC's co-founders write. That's financial heft. No surprise, then, that business carries water for LGBTQ advocacy groups on political issues. In a move reminiscent of North Carolina's bathroom battles, corporate giants like Amazon, Apple, Exxon Mobil, and Shell recently pressured Texas lawmakers to vote against a proposed transgender "bathroom bill."

How did gender ideologues gain such leverage over transnational corporations? By carrot and stick. Over fifteen years ago, the Human Rights Campaign Foundation (HRC) created a "benchmark" (the "Corporate Equality Index"), which assessed whether mid-to large corporations "discriminated" on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. HRC now publishes its ratings annually, bullying and shaming companies that fail to meet HRC's "equality" standards while rewarding companies for perfect scores. In 2018, "609 major businesses—spanning nearly every industry and geography—earned a top score of 100 percent and the distinction of 'Best Places to Work for LGBTQ Equality.'" (In 2002, by comparison, only 13 companies scored 100 percent.) Overall, the companies participating in HRC's 2018 ratings represented *over 5,000 top brands*.

Every few years, HRC's "equality index" ratchets left, upping both stakes and demands. The 2018 criteria extended far beyond standard employee benefits to shape corporate decisions

regarding contracts, donations, advertising, and public relations. Top-rated corporations not only must cover transgender benefits and provide “inclusive” health care (“medically necessary” services for gender transitions, including “sex reassignment”) but must also demonstrate “public commitment to LGBTQ equality,” and require their *suppliers, contractors, and vendors* to adhere to sexual orientation and gender identity protections too. Companies *lose* points for having “a connection with an anti-LGBTQ organization or activity.” Since 2014, HRC has also pressured companies to direct their charitable giving *only* towards non-profits with internal policies against sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination (religious organizations are exempt, for now). Starting in 2019, companies with “supplier diversity program[s]” for women or minorities “must include LGBTQ suppliers” as well. Corporate fear of the “bigot” label is a powerful motivator.

Bluntly put, by shaping corporate policies, LGBTQ advocates are bending the marketplace and culture into alignment with the LGBTQ agenda. (Even companies that do not participate in the Corporate Equality Index eventually follow its benchmarks.) HRC has created similar indices that pressure cities (“Municipal Equality Index”) and health care organizations (“Healthcare Equality Index”) to integrate gender ideology into language, regulations, internal policies, and public-facing promotions. HRC also routinely solicits favorable *amicus* briefs from companies to advance the LGBTQ agenda in cases like *Masterpiece Cakeshop*.

Other global *advocacy organizations* and international and *regional business coalitions* also pressure transnational companies and local businesses to embrace the “business case” for LGBTQ inclusion and get onboard with the gender agenda (see “Open for Business,” “Pride and Prejudice”).

## Queering the Schools, Indoctrinating America’s Children

The most potent strategy to drive social change, however, is through education. Gender ideology tiptoed gently into public schools, masked as inclusivity and kindly anti-bullying initiatives (like HRC’s “Welcoming Schools” program). The mask dropped quickly. Programs soon targeted “hetero-normative” and “cis-normative” language and thinking, pretending all students (even kindergarteners) needed freedom to express their “authentic” gendered selves.

School districts adopt gender identity and sexual orientation “anti-discrimination” policies—often over parents’ protests—because of lawsuit threats, state or local regulations, or activists’ pressure tactics. Consequently, the gender agenda affects *all children*, not only confused children. A welcoming, inclusive, safe school requires *everyone* to be LGBTQ “allies” and *all children* to be force-fed a faulty anthropology and destabilizing ideas about identity. Gender ideologues train *all school personnel*—from bus drivers to principals—in gender terminology, gender transitions, and gender-inclusive language and practices (banishing words like “boys” and “girls”). Worse, activists justify keeping parents in the dark while schools encourage “gender exploration” and gender affirmation, by *arguing* that children aren’t safe at home when parents (especially religious ones) oppose children’s emerging LGBTQ identities.

Classroom instruction covers gender “definitions” and, increasingly, LGBTQ history. School culture conveys unquestioning acceptance of gender ideology: schools are awash in rainbows, Pride celebrations, safe spaces, gay-straight student clubs, invented pronouns, and transgender-affirming storybooks like *The Princess Boy* or *I am Jazz*. Sex education becomes “LGBTQ-inclusive” (because *any* child might be trans or gay) so *every* child should learn about

anal sex, “women” with penises, and pregnant “people.” Public schools allow transgender students to use opposite-sex bathrooms, locker rooms, overnight accommodations, and to compete on opposite-sex sports teams. (Boys identifying as “transgender girls” won several Connecticut *girls’* state high school track championships in 2017 and 2018.) Although nearly half of teachers disagree with transgender bathroom policies, few do so openly. <>

Why do schools capitulate to gender ideology? Political calculation. They have little choice. Spineless legislators pass regulations to appease LGBTQ bullies, activist lawyers threaten expensive lawsuits, leftwing teachers’ unions and professional education associations pressure compliance, and advocacy groups mount campaigns relentlessly—especially when there’s money to be made. Gender ideologues feed piggishly from the public trough, fattening themselves with contracts for diversity and inclusion training, curriculum consulting, and professional services. (How long until every school needs a gender therapist on staff?)

## Medicine Yields to the Gender Lobby

Mainstream medical and counseling associations, having buckled under internal and external ideological pressure, are all-in for gender ideology. The World Health Organization in 2018 revised its disease classifications for transgender and gender identity issues—not because of new medical developments but because of pressure to reduce stigma. Transgender issues are collapsed into “gender incongruence,” categorized under “conditions related to sexual health” rather than mental and behavioral disorders.

Transgender activists lobby for a patients’ “informed consent” model of care, which obliges doctors to approve (and insurance companies to cover) a wide variety of “gender-affirming” procedures. The World Professional Associations for Transgender Health (WPATH) recently collaborated with Starbucks to create model “Transgender medical benefits” (no lifetime maximum), including procedures from brow lifts, buttocks implants, and voice feminization therapies to mastectomies and genital surgeries.

Physicians face increasing pressure to comply with the gender agenda: professional groups rewrite standards of care, institutional non-discrimination regulations require retraining, medical schools add LGBTQ specialty courses, and insurance companies accept transgender procedures as “necessary.”

In addition, high demand incentivizes physicians to enter the lucrative practice of “gender care,” particularly for children. In ten years, the number of medical centers treating gender-confused children has multiplied from a handful to over 40. The largest center, at the University of California, San Francisco, treats upwards of 900 children and urges parents to “affirm” the child’s desired gender through social transition, puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones, and genital surgery (age 16 and over). Leading gender doc Johanna Olson-Kennedy—‘married’ to a transgender ‘man’ (female)—admits puberty blocking has serious consequences but fast-tracks children towards transition anyway. In spite of thin research and the life-altering nature of these experimental treatments, child and adolescent referrals for gender treatment are skyrocketing.

## The “Faith” Card

The final strategy of the gender revolution is to play the faith card, neutralizing the revolution’s greatest opponent: religion. For a decade, gender activists have sought to exploit religious compassion and work from within to confuse and convert believers (especially teens). The Human Rights Campaign’s “Coming Home” series seduces Mormons, Muslims,

Catholics, Jews, and Evangelicals into believing that compassion and the tenets of their faith require support for “full inclusion” and the LGBTQ agenda. They are succeeding. Beliefs have shifted rapidly among people of faith, towards the pro-LGBTQ column. And more Americans than ever personally identify as LGBTQ: 4.5% of Americans overall and 8.2% of Millennials.

## Conclusion

So where does this leave us? Ideological assertions—fictions, really—about the human person, sexuality, and family are burrowing into our social fabric and cultural institutions. Growing numbers of youth are staring blindly at their own bodies, unable to recognize the most elemental truths about who they are. And the voices of religious leaders seem to have grown mute, silenced by the fear of being called a “hater,” or they have joined the popular chorus singing the praises of sex and gender “diversity.”

So what might change this disturbing trajectory? First, truth. Nature itself. Truth has a way of getting our attention, by forcing us to confront the disastrous consequences of embracing a lie: Confused children rendered sterile by hormonal cocktails, young adults with mutilated bodies, and citizens no longer free to express their religious beliefs or speak their minds. Second, a religious and moral awakening. As Pope Benedict observed in 2012, “When the freedom to be creative becomes the freedom to create oneself, then necessarily the Maker himself is denied and ultimately man too is stripped of his dignity as a creature of God, as the image of God at the core of his being.” Because the transgender agenda is ultimately a rejection of God, it must be countered spiritually—a responsibility that belongs to every believer.

[1] This article focuses on the LGBTQ political agenda and the activities and beliefs of LGBTQ activists. It is not meant to imply that a particular individual who identifies as LGBTQ necessarily believes or supports activist positions or the “gender revolution” more generally.

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# Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science

FEATURE ARTICLE

## Fr. James Martin, Daniel Mattson and Robert George Debate the Stability of "Gay" Identity

DAVID HENDERSON

**Fr. James Martin**, *Building a Bridge: How the Catholic Church and the LGBT Community Can Enter into a Relationship of Respect, Compassion, and Sensitivity* (HarperOne, 2017).

**Daniel Mattson**, *Why I Don't Call Myself Gay: How I Reclaimed My Sexual Reality and Found Peace* (Ignatius Press, 2017).

*This article appeared previously in Public Discourse and was subsequently commented upon by Robert George on the Mirror of Justice blog. In this article we offer the original review as written by David Henderson, the response by Robert George as well as an addendum by David Henderson.*

Fr. James Martin's impassioned plea in *Building a Bridge* for a new spirit of dialogue between the Church and the LGBT+ community continues to fuel divisive debate. Since its publication, critics and supporters have sparred over the book's glaring omission of the Church's magisterial teaching on homosexual relations.

Those supportive of the book's overall appeal are generally satisfied by Fr. Martin's response that the mention of such a divisive topic would only have been counterproductive and that the aim of the book was not to weigh in on matters of doctrine. But this answer has only furthered calls for Fr. Martin to clarify his position and to state his support of magisterial teaching. Dan Hitchens, writing at *First Things*, is one among many who have expressed concern that while Fr. Martin nowhere preaches directly against Church teaching, he also nowhere affirms it as true.

But in an article published in *Public Discourse*, Robert George argues that Fr. Martin's public confirmation of Church teaching, coupled with his repeated denials of seeking to alter a revealed truth of the faith, "removes doubt" and "no longer leaves room for detractors." Citing Fr. Martin's recent article in *America Magazine*, George writes that Fr. Martin has, "with no hint of ambiguity or evasion," affirmed magisterial teaching as "valid, true, [and] binding to conscience." To its credit, Fr. Martin's article does acknowledge at some length the traditional

scriptural and philosophical basis of the Church's teaching on homosexuality, and at least tacitly approves of the Church's statement that homosexual acts and the homosexual orientation are "objectively disordered." Although the article says nothing about the merits of such teaching, or the benefit it may be to the human person, at the very least it does demonstrate a deference for magisterial authority and a willingness to respond to critics. It is also only fair to mention that the newly revised and expanded edition of *Building a Bridge* includes a complete citation of the catechism's teaching on homosexuality (nos. 2357-2359), as well as an unqualified statement on the Church's official position that sexual relations between people of the same sex are always impermissible.

So is the controversy now over?

