



# Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science



## Issue Three

# Man and Woman: A Text to be Interpreted

MARGUERITE A. PEETERS

---

*The following article is the entry on "Semantics" from the Dizionario su Sesso, Amore e Fecondità [Dictionary of Sex, Love and Fecundity], edited by J. Noriega and R and I. Ecochard (Siena: Cantagalli, 2019), 854–857. Translated by Veronica Brown.*

From its origins up to its present-day extensions, the sexual revolution has used language for subversive ends, in particular, to negate and deconstruct the reality-truth about man and woman, manipulate the masses, take power and transform societies. It is therefore closely tied to the semantic revolution that has separated words from their clear and universal content and makes language a space of free interpretation. The sexual revolution and the semantic revolution have gone hand in hand with the cultural revolution that has made the West slide towards postmodernism.

The “freedom to choose” is the lynchpin of the postmodern ethical system. It is acquired through a process of “liberation” from the norms of reason, of the voice of conscience, of true human love, of reality, of what is, so that the individual can “freely” determine himself, as if he were not bound by the natural and eternal law written on his heart, and as if he were the absolute master of his existence.

Language has been the tool of the postmodern negation or “deconstruction” (Derrida), the weapon against transcendental truths. Thus, for example, Richard Rorty reduces “truth” to the following concepts: “To say that truth is not out there is simply to say that where there are no statements there is no truth, that sentences are elements of human language, and that human languages are human creations.”<sup>[1]</sup> In order for the individual not to be bound by his or her word and be able to escape any moral or personal commitment at any time, postmoderns have broken the relationship between signifier and meaning, thus causing semantic slippages that they believe to be potentially “infinite.” Signifiers have become processes of perpetual change

and words have acquired meanings that are often conflicting or contradictory. Reality, having become a “text to be interpreted,” reduced to a “text,” is “liquified”. Let us remember the well-known phrase of Derrida: “There is nothing outside the text.”[2]

Postmodernity wants to be tolerant and celebrates the “diversity” of interpretations. In reality, it has triggered a cultural power struggle that takes place precisely from within language, and those who lead it seek to impose their ideological program on everyone. The will to not clearly define words, in order to allow the individual to choose his own interpretation at every moment, is strategic and manipulative.

Pursuing the same deconstructivist objectives of the sexual revolution, the semantic revolution has found a privileged field of application. Here, it has manifested itself in diverse and complex ways. Cut off from their universally human content, some words like love, freedom, equality, fraternity, compassion, dignity, happiness, choice, conscience, family, rights, have linked themselves to an individualistic and hedonistic perspective: their meaning has become irrevocably *ambivalent*. Beginning in the ‘60s, a plethora of new expressions have rapidly appeared as slogans or cultural norms, such as “free love,” “the right to choose,” “ownership of one’s body,” “wanted baby,” “liberation of woman,” “voluntary termination of a pregnancy.” Some words have replaced others in everyday language: reproduction (a term found in the vocabulary of Margaret Sanger, foundress of the *International Planned Parenthood Federation*) for procreation, *gender* for sex, partner for spouse, “couples and individuals” or “families” for family, contract or equality for complementarity, for example. Lastly, certain terms like truth, obedience, virginity, purity, chastity, continence, fidelity, reason, heart, law, authority, have been marginalized or even banished by the new semantic system.

With *gender*, the semantic revolution has passed from the freedom to choose one’s own interpretation of words to that of choosing, *through language*, one’s “gender” and sexual orientation. Judith Butler, leader of the *gender* theorists, takes up John Langshaw Austin’s concept of *performative utterances* to affirm that gender is not what one *is* but what one *says* and *does*: “Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed.”[3] More than thirty years prior, John Money had already defined gender roles as “all those things that a person says or does to disclose himself or herself as having the status of boy or man, girl or woman.”[4]

From the deconstruction of God’s design on man and woman through language, revolutionaries have moved on to the reconstruction of human identity through performative language. They have given themselves the illusion of being able to recreate themselves *ex nihilo* by their word. Their efforts obviously bring them only to what David Halperin rightly defined as “an identity without an essence.”[5]

It is with his word that God creates-draws out of nothing: “God said: ‘Let there be light!’ And there was light” (Gen 1:3). The performative language takes up again the biblical Hebrew *dāvār*, that expresses the word in act, that is act and the word at the same time. The *dāvār* of God is final, efficacious, and fecund: the word of God always does what it says. Saint John, in the prologue to his gospel, tells us that the Word through which “all things were made” is the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, the Christ. It makes us understand the christic and filial

dimension of the logos. The devil, on the other hand, cannot create anything by himself. He can only negate and try to destroy what is. His use of language is negatory and deceitful. The semantic revolution, in particular in the present aspect of *gender*, manifests the anti-son who sets himself up as God, the anti-Logos, the anti-Christ.

In the years following the fall of the Berlin wall, a *new world language*, made up of thousands of expressions, was imposed during the period that saw the organization of important international conferences of the United Nations, whose purpose was to establish the standards of international cooperation in the 21st century. We can cite, by way of example, expressions like: sustainable development, good governance, quality of life for everyone, cultural diversity, partnership, awareness-raising campaigns, participatory democracy, best practices, indicators of progress. This semantic system is already globalized all the way to the local level but is very scarcely recognized as such. The analysis shows its link with postmodern ethics, which appears in particular in the deliberate and strategic absence of a clear definition of its components—their “liquid” nature.

Many of the expressions of the new language transform the goals of the Western sexual revolution into global political norms. Let us think, for example, of the gender perspective, sexual and reproductive health, reproductive rights, the equality of the sexes, comprehensive sexual education, the full range of contraceptives, services protected by confidentiality, safe abortion, universal access... Reproductive health is a typical example of the manipulative character of the new global semantic system. Since its adoption at the Cairo conference of 1994, this paradigm, whose signifier suggests the opposite of what it wants to implement, has deceived governments and peoples in developing countries. Its real agenda includes the universal access to modern contraceptives, safe abortions, and a purely technical and morally perverse sexual education.

Global governance has taken on a normative character with which peoples and governments have largely aligned themselves since the end of the Cold War. Thus the cultural impact, already immeasurable in the West, of a deconstructivist semantic and sexual revolution is spreading to the ends of the earth. The extent and depth of these phenomena are still far from clear.

*Marguerite A. Peeters directs Dialogue Dynamics, a Brussels-based institute specializing in the analysis of political and cultural developments at the level of global governance. She has authored several books on the globalization of the Western cultural revolution, the gender revolution and postmodernity. She is a consultant for the Pontifical Council for Culture.*

[1] Richard Rorty, “The contingency of language,” *London Review of Books* 8, no. 7 (17 April 1986): 3–6.

[2] Jacques Derrida, *De la Grammatologie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1967).

[3] Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 519–31, at 527.

[4] John Money, "Hermaphroditism, Gender and Precocity in Hyperadrenocorticism: Psychologic Findings," *Bull Johns Hopkins Hospital* 96, no. 6 (June 1955): 253–64.

[5] David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 62.

*Bibliography:*

Austin, J.L. *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

Pontificio Consiglio per la Famiglia. *Lexicon. Termini ambigui e discussi su famiglia, vita e questioni etiche* (2002).

Searle, John. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

———. "How Performances Work," *Linguistics and Philosophy* 12 (October, 1989): 553–58.

---

[www.humanumreview.com](http://www.humanumreview.com)