## Fr. Martin on Sexual Orientation

George's defense of Fr. Martin lands predominantly on Fr. Martin's willingness to verbally assent to Church teaching and not on the substance of Fr. Martin's argument, which remains unaddressed. Several substantive points—including Fr. Martin's promotion of "Pride" events, his ongoing support of New Ways Ministry and Out at St. Paul's, and his insistence that the Church adopt LGBT+ nomenclature—do make an appearance at the end of George's article, but are treated only as minor points of ongoing disagreement. But these issues are not so inconsequential. Taken together, they represent a single critical issue that has yet to be resolved: Fr. Martin's continued affirmation of sexual orientation as a valid basis of personal identity.

*Building a Bridge*, while timid in its defense of Christian teaching, is also brazenly emphatic that same-sex attraction serves as a genuine ground of personal, social, and cultural expression. The book advocates the Christian recognition of "gay" identity, calling on the Church to abandon its "antiquated" language of "homosexual persons" in favor of those terms chosen by the LGBT+ community. It is this premise that lies behind Fr. Martin's willingness to support "Pride" events and to associate with organizations that unambiguously seek to change Church teaching. These challenges are further supported by the suggestion that failing to recognize and affirm the validity of "gay" and "lesbian" identity is in itself a failure of justice that devalues and "makes invisible" the dignity of LGBT+ persons.

The question George does not raise is whether Fr. Martin's assent to Church teaching is not in fact undermined by the more substantive points of his position, given all that it affirms in terms of "gay" culture, language, and identity. George writes that Fr. Martin cannot consistently affirm Church teaching while simultaneously endorsing institutions that contradict it, yet he does not point out that Fr. Martin also cannot assent to magisterial teaching if his position demands the evacuation of its language and content. How can one assent to a doctrine while rejecting its material terms, such as the choice to say "homosexual" rather than "gay" or "inclination" rather than "orientation"?

*Building a Bridge* is strikingly silent on the theological implications of its position. In addition to giving no explanation for the theological foundations of Church teaching outside of appeals to naked authority, the book presents the Christian recognition of gay identity as a matter of little or no consequence. This not only deprives the Church of any justification for its moral teaching before the secular world, but is also patently untrue, as explained well by another voice in this ongoing discussion.

## A Fundamentally Different Vision of the Human Person

Daniel C. Mattson, in his book *Why I Don't Call Myself Gay*, explains clearly what an acceptance of gay identity implies, showing how a validation of LGBT+ terms carries within it a fundamentally new understanding of sexuality and the human person. Mattson courageously relates his own story of conversion to the rejection of his identity as a “gay” man. He speaks of his realization that words such as “heterosexual,” “homosexual,” “gay,” or “straight” are “just too limiting to be of any real value to reflect the dignity of man’s sexuality.” They sow confusion, particularly among young people, about the true source of human personhood. Such terms, Mattson writes, “lack objectivity.” They see the human person exclusively through the culturally fabricated “grid” of a so-called “orientation,” which is little more than a collectively decided-upon means of categorizing a set of personal experiences, inclinations, and behaviors.

To be clear, Mattson is not saying that subjective experiences are unimportant or immaterial to the formation of personal identity. They are, of course, vitally important, particularly with respect to the development of human sexuality. Mattson, rather, is pointing out that human emotional and sexual experiences can never be understood in isolation from a given order of creation that transcends them. The significance of a human experience, in other words, can only be rightly affirmed and interpreted against the backdrop of a more fundamental created goodness.

Mattson points to this order and its subsequent drama in human history when he highlights the “twofold expression of human nature, as male and female,” on the one hand, and the reality “that man as a fallen creature can experience a variety of attractions and desires,” on the other. While not inconsequential, the conclusion derived from this latter dimension is not in itself a sufficient basis for determining what is essential to human identity. In addition to the potential that such experiences could be false or misleading, they are also always framed by a more primary experience of created givenness—that is, the experience of being created as a man or a woman.

This is the heart of the matter. Mattson argues that, insofar as the language of being a “gay” man unavoidably circumscribes human identity between the categories of “straight” and some variation of “not straight,” it is not a benign descriptive term of the reality in question. The language of “gay” and “straight” orientations carries an entirely new judgment about the nature of sexuality as such, and with it a new understanding of the human person. In the first place, it construes human sexuality as originally without content, as something formless and androgynous, as though set before an infinite number of possible paths. In the second place, it conceives of the human person as abstracted from a sexual body, as someone who *must* first gather together an assortment of inclinations, attractions, and behaviors before receiving some manner of sexual “identity.” Put differently, the language of “gay” and “straight” orientations assumes that the primary order of created givenness is entirely insignificant, and thus approaches the distinction between “man” and “woman” as something over which a person exercises absolute authorial power.

To repeat: the language of “orientation” is *not neutral* with respect to the nature of human beings. It makes a *fundamental claim* about human nature and thus subjects *all* persons to what is essentially a “gay” anthropology.

## Is Homosexual Identity a Social Construct?

In light of this claim, Mattson asks the pertinent question: “Do homosexual persons, as such,

really exist *as homosexuals*, or is homosexuality, and the entire spectrum of sexual identities, a product of man's imagination, and the result of social constructs?"

The term "social construct" may seem surprising here. Nowadays, we are trained to think that "male" and "female" are the constructs that artificially consolidate and restrain what is an otherwise "fluid" and unrestrained capacity to define oneself. Mattson's point, however, is that the choice to frame human sexual identity in terms of an infinite number of possible *behaviors* is already a culturally influenced decision about the nature of the human person and of the natural world. This choice pivots on the words we use. With these words, we decide whether human sexuality is inconstant and indefinite before its consolidation into some form of "identity" or "orientation," or whether it belongs more fundamentally to an objectively given *substratum* that human beings receive more than make. This is why the Church uses the language of a person *having* certain sexual tendencies (i.e., "same-sex attraction") rather than a person *being* his or her sexual attractions, much less a chosen gender.

When Fr. Martin rejects the language of "same-sex attraction" as being superficial and dismissive of human sexual identity, he seems unaware that beyond this language lies a more fundamental affirmation. Is he aware that this language is based on the only theologically appropriate option for the Church, which can proclaim the full dignity and richness of the human person only if she can affirm the goodness of the given, created world in which human beings live?

Mattson's book is a powerful witness to the grace of the Church's teaching. It speaks to the emptiness and false promises of "coming out," which he describes essentially as an experience of being habituated to a view of human personhood in which the person as he or she is as simply received is rendered insignificant. The "victory" of the gay rights movement in the twentieth century, in Mattson's mind, is nothing but a further initiation into an already bleak and nihilistic outlook in which people are increasingly losing sight of the goodness of their existence.

Thus, the greatest fault of Fr. Martin's book lies not so much with what it omits with respect to the Church's moral teaching, but rather with its truncated view of the human person. His declaration that "people have a right to name themselves," and that the Church—and the whole of reality, for that matter—are beholden to the "names" people choose for themselves, perpetuates a view of the human person as the sole source of meaning and order in the universe.

## Upholding the Dignity and Truth of the Human Person

Fr. Martin's seemingly benign plea for justice and equity for "gay" and "lesbian" individuals based on their equal capacity to achieve an integral and morally sound personhood is therefore deceptive in at least two respects. First, it is something of a sleight of hand. Whether persons with same-sex attraction are called to moral holiness or are capable of profound acts of moral heroism is not in question—of course they are. No one with any conscience would deny this. But, more importantly, by basing this plea on an affirmation of "gay" identity, Fr. Martin has conceded the more fundamental ground, essentially removing any dimension of man's created givenness from the notion of justice. The key question is this: Can an identity that denies the given order of creation ever be just with respect to the full dignity of the human person? In the Church's estimation, the answer is unequivocally no. Affirming this effectively eliminates the body from any order of created goodness and silences any significance to our being created man and woman.

Thus, the Church’s decision not to use the terms of the LGBT+ movement is a matter of profound prudence. Upon this rests her mission of mercy: to uphold the dignity and truth of the human person as a beloved creature tenderly made by God.

Fr. Martin insists that the terms “homosexual persons” and “objectively disordered” are “needlessly harmful” and “unnecessarily cruel.” But surely this impression of cruelty is most prevalent when such terms are used in contexts where the truth of the human person they are meant to defend and affirm is not expressed or articulated fully. The fact that such a distinguished author and pastor so immersed in this issue seems unaware of what the Church affirms in her teaching is perhaps itself indicative of a genuine crisis. Too often, the Church’s moral teaching is understood solely as a prohibition or as the censuring of certain behaviors, while what she simultaneously affirms of human goodness goes unacknowledged and unrecognized. This is the difference between seeing moral truths as prohibitory *laws* and treating them instead as *protections* that invite individuals in new depths of personal awareness and intimacy with God. As Christians, we must work to articulate our faith mercifully and in accordance with God’s gratuitous abundance.

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## The following is the response of Robert George to David Henderson:

*David Henderson has an interesting essay up at [Public Discourse](#) today. It is well worth reading.*

*I need to correct Mr. Henderson on one point. He says:*

*[Robert] George’s defense of Fr. [James] Martin lands predominantly on Fr. Martin’s willingness to verbally assent to Church teaching and not on the substance of Fr. Martin’s argument, which remains unaddressed. Several substantive points—including Fr. Martin’s promotion of “Pride” events, his ongoing support of New Ways Ministry and Out at St. Paul’s, and his insistence that the Church adopt LGBT+ nomenclature—do make an appearance at the end of George’s article, but are treated only as minor points of ongoing disagreement. But these issues are not so inconsequential. Taken together, they represent a single critical issue that has yet to be resolved: Fr. Martin’s continued affirmation of sexual orientation as a valid basis of personal identity.*

*Henderson is absolutely right that the issues he mentioned are not inconsequential. But I didn’t say or imply or in any way suggest that they were inconsequential. In fact, the reverse is true. I made a point of highlighting their importance. In the very essay of mine to which Henderson is referring I say, speaking of areas of disagreement between Fr. Martin and myself:*

*So where do we disagree? Mainly, I think, on whether same-sex attraction (or other forms of feeling related to sexuality, such as the dysphoria or dysmorphia people have in mind when they use the term “transgender”) is a valid basis for establishing one’s identity, and whether we ought to recognize and affirm identity built around same-sex attraction (or those other forms of feeling). Fr. Martin believes we should. I believe we shouldn’t. This is a deep, multidimensional, and important debate. The right answer will determine, for example, what sort of language we ought to use (“same-sex attracted” vs. “LGBT+”) and whether we*

*ought to affirm celebrations of certain forms of “identity” such as those celebrated in “Pride” parades and other events.*

*I said—indeed, I have repeatedly stressed—the critical importance of these issues to the pastoral practice of the Church. It is not at all clear to me how Mr. Henderson could have read the words “this is a deep, multidimensional, and important debate,” or anything else I have said about the matter in the essay and elsewhere, and concluded that I regard the issues as being merely “minor points of disagreement” or “inconsequential.”*

*What’s more, again in the article to which Henderson refers, I called on Fr. Martin (as I have again since) to refrain from endorsing putatively Catholic ministries that reject the Church’s teachings on sexual morality and marriage. Here is what I said:*

*I would appeal to Fr. Martin to reconsider his support, which has been enthusiastic and vocal, for organizations such as New Ways Ministry and Out at St. Paul’s—organizations that unambiguously contradict and seek to undermine the Church’s teachings on marriage and sexual morality. His support for these organizations—motivated by his laudable desire to reach out in a welcoming spirit to those whom they purport to serve—leads people to wonder whether he is being honest in saying that he does not himself reject the Church’s teachings. New Ways Ministry has twice been severely rebuked by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Out at St. Paul’s has explicitly claimed that Pope Francis is “wrong” to reaffirm the Church’s teaching on marriage as the conjugal union of husband and wife. Fr. Martin stands with the Pope and the Church, as I do. But that cannot be done consistently with an endorsement of Out at St. Paul’s.*

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## David Henderson responds to Robert George:

One concern this article seeks to address is the way in which the debate surrounding Fr. Martin’s book is commonly framed. Predominantly, the critical response has centered on questions of authority—whether the book has the blessing of some authoritative ecclesial body, or whether Fr. Martin himself is in agreement with magisterial teaching. Such questions are certainly important, but what is concerning in this debate is how often substantive concerns—such as those raised by Robert George—are often not brought to bear on these decisions.

Something that this article serves to highlight is the urgent need to challenge Fr. Martin’s most basic assumptions. In response to his critics, Fr. Martin frequently minimizes the accusation that his thought departs from Church teaching, arguing that what the Church teaches pertains only to illicit sexual *activities*, whereas his concern is specifically on the dignity of homosexual *persons*. In the mind of Fr. Martin, this neat separation between *morality* and *personhood* is what protects his thought from contravening ecclesial authority. But as my article shows, at the heart of this division lies a fundamental anthropological claim that perpetuates a vision of man and an understanding of our sexually differentiated bodies that is explicitly at odds with a Christian view of creation.

George clearly senses this substantive disconnect at the heart of Fr. Martin’s position when he contrasts Fr. Martin’s acceptance of Church teaching with several areas of his thought that

significantly contradict this assent. He rightly identifies Fr. Martin’s promotion of “gay” identity and use of LGBT+ terminology as “a deep, multidimensional, and important debate,” while pointing out the contradiction between Fr. Martin’s support of magisterial teaching and his endorsement of putatively Catholic organizations. Consequently, George reasonably expresses a concern that this article fails to represent his views when it describes his treatment of these issues as “minor points of ongoing disagreement” and “inconsequential.”

Admittedly, the commentary here on George is imprecise and could have been made with greater nuance. However, I do wish to draw attention to the context of the paragraph in question, which begins: “George’s defense of Fr. Martin lands predominantly on Fr. Martin’s willingness to verbally assent to Church teaching and not on the substance of Fr. Martin’s argument, which remains unaddressed.” The concern, in other words, is that the substance of Fr. Martin’s dissociation from Catholic teaching is not specified in George’s article and does not seem to have any impact on his argument. George clearly sees these issues as matters of grave importance, but the fact that they appear *at the end* of his article, *after* removing “any doubt” as to whether Fr. Martin is in agreement with Church teaching, leaves the reader wondering whether these matters have any bearing on the moral question he is trying to answer.

One notable point of ambiguity in George’s article is when he confirms Fr. Martin’s point “that the phrase ‘objective disorder’ does not refer to the person himself or herself but to the orientation,” to which George responds: “[Fr. Martin] correctly notes that this teaching does not suggest that *persons* (as opposed to *desires* a person may happen to have) are disordered, nor does it ‘detract from the dignity of any human being.’” Although not incorrect—and George appropriately avoids using the language of orientation—what goes unchallenged here is Fr. Martin’s assumption that what the Church teaches by way of objectively disordered desires makes no fundamental claim as to the nature of the human person. George is clearly attempting to criticize this supposition by drawing attention to the inconsistencies of Fr. Martin’s view with regards to Church teaching. However, by already conceding that Fr. Martin is in agreement with Church teaching *prior* to his recanting of these views, George risks construing these issues as irrelevant to the question of Fr. Martin’s adherence to Christian doctrine. The reader is left to conclude that Fr. Martin’s conformity to Church teaching is purely formal. One point my article serves to highlight is the need to challenge Fr. Martin on precisely this point, as it is this division between a purely formal order of moral activity and an entirely separate order of substantive goodness that supports the anthropological vision that drives his thought.

*David Henderson is a contributor to Humanum and Ph.D. candidate at the John Paul II Institute for Studies in Marriage and Family in Washington, D.C.*

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# Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science

BOOK REVIEW

## The Global Reach of Gender Ideology

CONOR B. DUGAN

**Gabriele Kuby**, *The Global Sexual Revolution: Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom* (Angelico Press, 2015).

In his final Christmas Address to the Roman Curia before he retired, Pope Benedict XVI criticized a new philosophy of gender: “According to this philosophy, sex is no longer a given element of nature that man has to accept and personally make sense of: it is a social role that we choose for ourselves, while in the past it was chosen for us by society.” Pope Benedict noted the “profound falsehood of this theory” and argued that within itself it contained an “anthropological revolution” the consequences of which are grave:

[I]f there is no pre-ordained duality of man and woman in creation, then neither is the family any longer a reality established by creation. Likewise, the child has lost the place he had occupied hitherto and the dignity pertaining to him.

Indeed, under gender ideology children become “object[s] to which people have a right and which they have a right to obtain.” This is not, however, simply a rejection of anthropological and metaphysical reality. It goes deeper; it denies God. Thus, Benedict concluded: “The defense of the family is about man himself. And it becomes clear that when God is denied, human dignity also disappears. Whoever defends God,” on the other hand, “is defending man.”

Gabriele Kuby attempts to defend man—and God—in her book *The Global Sexual Revolution: Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom*. It is an important but flawed book. It is important because it details the attempts, usually by Western elites, to mainstream the philosophy of gender and sexuality critiqued by Pope Benedict in that December 2012 speech. It is flawed because it is prone to rely upon sources and citations that either appear to be or are in fact suspect and unreliable. In this way it resembles the website that co-published the book, *LifeSite*. It is more a polemic than a reasoned study, so its influence will be limited. A reader will have to supplement and check certain assertions made by Kuby. Still, Kuby’s account of the genealogy and effects of the gender revolution is plausible and merits serious

consideration.

Kuby's most significant and powerful chapter is that detailing the various thinkers who laid the groundwork for today's near-constant assault on the family and nature. In it, Kuby describes the sorry and sordid details of some of the progenitors of today's gender ideology, including Margaret Sanger, Wilhelm Reich, Magnus Hirschfeld, Sigmund Freud, Alfred Kinsey, and Simone de Beauvoir. The disordered thinking and living at the root of our current crisis is harrowing to read. For instance, Kuby describes Reich promoting "masturbation as a 'way out of the harm of abstinence' and sexual intercourse starting at puberty, because 'suppression [of youth sexuality] is essential for maintaining compulsory marriage and family as well as for producing submissive citizens.'" Reich died in a Pennsylvania prison after being arrested for shipping his "orgone accumulator"—a contraption that supposedly harnessed a biological life-force—across state lines. In a similar vein, de Beauvoir famously stated in *The Second Sex* that "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes a woman" and saw marriage and motherhood as shackles to be escaped. She instantiated her theory in her own life, living an open relationship with Jean-Paul Sartre, seducing minors, and promoting abortion. These are the founders of the movement that daily seeks to disassociate men and women from their nature.

As Richard Weaver observed, ideas have consequences, and the theories espoused by these thinkers have come to flower in our present age. Kuby describes the international effort towards gender mainstreaming. Kuby explains that this is "about much more than equality of men and women." Rather, gender mainstreaming "involves manufacturing equality through 'deconstruction' of the binary hierarchical gender order to arrive at a diversity of genders with equal value and equal rights." Kuby details the way experts and elites have worked to foist this deconstruction of gender upon Western societies and now on the international community.

In a chapter entitled, "Intolerance and Discrimination," Kuby demonstrates how the push for gender mainstreaming has resulted not only in a detachment from reality—and the attendant loss of freedom it entails—but the loss of basic freedoms even to speak out in defense of reality. The examples are legion—indeed, many of us can point to examples in our own lives. Kuby writes, "The transformation from a democratic society, founded on Christian faith, to a hedonistic totalitarian one does not happen in just one step. There are no signs that this trend will stop, unless people rise to defend their values and democratic rights." In one sense, Kuby is right. And through her book she is giving people tools and data to raise their voices. At the same time, I fear that Kuby is unaware of the way in which liberal democracy has a built-in logic that leads to the very soft totalitarianism she rightly condemns. In this sense, her critique is not radical enough.

In the end, Christian anthropology, Christian realism, Christian charity, and Christian hope are the only things that can help to stem the tide of the gender ideology that Kuby describes in vivid detail. It is Christian anthropology, which understands that humans are made in God's image as man and woman, male and female, that will help to reorient society. It is a Christian realism that purifies reason with faith and sees reality as it actually is that can help to reground society in nature and the given. It is Christian charity that will allow Christians to live attractive lives that draw in the hurt and wounded of our world—hurt and wounded in part because of the rampant gender ideology—to Christ and reality. And it is Christian hope that will allow us to weather these storms. As then-Cardinal Ratzinger said, "[T]he fate of a society always depends on its creative minorities. Christian believers should look upon themselves as just such a creative minority, and help [the West] to reclaim what is best in its heritage and to thereby place itself at the service of all humankind." By witnessing to the reality about man and woman in love and hope, Christians can help leaven the world and lift it out of its current darkness.

*Conor B. Dugan is a husband, father of four, and attorney who lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

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# Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science

BOOK REVIEW

## Camille Paglia's Sexual "Realism"

MARGARET HARPER MCCARTHY

**Camille Paglia**, *Free Women, Free Men: Sex, Gender, Feminism* (Pantheon, 2017).

If I were a feminist, I'd be Camille Paglia.

For over two decades now, Paglia, a Professor of Humanities at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, has proudly set herself apart from mainstream American feminism through her books (*Glittering Images*; *Break, Blow, Burn*; *Vamps & Tramps*; *Sexual Personae*) and many articles. A collection of these articles has now appeared under the title *Free Women, Free Men: Sex, Gender, Feminism*. There, you can find her refreshingly politically incorrect critique of the unquestioned assumptions and one-sided diagnoses that dominate feminist discourse.

Central to Paglia's critique of that discourse is its "Rousseauian" insistence that all differences between the sexes are nothing but "constructs" "inscribed" on the sexes by adverse (male) social pressures (*that* being the source of any and all trouble between the sexes). In her view, this is willful blindness to all the evidence, a blindness apparent, for example, in the work of Kate Millett, the matriarch of "second-wave feminism," who wrote: "Patriarchy is so powerful, that it has a successful habit of passing itself off as nature." Paglia, by contrast, holds that certain key differences—not the restrictive stereotypes of the '50s she so detested as a young girl—are, in fact, rooted in nature. As she observes, across cultures "there is something fundamentally constant in gender that is grounded in concrete facts."

Such "constants," not being the product of a nefarious patriarchy, incline Paglia to a much more positive assessment of maternity that places women more on the side of nature, representing it, so to speak. In her view, "The question of motherhood is central." Flipping the usual equality talk on its head, she writes: "There is one place where men can never equal women and where female power is at its height—the realm of procreation." Feminist ideology, in Paglia's view, has never dealt honestly with this "mother power." "Its portrayal of history as male oppression and female victimage is a gross distortion of the facts." She disdains the "peevisish, grudging rancor against men." As for the traditional division of labor, she harkens back to that time well before the 1950s—that constant foil!—when her own two grandmothers "had an awesome majesty and power and a greater stature than that of any feminist I have yet

met ...[yet] rarely left the kitchen, the warm shrine of the home, from dawn to midnight.” As for motherhood, she, a mother, rails against the absence of any positive account of children who are at most “a management problem to be farmed out to working-class nannies” or daycare centers when they haven’t been “dealt with” ahead of time. Paglia, who is by no means a “pro-lifer,” exposes the callousness of the feminist *sine qua non* that does not reckon with the violence of abortion.

Paglia’s insistence on looking at the evidence of things and “getting back to nature” shows up most prominently in her dealings with sexual desire. Being a lapsed Catholic of Mediterranean extraction, she is allergic to the “pinched, cramped, body-denying Protestant culture” that runs through so much of American feminism. “Leaving sex to the feminists is like letting your dog vacation at the taxidermist’s,” she says. Unlike her “naïve and prudish” feminist sisters—such as Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin—she is “pro-sex.” (Full disclosure: that includes being pro-pornography.) But she is also a “realist.” She takes the “Hobbesian” view: namely, that sex is a “red flame” caught up with the “deep, dark earth rhythms” of nature: vitality, allure, and glamour but also aggression, power, and conflict. In the case of men, this aggression takes the form of hunt, pursuit and capture, and, of course, rape. In the case of women, it takes *another* form, chiefly in the form of possessive motherhood. She’s an equal opportunist.

By denying all this and throwing social cautions to the wind, telling women “they can do anything, go anywhere, say anything, wear anything,” it is *feminism*, declares Paglia, that has made them vulnerable, not patriarchy. “A girl who lets herself get dead drunk at a fraternity party is a fool. A girl who goes upstairs alone with a brother at a fraternity party is an idiot. Feminists call this ‘blaming the victim.’ I call it common sense.” It is her “realism” that fires Paglia’s vitriol against the “date rape” (*her* scare quotes) and sexual harassment campaigns and regimes, going all the way back to the Anita Hill affair and including the most recent anti-male grievance fest, the #MeToo movement (too recent to be included in the book, but commented on by Paglia [here](#)).

Paglia’s “realism” is refreshing, especially when compared to the only narrative currently permitted in public discourse: men are aggressors, women are victims, and patriarchy is to blame. That said, for all her seriousness about human nature, Paglia is as much in favor of overcoming it as she is for rooting sexual difference in it. Indeed, much of Paglia’s pro-man talk is driven by the fact that men are the ones chiefly responsible for “transcending” nature through art, science, and politics, by virtue of their general capacity to project (a talent expressed in their very physiology). She famously wrote in her *Sexual Personae*: “If civilization had been left in female hands, we would still be living in grass huts.” This celebration of transcendence would not be alarming, especially for those who have a more classical understanding of human nature (as *already* set up for culture-making). But, having a “pagan” view of nature (her qualifier), she cannot but pit transcendence against nature. This is clear enough when she states: “we have the right to thwart nature’s procreative compulsions, through sodomy or abortion. Male homosexuality may be the most valorous of attempts to evade the femme fatale and to defeat nature.” And “my absolute right to my body takes precedence over the brute claims of mother nature.”

Still, Paglia’s “realism” makes her more aware of the limits of such a project than most feminists. Whether it concerns promiscuity, delayed pregnancy for young women, the disregard for the traditional division of labor, or homosexuality and abortion, Paglia’s judgment is clear: “there are certain fundamental principles of human life that return again and again ... I have serious doubts about whether androgyny can usefully be extended as a master plan for the human race.” Indeed, *Free Women, Free Men* is littered with apocalyptic

warnings about cultural collapse for an age committed to “extravaganzas of gender experimentation.” “There are many parallels between our time and that of the Roman empire. Whenever you get cosmopolitan cultures that are very tolerant and permissive . . . it seems to be the case that such cultures are ripe for collapse.”

The book is a mixed bag, to be sure. Still, it offers a much-needed challenge to the assumptions of mainstream feminism. Perhaps more importantly, it offers some caution for traditionally-minded women tempted to jump on the latest feminist band-wagon in hopes of selling their (good) moral package. We all agree that rape (when it is rape) is bad, as is demanding sexual favors in exchange for movie roles and promotions. But the motives and “solutions” of those driving the band wagon aren’t ours. They want androgyny: abstract, dis-embodied, interchangeable individuals, with no natural relation to each other, no common path, no common project. Is that what we want? Do we really want to promote a world where the natural electricity between men and women has been turned off, either by threat of legal action (for even a mere compliment) or—to pick up on one of Jordan Peterson’s latest challenges—the enforcement of a stricter dress code, of, say, Mao suits for everyone? What will we achieve if, in our “shock” over the latest revelations of misbehavior, we help to bury the last remnants of a pre-androgynous world? A world in which men and women studying and working together were still recognized to be just that—a world, therefore, of *eros*, allure, and flirtatiousness, along with the modesty and gentlemanliness that guided these, in courtship, toward a life-long and fruitful marriage.

By recognizing certain (natural) evidences and questioning dominant foils, caricatures, and one-sided finger-pointing, Paglia clears a path for a bigger project, one that would have older and deeper resources than her own Hobbesian ones, to be sure. Such a project would bring men and women *together*, and on more positive ground.

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# Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science

BOOK REVIEW

## Bringing Up Boys

CARLA GALDO

**Leonard Sax**, *Why Gender Matters: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know About the Emerging Science of Sex Differences* (Harmony, 2017. 2nd ed.).

**Meg Meeker**, *Strong Mothers, Strong Sons: Lessons Mothers Need to Raise Extraordinary Men* (Ballantine Books, 2014).

When my eldest son was 3, moving from toddlerhood into childhood, I began to try to understand him less as a toddler and more as an emerging child, with certain educational, social, and spiritual needs. I felt like I was standing at the edge of a vast canyon. The landscape of childhood was beautiful but daunting, and there were methods of navigating it completely unknown to me up to that point. Without brothers or even close male cousins in my family of origin, I had no idea what mothering a healthy little boy would look like, and I relied heavily upon the advice of friends who had walked this path before me, as well as broad reading. Now, ten years and four more children later, I find myself experiencing the same sense of vertigo, of standing on the edge of something huge. My eldest son is squarely in the preteen years, and the vista of the teen years is stretching out before me. I have found *Why Gender Matters* and *Strong Mothers, Strong Sons* to be exceptionally helpful resources for charting a path to accompany boys through their teens and into adulthood. *Why Gender Matters* is a heavily science-based book, filled with statistics, studies, clinical results, and supported by Sax's years as a family physician. Discussions regarding gender can be volatile and emotional; Sax's book, by contrast, provides evidence-based explanations while steering clear of moral prescriptions. *Strong Mothers, Strong Sons*, while similar in that it is largely the fruit of Dr. Meeker's many years of pediatric medicine, reads more like an in-depth, experience-based pep-talk from a mom who has walked the path we will walk. Meeker shares anecdotes from interviews, her own mothering, and from her widespread experiences speaking to teens around the country about healthy sexuality. She speaks to mothers who struggle with a culturally-promoted perfectionism, emphasizing that we can and should get off the hyper-obsessive "crazy train" that pushes us to make sure our boys have more and achieve more than their peers. She encourages instead a focus on motherly presence and relationship combined with appropriate boundaries as boys move into their teen years.

I first read *Why Gender Matters* in 2005; revisiting the book's 2017 update was helpful, especially considering how the landscape of gender politics has changed in the last ten years. Dr. Leonard Sax surveys the whole arena of gender differences—from specific ways that boys and men see, smell, and hear differently from women, to the distinct ways that each approach risk, school, sex, drugs and alcohol, as well as social media and video games. He insists that close attention should be paid to the scientific analysis of differences between men and women and remarks that “with regard to gender and the understanding of gender, our culture is going in the wrong direction, and the changes are being driven not by science but by ideology.” He is not an extreme traditionalist, however, wanting to lock men and women in stereotyped boxes. On the basis of neurological studies and evidence, he points out that there are certain norms or typical characteristics of men and women, but as is the case with most statistically quantifiable groups, there are outliers—men who have more feminine brains or traits and women who have more masculine brains or traits. Contrary to current gender politics, this does not imply for Sax that these men and women should assume that they are “gay” or “transgender”—it simply means that the understanding of masculinity and femininity needs to be expanded to incorporate these people and their less-typical traits in certain areas. He does not make morality-based assertions; rather, he relies on evidence garnered from personal and scientific studies. “The contemporary assumption,” he says, point-blank, “that every boy [who enjoys more typically feminine pursuits] will be better off in the long term if we put him in a dress, castrate him, and give him female hormones...does not have a strong basis in evidence.”

In terms of education and child-rearing, the most fascinating assertion of Dr. Sax's book is that gender-blind treatment and instruction actually serves to reinforce the very gender stereotypes which educators are trying to avoid. Sax explains that small details such as sitting side-by-side with a boy and speaking in a more elevated tone can improve his academic performance, whereas girls can interpret the same instructional methods as both threatening and unfriendly. Girls perform better with a smiling instructor, speaking in a lower tone, sitting face-to-face. These are small but powerful points that can assist not only teachers but also parents in the trenches of after-school homework battles. Sax also highlights how certain material, such as art, math, or physics lessons, can be adjusted to be more appealing to both boys and girls by making changes in the order or method of presenting the material. For example, in art, he notes how young girls overwhelmingly prefer to draw colorful, static scenes of people, houses, animals, and nature, whereas boys prefer monochromatic depictions of moments of action, change, or violence. If a female teacher or parent, misunderstanding the effort or intention put into the child's work, suggests that the boy who has drawn an all-black and white scene of a stick-figure attacking an enemy has not quite completed the assignment and should add more color or static structures, the boy will eventually feel his attempts at art are pointless and unacceptable, and decide that “art is not for boys,” when in fact his particular approach to art was simply not well understood. When boys' art is cultivated well for what it is, fewer boys abandon art.

Sax points out that the problem overall, throughout the entire cultural realm, is that while we are breaking down all the gender norms which both nature and tradition offer us, we are leaving children and young adults in a vacuum with nothing to aspire to except an ambiguous sense of “personhood.” While valuing personhood is good, boys and girls don't aspire to be ambiguous persons; rather, boys naturally aspire to manhood and girls to womanhood, and we must teach them what that means. Sax does not agree with the mainstream cultural consensus that gender is simply a social construct; it is, he says, a biological fact, that can be influenced to a certain extent by environment and experience. He points out the strange situation in which liberal activists consider gender to be entirely a social construct *except* in the case of a “transgender” individual: in their case, the gender they believe themselves to be is “inviolable,

hardwired, and impossible to change.” He relates the tale of Dr. Kenneth Zucker, a Canadian doctor and leading expert in gender dysphoria (the phenomenon of boys who say they are girls and vice versa). In over 30 years of experience with such cases, Zucker came to realize that it was best to not “transition” children under age nine who say they are the other gender because in many cases, the child grows out of it; on the other hand, he supported adolescents who requested transitioning through the use of cross-sex hormones. In 2015, he was fired without notice and barred from his office because he refused to swim with the current “gender affirmation” tide which insists that children of any age who experience any kind of gender dysphoria should be allowed to begin the transition process immediately, without investigation into mental health or other contributing factors.

It is worth mentioning that in *Why Gender Matters*, Dr. Sax treats homosexuality as a normal, albeit less-typical, variation of gender expression. He also mentions, however, without expressing his own moral view, that something can be medically normal—he uses the analogy of drinking alcohol in moderation—but at the same time can be considered morally wrong according to some cultures and religions. He sees homosexuality as both genetic and environmentally influenced, pointing to studies of twins in which one member of the pair was homosexual. There was a 25 percent chance of the other twin being homosexual if the twins were identical (sharing the same genetics), yet only a 13 percent chance if the twins were fraternal. If homosexuality were entirely genetic, all identical twins of homosexual persons would be genetic, and yet this is not the case. He encourages parents of children who come out as “gay” to be constant in their support for their child as a person, especially because there are concerning statistics as to their suicide risk. (One study cited by Sax indicates that gay men are eight times more likely to commit suicide than straight men in similar life circumstances.) He emphasizes overall, however, that a same-sex attracted boy or girl remains a boy or girl in most key, neurological ways.

While Sax’s book deals with a wide spectrum of male and female gender experience—from the statistically normal to extreme clinical outliers—Dr. Meg Meeker’s book *Strong Mothers, Strong Sons* is intended to cut through the mists of everyday misunderstanding and miscommunication between mothers and their sons. Sax’s book would provide science-based insight into reasons that most of the parenting techniques Dr. Meeker discusses need to be gender-specific—why there are ways for mothers to relate specifically to their *sons*, rather than to an androgynous or unspecified “child.” It is incredibly useful as a mother to understand, for example, that while abilities to concentrate and focus are generally similar between adult men and women, among children, the average five-year-old boy is, in some respects, more similar in his ability to concentrate and focus, not to his female classmates, but to three-and-a-half-year-old girls. Boys lag significantly behind girls in brain development, and this is important to know if one is a mother worried about why her son isn’t learning to read as fast or as easily as his older sister did.

There is much to admire about Dr. Meeker’s work—from her matter-of-fact approach to discussing sexuality with children from the time they are very young into the teen years, to her insistence that mothers can and should maintain a strong relationship with their boys from birth to adulthood. However, this relationship needs, particularly in adolescence, to focus on providing her son access to good male role models and mentors, including, but not limited to, fathers. As one would assume, the nature of the motherly relationship needs to change as boys age, with successive steps of appropriate letting-go moments that allow her son to grow in wisdom, responsibility, and ability to navigate the world of work and personal relationships by the time he is an adult.

One of the most useful and personally consoling chapters in Dr. Meeker’s book is titled “He’s

Got a Bow and Arrow (And the Target's on Your Back).” Insisting that boys need to differentiate themselves from their mothers in order to achieve successively greater levels of independence as well as a deeper understanding of themselves as male, Dr. Meeker points out that the conflict sons have with mothers should not be taken personally. Often mothers are hurt by their sons’ withdrawal or constant contradictions, particularly starting in preadolescence, but in most cases this push-back is healthy and needed. At the same time, she insists that rules and family standards must remain firm, because “boys naturally need to run into things, and if they aren’t hitting fences erected by their parents, then they will have run-ins with teachers, coaches, or even the law.” She points out that while they may rant and rage, if they have grown up confident in a mother’s love and care, they actually feel more respected with the more reasonable limits they come up against, although they often can’t express this. Such words are encouraging when finding oneself in the thick of battle with a son of any age.

Dr. Meeker offers readers 200+ pages of similarly sensible advice, insisting on the need to teach sons respect for God, prayer, and wisdom, using input from sources as diverse as St. Augustine, Aristotle, John Milton, Father John Riccardo, and a loquacious Texan taxi-driver. While incorporating the need to teach sons about faith and spirituality, this book, like Meeker’s many others, is accessible to, and lauded by, a wide audience. Dr. Meeker has a strong appeal across the socio-cultural spectrum. Her website lists endorsements from Oprah Radio, NPR, the Today Show, *Psychology Today*, and Fox Radio, among others. It is refreshing to see how her friendly, professional, science- and experience-based presentation of the dynamics of parenthood and childhood can be useful to so many people. While she needs to tread lightly in certain areas, such as premarital sex, she doesn’t sacrifice ground morally while she does this. She points out the medical reasons that teenage sex is unhealthy both physically and emotionally; she leaves the door open for parents to utilize this information as they explain to their son the morality of his sexual behavior and choices. Her ability to speak effectively and well to so many—from middle and upper class “hyper-mothers” to hardened Los Angeles teens, is admirable and worthy of praise and imitation. St. Josemaria Escriva, in a 1967 homily to students and professors at the University of Navarra, exhorted them to pursue excellence in “all the immense panorama of work” and in so doing to “passionately love the world” because “there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations.” Dr. Meeker’s love for the world, and the people she encounters in it, is evident. In her close study of the dynamics of many mother-son pairs, she found that only those mothers able to “let go” of their sons were able to receive them back as men. This “letting go” is essentially the art of detachment, which is not only a practical skill but also an important spiritual practice. Detachment is a prominent Biblical theme, from Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac, to Jesus’s call for his disciples to leave all to come follow him, to Christ’s own abandonment of his will into the Father’s hands in the garden of Gethsemane. Although she never mentions such passages, Dr. Meeker’s writings witness to the fact that spiritual realities always play out their dynamics in the workings of the everyday world, and lives lived in accord with these invisible realities bear very tangible fruits.

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# Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science

BOOK REVIEW

## The New Disconnect Between Law and Reality

MORGAN HOLLIGER

**Daniel Moody**, *The Flesh Made Word: A New Reason to Be Against Abortion* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016).

Amidst the tumult surrounding the so-called “bathroom wars,” some critics have taken conservatives to task for blowing the issue out of proportion. Doesn’t the controversy really come down to “whether a boy gets to use the girls’ loo”? And, if so, is all the fuss really worth it? Likewise, why should the Right get so upset about expanding the legal definition of marriage? This, like gender identity, can be treated as a technical legal matter. A circumscribed change in the law, so the argument goes, can be tolerated in the interest of freedom.

The beauty of Daniel Moody’s *The Flesh Made Word* is that he deftly gives the lie to this oft-repeated call for conservatism to sacrifice its ideals for the sake of democratic freedom. As he effectively proves, what might immediately seem to be a string of mere legal technicalities to accommodate the freedom of a small population (*technically* we can now choose our gender identity, *technically* marriage is no longer between a man and a woman, etc.) are not really technicalities at all but have implications for law itself. What is at stake for Moody is not first and foremost traditional “family values,” but something far more elemental: the relationship between reality, language, and law that together form the foundation of all human society.

Though it may at first seem a bit tedious, Moody begins by raising a simple question: What is language? He makes the basic but necessary point that language is preceded by and always draws its existence from a natural reality. Whether we call a car a “car” or “water” is ultimately, Moody argues, entirely arbitrary. However, what would be the social implications of intentionally depriving something as constitutive to human life as water of any name at all? Moody asks, “Why would we ever take a natural reality and shroud it in silence?”

It is not difficult to see where Moody is going with this logic as the theoretically-heavy first part of *The Flesh Made Word* gives way to its more concrete arguments that deal directly with the issues of abortion, gay marriage, and transgenderism. He clearly illustrates that what is happening with these issues most foundationally is the ideologically-motivated manipulation

of language that becomes instantiated in law.

Law, Moody explains, is “like a mirror that reflects reality and society” made up of nothing but language. Thus, when the law severs the tie between natural reality and language, such as with abortion legislation that separates the word “person” from the body, the implications of this are not limited to the legal realm but are, as Moody will argue, far more intimate.

Now we approach the central claim of Moody’s argument. What is really at stake if law mandates the separation of language from reality? At the end of the day, is it not the case that a person is a person, a man is a man, a woman a woman, etc., no matter what the law says? While the law does indeed lack the power to change reality, it nevertheless has the power to undermine our capacity to articulate it. It can shroud natural realities in silence. “Making legally possible the physically impossible it makes legally impossible the physically possible.”

Moreover, Moody continues, since governing ought to reflect and nourish the truth of things, any time the law refuses to do so, as in the current separation of personhood from the body, we are, in fact, “no longer being governed” at all. And yet with the law’s continued appearance of governing, we are both deprived of the adequate language to understand who we are, and we believe lies about ourselves. This, in essence, is the “flesh made word,” where language no longer mirrors reality but uses its signifying power to actually oppose it, systematizing and formalizing this opposition in law and, in Moody’s words, thereby “trapping us in language.”

There is no question that Moody puts his finger on the problem with great precision. His method manages to avoid the common superficiality of these often ideologically freighted discussions and convey his point with remarkable objectivity.

One possible sticking point with Moody’s argument is his ascription of the unraveling of law (the point where he would make the claim that we are “no longer being governed”) to abortion legislation. While I do not doubt the monumental impact of this legal separation of personhood from man’s bodily existence, I wonder if the argument might benefit from recognizing (taking a cue from thinkers like David Crawford) the roots of this “disembodied” conception of man in the foundations of the Liberal tradition that progressively codified this conception even prior to the legalization of abortion. One could argue, for instance, that this was in some way already the case with earlier legislation regarding contraception.

Finally, the last chapter of *Flesh Made Word* is entitled “The Denial of Man.” This apparently gloomy chapter is actually hopeful. In the midst of cultural chaos, Moody invites us to “wrench our gaze away” from the distorted image that the law reflects and return to the Divine as the only adequate way of interpreting our true identity. More specifically, he refers to the Divinity that has revealed all of natural reality as imbued with meaning and that alone can really free us from being “trapped in language”: the Word made flesh.

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# Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science

## BOOK REVIEW

### Why We Need Jordan Peterson, and Why He Needs Us

REBEKAH LAMB

**Jordan B. Peterson**, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (Random House Canada, 2018).

Steps from the University of Toronto's downtown campus, the Bloor and Bay St. West Indigo Books and Music storefront displays their most popular book requests. *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* by Jordan B. Peterson has been on that display since shortly after its January release. Cross-listed under the categories Health and Well Being, Psychology, and Applied Psychology, the best-selling *12 Rules for Life* offers its readers a set of "ordering principles" for the sake of individual and collective "flourish[ing]." According to Peterson, the drama of existence consists of finding ways to "stand up" in one's life both "physically" and "metaphysically" to seek out meaning and "keep the corrupting influence of mortal despair at bay."

Peterson's book draws on a wide-ranging, interdisciplinary array of sources to make his points. For instance, he uses a case study on the "neurochemistry of defeat and victory" as found in lobsters to aid psychological analyses of biblical figures and passages. Unexpected comparisons like this one are illustrative of Peterson's overall method. Leaving seemingly no stone unturned, he explores how mythology maps out clear warnings and guidelines for personal decisions; the ways evolutionary science illuminates biblical narratives; and the value of art to help us live more committed lives.

Peterson's emphasis on the importance of seeking out, and even *making*, meaning in life is the central strength of his book. It is a refreshing invitation to accountability in things both great and small for the sake of personal and social development. "[I]f we each live properly, we will collectively flourish," he notes. Peterson has made his views on meaning in daily life, sexuality, identity, habit formation, and gender more than clear and known in countless lectures, published papers, Youtube talks, and interviews. In *12 Rules* he rehearses many of these well-known points but he also covers a lot of fresh ground (which most reviewers have sidelined for the sake of rehashing his better known, more controversial ideas).

One of the most important topics in *12 Rules* is Peterson's discussion of the crucial role that healthy family life makes to the overall flourishing of individuals, communities, and culture.

This aspect of Peterson's philosophy is well worth more sustained attention. In *12 Rules* he particularly considers how the ways in which a society understands and cultivates the gender identity of children directly influences whether human dignity, individual flourishing, and family culture is promoted or hurt, within society more broadly. Peterson advances an ethical theory of family life, living, and sexuality, pointing to the family as the fundamental building block of virtuous living and ideal socio-political development. Emphasizing the importance of family stability, Peterson shows what breaks down when gender difference is treated merely as a constructed thing.

Reminding us that "ideas have consequences," Peterson examines how the denial of male and female psychological and biological differences is not only leading to a further breakdown in familial structures. He also discusses how the growing socio-political attempts to erase acknowledgement of gender and sexual differences are leading to psychological crises of identity, especially in young boys (but in girls also). Pointing to recent studies from Scandinavian societies in particular, Peterson discusses how boys and girls learn, express themselves emotionally, and establish their sense of identity in strikingly different ways. For example, the data shows that while girls thrive by "winning in their own hierarchy—by being good at what girls value, as girls" and can "add to this victory by winning in the boys' hierarchy," boys "can only win by winning in the male hierarchy." This is especially seen when we consider the typical differences in strength, expectations, and proclivities (both intellectual and emotional) between boys and girls. "If you're male... you can't just hammer a female as hard as you would a male. Boys can't (won't) play truly competitive games with girls," Peterson notes. "It isn't clear how they can win" without potentially violating various moral codes, ones which are incredibly important socialization aids in future life decisions, especially those relating to marriage, work, and family life.

Increasingly, education systems, from elementary school through to university, are favouring female behavioral patterns as well as female modes and methods of learning. While Peterson advocates for the rights and educational development of females, he emphasizes that males can't be forgotten—this leads to a host of other social problems, one of the increasingly prominent ones being absentee fathers who, for various reasons, are not being held as accountable on the one hand or who, on the other, are increasingly finding less and less social room and accommodation (particularly in the education system) for them to act, learn, and behave as boys, as men:

It has become a tenet of a certain kind of social constructionist theory that the world would be much improved if boys were socialized like girls. Those who put forward such theories assume, first, that aggression is a learned behavior, and can then simply not be taught, and second (to take a particular example) that, "boys should be socialized the ways girls have been traditionally socialized...." First, it is not the case that aggression is merely learned. It is there in the beginning. There are ancient biological circuits, so to speak, that underlie defensive and predatory aggression.... Most [boys] are ... socialized effectively by the age of four. This is not, however, because they have been encouraged to act like little girls. Instead, they are taught or otherwise learn in early childhood to integrate their aggressive tendencies into more sophisticated behavioral routines. Aggression underlies the drive to be outstanding, to be unstoppable, to compete, to win—to be actively virtuous, at least along one dimension. Determination is its admirable, pro-social face.

Referring to various examples from his clinical practice, Peterson explains that men who have

not had their aggression channeled positively can have seriously damaging psycho-social problems and damage the women in their lives. Throughout his book Peterson appeals to examples from his work as a clinical psychologist to illustrate, case after case, that failure to attend to and support the learning and psycho-sexual differences of boys and girls leads to serious gender imbalances and conflicts. This concern is one of the strongest points of the book, and clearly outlines why we need practical and empathetic ways of attending to and affirming the unique capacities and qualities of men and women, especially from childhood onwards. The profoundly negative consequences of “minimiz[ing] the innate differences” between boys and girls has significant ethical consequences for society at large, he argues.

Peterson’s examination of how to live an intentionally ethical life in fact covers a diverse range of topics: from education to gender, from forgiveness to accountability. He hopes that this will help encourage ethical action, even in the face of totalitarian or ideological pressures. For Peterson, we are always already implicated in political and social power dynamics of one sort or another. His thinking grew partly out of his moral horror regarding the dark history of twentieth-century totalitarian regimes and their respective origins. Peterson explains that it was mainly in poring over Solzhenitsyn that he came to the position that happiness must not be the reason for existence. Quoting Solzhenitsyn, he says that the idea we are made for happiness is an ideology too easily “done in by the first blow of the work assigner’s cudgel.” So, instead of being made for happiness, Peterson posits we should seek out a “deeper meaning” for existence. He settles on the idea that life has “more to do with developing character in the face of suffering than with happiness.”

Peterson’s conception of happiness is surprisingly underdeveloped. And this oversight is especially disappointing given that he is usually so attentive to the nuances and implications of the history of concepts and ideas. From the way he speaks about it I can only assume he equates it with superficial consumerism, pleasure seeking or go-with-the-flow, moral complacency. If this is what happiness amounted to then I would be absolutely on side with Peterson. However, the theological Judeo-Christian tradition, not to mention the philosophical one, tells a very different story about the nature and purpose of happiness. It’s a story Peterson strangely skirts, to the detriment of his overall argument.

While people attach a multitude of attributes and meanings to the term happiness, it is often understood in philosophy and Christian theology to mean, as Joseph Pieper puts it, “a basic conception of the nature of man and the meaning of human existence.” For Aristotle, the just person is the happy one. For Aquinas, happiness is the act of contemplating “the Good” (the Trinity) and striving to live in accordance with the transcendental: the true, beautiful, and good. “God alone can satisfy the will of man,” he writes in Part Two of the *Summa*. The Christian philosophical tradition understands happiness to consist of being-in-relationship with the Trinity, with the perfect community of persons who loved us into existence not primarily so that we would struggle for the sake of the strengthening of the will. Rather, we were made for happiness, called to love God and others and, as a result, to struggle in this fallen world as a consequence of seeking to love.

A more robust examination of the history of happiness as a philosophy helps us to better understand how, for instance, Maximilian Kolbe behaved in Auschwitz. Peterson’s *12 Rules* can’t produce a Kolbe. Only love of God can direct the will far beyond the noble but limited aims of struggling for meaning. Peterson refers to the Nazi and Soviet work camps to show how individuals of exceptional character challenged the entire totalitarian superstructure through their moral courage, through acts of resistance. However, the role of faith was often a profound motivating factor for these resistances (which Solzhenitsyn acknowledged). For Kolbe, among countless others, love is the purpose of moral action (and self-development a

derivative effect, not the main goal). At best, Peterson psychologizes this. As a consequence, we are left in *12 Rules* with a will-to-power language that cannot, among other things, accurately describe the actions of the heroic resisters Peterson so rightly admires. The economy of grace is sheer divine gift, working in accordance with, but transcending, the human will: there's not much room made for this mystery in the Peterson lexicon (he has often acknowledged as much).

Ultimately, Peterson's dismissal of happiness as the purpose of life is a problem because it aligns his argument too closely with an emphasis on an introspective attempt at self-sufficiency. Insisting that meaning can be forged out of effort emphasizes a kind of self-reliance which, while certainly useful and even admirable at times, misses the mark in telling most of the human story. Suffering for the sake of suffering in order to "tolerate the weight of our own self-consciousness" is, I suppose, the best we can aim for if the material world is all that exists. Personally, I am not that inspired to pursue goodness simply for the sake of "bear[ing] a load" to "justify" my "miserable existence" so as to better hunger after participation in the "heroism of genuine Being." The abstract Logos, the rational ordering principle of existence is far more compelling when it is made flesh: not simply Christ as appealing psychological archetype, conveniently categorized and thus tamed and predictable. But Christ as the *personhood* of a love which transcends, because he embodies, all the "rules."

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# Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science

BOOK REVIEW

## Parents in the Corner: The New Status of "Primary Educators"

KATIE SCHNEIDER

**Melissa Moschella**, *To Whom Do Children Belong?: Parental Rights, Civic Education, and Children's Autonomy* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

In his 1929 encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri*, Pope Pius XI wrote that a parent “holds directly from the Creator the mission and hence the right to educate the offspring, a right inalienable because inseparably joined to the strict obligation, a right anterior to any right whatever of civil society and of the State, and therefore inviolable on the part of any power on earth.” The struggle between parental rights and the motivations of the state to form citizens within its ideology is not a new conflict. This struggle, however, has been greatly exacerbated today by the state’s embrace of a comprehensive sex education policy, now informed by new definitions of gender.

It is obvious to a person who has any degree of proximity to the public school system in America that the mandate of the public schools has expanded significantly with the rise of sex education and that such an expansion is especially alarming when it gives transgender ideology the sanction of the state. With the rise of two parents working outside of the home and the increasing economic pressure to move away from extended family, children who are in conventional school settings spend most of their days with either teachers or daycare providers. In the vast majority of cases, loving, compassionate individuals are guiding these children. Regardless of how loving and caring these educators are, however, there is no replacement for the child’s parents. So contends Dr. Melissa Moschella in her recent book *To Whom Do Children Belong? Parental Rights, Civic Education and Children’s Autonomy*.

Moschella speaks to the clash going on today between those who believe children belong to the greater community (the “it takes a village” mentality) and those who maintain that children still belong to their parents and that it is the task of the parents, not schools or the government, to raise them. Although a philosophical inquiry rather than a parenting book, Moschella’s text could still be recommended as required reading for all parents or those who strive to support parents in the great task of bringing a child to adulthood as a moral and virtuous individual.

Moschella describes the places and situations where parents are not legally allowed to be the primary voices in their children's education, writing at one point about parents in Germany unable to homeschool their children even after it becomes clear that the school is going against the family's cultural values, especially with sex-education. At another point, she directs readers towards New York City's strict sex-education curriculum, the HealthSmart program, which parents cannot fully opt-out of for their children, despite the shockingly graphic sexual information presented to young students.

Public schools are not intrinsically bad, but issues arise with "policies that grant public schools a monopoly on public funding." These policies "are inherently problematic because they make state-run schools the default option for educating one's children." Moreover, Moschella writes, these policies send "the false message that the state, rather than the parents, has primary responsibility and authority for children's formal education" and "fail to respect the conscience right and primary educational authority of parents."

Parental authority supersedes the state's authority over children, Moschella argues, and it is parents that have the ultimate authority over their children. Certainly, "caring for children requires making decisions on their behalf and thus exercising authority over them; then it follows that parental authority is natural and original, primary to the state's authority over children and in no way derived from it." Therefore, it is not the state's task to challenge the notion of identity, which is born within the family culture, or teach a definition of human sexuality that goes against the beliefs of the parents. The state—acting through the school—cannot take away the parents' right to be the child's primary educator, and this is especially the case when it comes to notions of gender and sexuality.

Parents do, Moschella writes, have a responsibility to teach their children about sexuality. They may, however, decide that what public schools teach about sexuality does not "convey a proper understanding of sexuality." While some claim that "failing to provide comprehensive sexual education to children is tantamount to abuse or neglect" this definition of abuse and neglect "would effectively obliterate all parental discretionary authority and create a warrant for constant state surveillance." Ultimately, the push for state-run sex education erodes the natural rights of the individual.

Although teachers and other educators play an important role in the life of a child, their influence cannot overshadow the role of the parent:

[T]he relationship with parents, as the only one that is the cause of the child's biological existence and identity, is clearly the closest. Thus it is the parents who have the strongest special obligation to foster the child's well-being. Since parents' special obligation is based on a relationship that is permanent, their special obligation for the child's well-being is likewise permanent, although as the child matures the concrete implications of that obligation change significantly.

This "special obligation" of the parents is to be the primary educators of their children, but also to protect them from premature or unnecessary exposure to sexual education curricula or indoctrination into the belief that gender is changeable. Moschella echoes Pope Pius XI's message that parental rights are "inviolable on the part of any power on earth."

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# Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science

BOOK REVIEW

## A Pastoral Approach to Gender Dysphoria

ANDREW J. SODERGREN

**Mark Yarhouse**, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (IVP Academic, 2015).

In today's climate of political polarization, calls for civility are becoming more and more frequent. Now more than ever, Christians are called to speak the truth in love. This task can be challenging as the fallen human heart is often tempted to compromise elements of truth in order maintain social harmony or relentlessly seek victory in argument without respect and sensitivity for the persons involved. While common and understandable, both tendencies result in distortions of Christian charity. Such charity is especially needed today in addressing the delicate topic of gender dysphoria.

In his book *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, Evangelical Protestant psychologist Mark Yarhouse repeatedly emphasizes the need to distinguish between “pastoral care” and “cultural engagement.” This book, released by a Christian publishing house (InterVarsity Press, 2015), appears to be written primarily for Christians and often comes across as a corrective intended to help Christians understand better the experiences of those with confusion about their sexual identity and strike a more compassionate tone in relating to them and welcoming them into our churches. The book is replete with stories of gender dysphoric individuals, including many who have struggled with their Christian faith or were hurt in some way by Christian leaders. These anecdotes help the reader empathically connect with the pain, confusion, and isolation such individuals and their families often experience. This aspect of the book is quite helpful in developing a keener sensitivity to these suffering souls and broadening one's awareness of the vast diversity and complexity among those who experience confusion about their sexual identity.

As he has done in previous works, Yarhouse also does a masterful job of reviewing the relevant scientific research in a way that is honest, fair, and accessible to the lay reader. Indeed, it is not a stretch to say that Yarhouse has established himself in Christian circles as one of the best in this regard. Following his usual style, he relies upon and cites primary sources from professional journals while explaining both the key findings and the

methodological limitations of the research. Thus, if the reader approaches this book with the expectation of receiving a basic education in the science of gender dysphoria, he will not be disappointed.

Alongside these positive elements, there are some areas of concern with *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*. Parents, church leaders, and Christian professionals are hungry for answers regarding how to help young people struggling with confusion about their sexual identity in ways that are consonant with their Christian values. They want to understand the available options in such situations and how to discern the best path to follow. This is an especially urgent need as cultural pressure is mounting to view “transitioning” as both acceptable and inevitable.

Yarhouse provides some help in this area but stops short of providing a thorough moral analysis of the different treatment approaches and possible accommodations in response to a young person experiencing sexual identity confusion. Following the professional literature, Yarhouse distinguishes between childhood cases and adolescence/adulthood cases. For childhood cases, he lists the following options:

- psychosocial treatment to decrease cross-gender behavior / identification
- watchful waiting
- psychosocial facilitation (i.e., social transitioning)
- puberty suppression.

The options are similar for late adolescents and adults:

- seek to resolve the confusion in line with the sex of the body (perhaps through therapy or other means)
- manage the confusion and concomitant distress through intermittent cross-gender behavior (e.g., occasional cross-dressing or other behavior not in line with typical sex roles)
- adopt a cross-gender identity and roles, which may include cross-sex hormone treatments and/or surgery.

Yarhouse describes these various options and presents information about their outcomes and effectiveness in decreasing the subjective distress of the individual. However, he does not give a thorough moral analysis of them. While he notes that “theologically conservative” Christians may be uncomfortable with the thought of gender transition and/or sex reassignment, absent from the discussion in *Understanding Gender Dysphoria* is any moral absolute, such as the principle that mutilating a healthy human body for the purpose of simulating the opposite sex is intrinsically evil and, therefore, harmful to the individual. Furthermore, there is no discussion of the issue of cooperation with evil that arises when Christians are pressured to use opposite sex or alternative pronouns and names for people whose real sex is known. Yarhouse does not consider, for instance, whether such accommodations constitute bearing false witness.

Yarhouse summarizes his position in this way:

I see the value in encouraging individuals who experience gender dysphoria to resolve dysphoria in keeping with their birth sex. Where those strategies have

been unsuccessful, there is potential value in managing dysphoria through the least invasive expressions (recognizing surgery as the most invasive step toward expression of one's internal sense of identity). Given the complexities associated with these issues and the potential for many and varied presentations, pastoral sensitivity should be a priority.

These principles are fine as far as they go, but they lack any clear moral boundaries as to how far is too far. Without such clear guidelines, there is no backstop to prevent suffering individuals from falling off the cliff of self-alienation and mutilation.

Yarhouse's book is a respectable attempt to meet a pressing need for the Christian community and has much to offer. However, it ultimately comes up short because his whole analysis is not sufficiently grounded in an adequate anthropology that sees the body—and the sex revealed therein—as intrinsic to both the fundamental identity (son or daughter) and vocation (father or mother through spousal love) of every human being. Yarhouse pays some respect to the Christian drama of creation, fall, redemption, and glorification, but fails to fully see the anthropological vision flowing from the Trinitarian God embedded within it. Without this firm foundation, one is left grasping for moral principles to guide the response to sexual identity confusion and left with the well-intentioned, but slippery-slope principles offered in *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*. Our churches always have room for growth in compassion and welcoming—a crucial task to be sure—but without objective truth to guide us, our charity risks sliding into a kind of sentimental enabling which may ultimately result in harm coming to sexually confused individuals and their families, including further alienation from Christ, the source of all Truth about what it means to be human.

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# Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science

EDITORIAL

## Identity and Difference

MARGARET HARPER MCCARTHY

Over thirty years ago, the French Feminist, Luce Irigaray, wrote:

Sexual difference is one of the important questions of our age, if not in fact the burning issue. According to Heidegger, each age is preoccupied with one thing, and one alone. Sexual difference is probably that issue in our own age which could be our salvation on an intellectual level.[1]

There is no question that Irigaray was right. Especially now that the old debate about the relation between the sexes has been brought up into the more recent one about the relation between our “selves” and our bodies. Both debates, of course, stand or fall together, which is why we bring them together in this single issue: *Identity and Difference: The Gender Debate*.

The first part of the title concerns the delicate relation between the sexes, who have the same human nature but in two different bodily “incarnations.” Saint John Paul II, of course, gave us this language in his famous *Theology of the Body* where he brought out the “nuptial” character of the human body: its “being with” and “being for” another. He is our incomparable *Re-Source*.

John Paul II had much to say about the “feminine genius.” But now, decades later, many feel the need to think out the correlative “masculine genius”—and how to *foster it in young boys!* We review the *12 Rules* by the iconoclast Jordan Peterson, whose popularity—against all odds—is due in large part to his concern with masculine identity. And also *Free Women, Free Men* by Camille Paglia, another champion of men in the ferment of the #MeToo era.

The second part of our title (and issue) concerns the raging debate about whether our sexually dimorphic bodies have a say in who “we” are. Are they *already* inscribed with meaning, asking to be “re-read” and taken up by us in freedom (as John Paul II would say)? Or are they just blank slates on which to inscribe our own meaning from without? The meaning currently given to the old term “gender” suggests the latter, however much the word’s own roots (*gener*, *genus*), suggest the opposite. If we are *gendered*, we are so because we have been and are capable of the same, through *generosity*. The newer meaning of “gender” exists to put that into question, by rendering all the visible evidence—the “being from, with and for”—invisible. The

author of *The Flesh Made Word*, reviewed [here](#), makes this case in his analysis of the current changes in legal language which “makes legally impossible the physically possible” and “legally possible the physically impossible.”

We weigh in on this debate from a couple of different angles. One of our features offers an analysis of the “industrial complex” that exists to enforce the physically impossible across the culture (through its businesses, schools, and medical institutions). *Freedom Wars* by Gabriele Kuby also deals with the “top-down” nature of so much of the gender revolution. But the enforcement doesn’t stop at the front door of the family home. The recent book *To Whom Do Children Belong*, written by an expert on parents’ rights, lays out the incompatibility between the interventionist nature of the gender revolution and Catholic social teaching on the role of the parents as the first educators of their children. It is reviewed [here](#).

“Gender dysphoria” does, of course, exist. Two psychologists discuss this for us. One reviews a popular book, especially among Evangelicals. The other is the English psychotherapist, James Caspian, who provides this issue’s witness piece. Caspian was personally involved for decades in assessing requests for gender transitions coming from what were then rare cases of deep-seated dysphoria. Then, out of concern for his clients, he proposed to study the reasons for requests to de-transition and suddenly found himself a pariah in the transgender world.

Given all the many ways in which we can call into question the “nuptial body”—its orientation and its identity—we need, above all, a clear judgment on who and what we are as embodied creatures. For this reason, we are reprinting here a review of the two most significant books on the question of “identity”: *Building a Bridge*, by Fr. James Martin and *Why I don’t Call Myself Gay*, by Daniel Mattson. Henderson’s review appeared first in *Public Discourse*, where it drew significant attention, not only because of its incisiveness, but also because it challenged one of Fr. Martin’s key conservative dialogue partners, Robert George. George’s response to Henderson and Henderson’s to George are both included [here](#).

[1] Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. C. Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 5.

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# Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science

WITNESS

## Note of Caution: A Gender Therapist Asks Questions

JAMES CASPIAN

I am a psychotherapist who has worked extensively for more than a decade with transgendered people. I have been around people who were transitioning for much of my adult life, although when I was growing up during the 1960s in the north of England, they were still rather rare. There was at that time a loosely defined gay community in the area where I lived that included some people who were transitioning. I knew two people, a man and a woman, each of whom was transitioning in the opposite direction. Both desisted, interestingly enough. One of them lived for two years as male, taking hormones, then reverted to living as female.

I had undergone many years of psychotherapy before training in it myself. I originally trained at the National College of Hypnosis and Psychotherapy and had a very broad, very general training. My own therapist was trained in psycho-synthesis, and I became deeply interested in transpersonal therapies. I have done foundation training in Jungian analytical psychology, which informs my work today. Looking back, I think it was partly the spiritual side of things that attracted me. Ken Wilbur talks about how there are different levels of consciousness: every level knows its own level and those below, but knows nothing of the levels above.

It never crossed my mind that someday I would get involved in transgender counselling. But about 18 years ago a friend of mine asked me if I would become a trustee of the Beaumont Trust, a charity which came out of the Beaumont Society, established in the 1960s to support and educate the public about transsexuals and cross-dressers. Then, in my mid-40s, I studied for a degree in Chinese at the University of Westminster. For my research dissertation I chose to interview transgendered people across China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. No one else seemed to be doing research in this area of Chinese culture. As a result of this, I travelled to Hong Kong, thinking I might do an M.A. at the university, and while I was there I met a professor who was involved in transgender rights in Hong Kong. He invited me to present a paper presenting my research at the first conference to be held in Asia on the subject of gay and transgender rights, in Bangkok in 2004.

So my interest in psychotherapy came together with the research that began with my degree. I worked with a private gender clinic in London, which offered all services for transgendered people including psychotherapy. At the beginning, only about 20% of my clients were

transsexuals. By the end of my work there, 80% of them were (I also maintained a private practice outside of the gender field). I work with the person that's in front of me: I don't work the same way with everybody. With gender patients who are considering treatment, there are different things to consider. A mental health assessment was, at the time, recommended by public health guidelines before medical interventions could be carried out. Older research suggests that the median age for patients presenting at gender clinics for transition used to be around 41–42 years old, and largely natal males; these studies predate mass use of the internet.

However sometime around 2014, it became apparent that this was changing. Three years later the median age dropped, and where the majority of patients used to be natal men, by 2017 it was the other way around, and three times as many natal females who wanted to be men were coming forward. So it started with a greater proportion of middle-aged men, but by the end there was a greater proportion of very young women in their late teens and early twenties. In 2017 alone that curve went up dramatically and no research was being done into why this was happening.

The transgendered field is on the whole very under-researched. Very few clinicians or psychiatrists have chosen to become involved with it. Recent research has tended to be sociological rather than clinical: so there are lots of studies into how oppressed transgendered people feel, how discriminated against they are, studies about their sexuality. But virtually no research into the *clinical reasons* for wanting to transition. Clinics in the Netherlands and Belgium have all called for this research, but few people seem to be picking up on it.

Kenneth Zucker, a Canadian psychiatrist who ran a child and adolescent gender identity clinic in Toronto, has done more research into child and adolescent gender identity than anybody else. His clinic was shut down in 2015 because of pressure from political activists. He urged extreme caution in facilitating children to live in the opposite gender role. He advised parents to encourage children to remain in their original gender role, and only then move them forward into transition, should they persist in their cross-gender identification over a long period. His research, and that of others, shows that around 80% of children who are not put on puberty blockers, and who attend gender identity clinics, do not go on to transition: most are gay and go on to live gay lifestyles.

In the UK, at the Portman and Tavistock Child and Adolescent Gender Identity Clinic in London (the only NHS gender clinic for under-18s in the UK), about 12 years ago approximately 6 children a year were being referred. In the last year 2,300 were referred. The number has doubled every year over the last decade. I think it's important that we use facts and observation in developing our understanding of this phenomenon. We need research because we don't know why these hugely increased numbers are happening. Has mass use of the internet accelerated it? We need the research in order to find out what is going on. Just recently Penny Mordaunt, the UK Minister for Women and Equalities, has launched an *inquiry* into the huge surge in girls wanting to transition.

In 2014 I was having a drink with Miroslav Djordjevic, a professor of urology who also does gender reassignment surgery at the University of Belgrade School of Medicine in Serbia. He told me he had had several requests from male to female reassigned people to reverse their surgery. He said he thought that somebody needs to research why this is happening. In the past, studies suggested that the rate of regret among those who had transitioned was between one and five percent. The general attitude among people involved in the transgender world was that it was so low that it wasn't really important. But this was based upon old research from the '80s and '90s. My preliminary research suggested those percentages were massively

out of date.

So at the start of 2015 I enrolled for an MA in Counselling and Psychotherapy at Bath Spa University because I knew the bulk of the degree was a research project, and I wanted to research the reasons why people decide to de-transition and reverse their gender reassignment surgery. I put notices out on the internet: some people contacted me saying they were so traumatised by what had happened they didn't want to talk about it. I was also contacted by a group of young women in the US who had transitioned to the male gender, had double mastectomies, taken testosterone, etc. They then transitioned back, but they didn't reverse their surgery, they said they would just live with the scars rather than having implants. Under the parameters of my research project as originally specified, I couldn't include them in my research. So I went back to the university and said I want to include subjects who didn't have reconstructive surgery when they de-transitioned. I was told I had to resubmit my proposal, and then told at the end of 2016 that I couldn't do the study at all. They said that undertaking this research could result in criticism of the university. They wanted me to change my research proposal. I refused and lodged a complaint. In 2017 I took legal advice and began the process of taking the university to court.

This coincided with transgender issues looming even larger in the media, and also with public policy changes. The Equality Act affects people with protected characteristics—which includes those who are undergoing gender transition. But no one is completely sure who that applies to. So, for instance, the clothing retailer TopShop made their changing rooms unisex, because a man who was wearing women's clothing wanted to use the women's changing room, was refused and complained. Similarly with the Girl Guides: any boy living as a girl will now be housed in the girls' dorm. No one wants to be sued under the Equality Act.

It is now being proposed to change the Gender Recognition Act to legally recognise the *self-declaration of gender*, which would mean that sex and gender would become defined by what a person thinks and feels, and not by their body. In the UK, since 2004, in order to get a Gender Recognition Certificate allowing a person who has transitioned to change their birth certificate to their “acquired” gender, they have to have lived in that gender for at least two years. Two doctors have to vouch for them, and one of those must be on the Gender Recognition Panel's list of approved doctors—so in effect a gender clinician. We have a situation where policy and law are being made without a full understanding of what is going on. In addition, trans has become a rallying point for people who have a political agenda. This has a lot to do with the meeting of social justice theory and identity politics.

But from a clinical point of view, it is worrying: standards of care for treatment have been hugely liberalised in a move to make things easier for transgendered people. There's been pressure for many years to make it easier to transition. In the last Standards of Care issued by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health, which sets the international benchmark for treatment, the requirement for counselling before treatment was removed. These are not rules, they are simply recognised standards for the medical profession, but this shows how the idea has grown that it is oppressive for transgendered people to have to prove their need for treatment. The move is towards treatment on demand, particularly in the USA, where the “affirmation” approach to treatment is being embraced. Yet the only way you can have treatment on demand is if doctors abdicate their responsibility of care.

What the de-transitioning women I have spoken to are saying is that they felt they had been drawn into a “movement”. It was very exciting, it gave them a place to express themselves, and they were encouraged by their peer groups to have gender transition treatment, which was easy to get in America where the “affirmation” approach within clinics is quite usual. Then

they found that this didn't solve their problems. Many of them had had mental health issues, many had been sexually abused, they hated their bodies... They felt that their female identity had been compromised, but neither the ideological context in which these young women were living, nor the clinics they attended were able to address this.

I went into therapeutic work in order to help alleviate suffering. Clinicians, psychotherapists, doctors all work to alleviate suffering. When I first became a psychotherapist, there were a tiny number of people who had suffered so much and had struggled so long with how they felt about having to live out their gender, that they really felt the need to transition, physically, to the opposite one. But that's a very extreme solution. The psychological motivations and emotional reasons for people going to gender clinics are hugely varied and complex. For instance, research shows that there is a very high ratio of people on the autistic spectrum presenting with gender problems. Autistic people, of course, have problems with the issue of "role".

There are those who want to prove that gender is entirely neuro-biological, that gender identity resides completely in the brain, from birth. For instance, the Gender Identity Research and Education Society in the UK seeks to prove that this is the case. Therefore, there's nothing you can do about it: you can't be "cured" of it, it's part of you, a natural difference in someone's brain. You can't change the composition of the brain: so, in order to help a person with that kind of neuro-biological make-up, you change their body to match the brain. They are seeking to prove that gender identity is not a choice. I think that it's possible that neuro-biology plays a part for some of the patients I was seeing. But no one has proved this definitively, and in addition, there is clearly a large social and cultural element in what constitutes gender.[1]

These days, I have de-transitioning people contacting me on regular basis. I don't believe that one is "transphobic" for listening to them and giving them a voice. There is nothing to fear from talking to those who regret transitioning or are critical of it. We need to know the truth, and once we hear from a spectrum of people it's going to be a complex picture. The method I was going to use for my research is called phenomenological analysis. It means letting people speak for themselves. The researcher must stay out of the way. I simply wanted to give people a platform to be heard.

From a Jungian perspective, I think we need to understand how the collective unconscious comes into this. We need to get at the deep reasons why this political bandwagon has gathered so much momentum. We need to understand this "shadow" phenomenon where people who question are vilified and silenced, and people are afraid to say what they think. It comes up time and time again throughout human history. Why has gender now become such a political flash point? It has become impossible to have a critical discussion about it. Critical thinking is being confused with criticism, and criticism is being confused with attacking people. Maybe the "shadow" of liberalism is repression: we are not allowed to think, let alone speak, critically. Jung would say that some things come out of the collective unconscious, manifest, then subside again. In the meantime, we need to be circumspect with how we allow these manifestations to affect vulnerable individuals, and we need to allow people to talk, and to question.

[1] See Pfäfflin, F. "Atypical Gender Development: Why I did not sign the GIRES Review", *International Journal of Transgenderism* vol. 9, no.1: 49–52.

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# Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science

RE-SOURCE: CLASSIC  
TEXT

## "Look, a Body That Expresses the 'Person'!"

POPE SAINT JOHN PAUL II

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In this way, then, these two expressions, that is, the adjective “alone” and the noun “help,” seem truly to be the key for understanding the essence of the gift on the level of man, as the existential content inscribed in the truth of the “image of God.” In fact, the gift reveals, so to speak, *a particular characteristic of personal existence*, or even of the very essence of the person. When God-Yahweh says, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen 2:18), he affirms that, “alone,” the man does not completely realize this essence. He realizes it only by existing “*with someone*”—and, put even more deeply and completely, by existing “*for someone*.” This norm of existing as a person is demonstrated in Genesis as a characteristic of creation precisely by the meaning of these two words, “alone” and “help.” They point out how fundamental and constitutive the relationship and the communion of persons is for man. Communion of persons means living in a reciprocal “for,” in a relationship of reciprocal gift. And this relationship is precisely the fulfillment of “man’s” original solitude.

In its origin, such a fulfillment is beatifying. Undoubtedly, it is implicit in man’s original solitude, and precisely constitutes the happiness that belongs to the mystery of creation made by love, that is, it belongs to the very essence of creative giving. When the “male” man, awakened from his Genesis sleep, says “This time she is flesh from my flesh and bone from my bones” (Gen 2:23), these words in some way express the subjectively beatifying beginning of man’s existence in the world. Inasmuch as this [expression of joy] was verified at the “beginning,” it confirms the process of man’s individuation in the world, and is born, so to speak, from the very depth of his human solitude, which he lives as a person in the face of all other creatures and all living beings (*animalia*). This “beginning,” too, belongs thus to an adequate anthropology and can always be verified based on that anthropology. This purely anthropological verification brings us, at the same time, to the topic of the “person” and to the topic of “body/sex.”

This simultaneity is essential. In fact, if we dealt with sex without the person, this would destroy the whole adequacy of the anthropology that we find in Genesis. Moreover, for our theological study, it would veil the essential light of the revelation of the body, which shines through these first statements with such great fullness.

There is a strong link between the mystery of creation, as a gift that springs from Love, and that beatifying “beginning” of man’s existence as male and female, in the whole truth of their bodies and of their sexes, which is the simple and pure truth of communion between the persons. When the first man exclaims at the sight of the woman, “she is flesh from my flesh and bone from my bones” (Gen 2:23), he simply affirms the human identity of both. By exclaiming this, he seems to say, *Look, a body that expresses the “person”!* Following an earlier passage of the Yahwist text, one can also say that this “body” reveals the “living soul,” which man became when God-Yahweh breathed life into him (see Gen 2:7). His solitude before all other living beings began in virtue of this act. Exactly through the depth of that original solitude, man now emerges in the dimension of reciprocal gift, the expression of which—by that very fact the expression of his existence as a person—is the human body in all the original truth of its masculinity and femininity. The body, which expresses femininity “for” masculinity and, vice versa, masculinity “for” femininity, manifests the reciprocity and the communion of persons. It expresses it through gift as the fundamental characteristic of personal existence. This is *the body: a witness* to creation as a fundamental gift, and therefore a witness *to Love as the source from which this same giving springs*. Masculinity-femininity—namely, sex—is the original sign of a creative donation and at the same time the sign of a gift that man, male-female, becomes aware of as a gift lived so to speak in an original way. This is the meaning with which sex enters into the theology of the body.

This beatifying “beginning” of man’s being and existing as male and female is connected with the revelation and the discovery of the meaning of the body that is rightly called “spousal.” If we speak of revelation together with discovery, we do so in reference to the specificity of the Yahwist text, in which the theological guiding thread is also anthropological, or better still, appears as a certain reality that is consciously lived by man. We have already observed that after the words expressing the first joy of man’s coming into existence as “male and female” (Gen 2:23) there follows the verse that establishes their conjugal unity (Gen 2:24), and then the one that attests the nakedness of both without reciprocal shame (Gen 2:25). That these verses face each other in such a significant way allows us to speak *of revelation together with the discovery of the “spousal” meaning of the body in the mystery of creation*. This meaning (inasmuch as it is revealed and also consciously “lived” by man) completely confirms the fact that creative giving, which springs from Love, has reached man’s original consciousness by becoming an experience of reciprocal gift, as one can already see in the archaic text. A testimony to this fact seems also to be—perhaps even in a very specific way—that nakedness of both our first parents, free from shame.

*John Paul II served as Pope from 1978 to 2005. He was canonized in 2014.*

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