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# Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science

BOOK REVIEW

## Issue One

### A (Friendly) Critique of Helen Joyce's "Trans." Why Radical Feminists Have to Go Further

MARGARET HARPER MCCARTHY

**Helen Joyce**, *Trans: When Ideology Meets Reality* (Oneworld Publications, 2022).

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The best thing about the latest battle in the culture war is that we are now talking about *being*. We have moved from what we should *do* with sex (and its fruit), to *which* sex to do it with ("orientation"), finally to what sex we *are*, if any at all.

With our being now thrown into question it is not surprising that some of the opponents to the latest wave of the sexual revolution find themselves allied for the first time with opponents to its previous waves. There is too much at stake, and no less so for radical feminists: when the *embodied* category of "woman" has been exchanged for the *professed* one, there's no time to worry about being on the same side as the likes of Donald Trump and the Alliance Defending Freedom. Too much energy was spent securing athletic opportunities for *actual* women and attending to their unique vulnerabilities. But now, after all that, these women are to forfeit their gold medals to men and live with them in their shelters and prisons (which, for the first time, are experiencing influxes of "female" sex offenders).

Then there are those dreaded sex stereotypes feminists had fought so hard to put to rest. After finally establishing that girls were people with female bodies who can do whatever they want, now they must be "boys" if they like to wear cargo pants and climb trees. It is enough to put a feminist in the fetal position!

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These are the attitudes that describe the author of the recently-published best-seller on transgender ideology, *Trans: When Ideology Meets Reality*. If you want to read one book on the now near universally accepted view that “people should count as men or women according to how they feel and what they declare, instead of their biology,” this is the one. *Trans* is a tour-de-force, taking the reader through the recent history and current state of transgenderism: from the first “sex changes” (the “Danish girl”), the sexologists who made them possible (Hirschfeld, Benjamin, Money, et al.), to the development of gender ideology, the mechanisms of its influence among staggering numbers of young people, especially girls, and its deleterious effects on girls and women, especially in the sports arena and in prison (since no “transgender men” are requesting membership on *male* teams, or transfers to *male* prisons). You will also be brought up to date on the current legal landscape of “gender” in the UK and the US, up to *Bell v. Tavistock* (2020) and *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020), respectively.

The book's author, Helen Joyce, is a “gender critical” feminist or, pejoratively, a “TERF” (trans-exclusionary radical feminist). Joyce is more than this, though, and not only because she has a PhD in mathematics and is an editor at *The Economist*. She is a mother, too, and genuinely worried about the massive science experiment being carried out on the next generation (in most cases irreversibly) by the medical and psychological establishments that appear to be in a trance, captive to trans-activists. She is also a truth seeker and thinks that the worst thing—if there can be anything worse than a society rolling its children up to the hospital to get their healthy body parts replaced as though they were going to an auto body shop—is that society has lost its mind, paying lip service to “magical” identities, against all evidence to the contrary.

Joyce does much to restore our collective sanity in her book. And she is merciless in doing so. The predictable reference of trans apologists to clownfish who change sex in order to reproduce is met with a swift rejoinder: we aren't fish, and when we change sex, we become infertile. As for the common appeal to disorders of sexual development (“inter-sex”) to “argue” that the sexes for mammals are not two, distinct, and correlative, Joyce dismisses it with a single stroke: anomalous development of reproductive organs in one person doesn't change the nature of the sex distinction any more than the absence of legs in one human being changes the nature of the human being as an upright animal.

Ultimately, for Joyce, all of the ruinous wide-spread consequences of transgender ideology stem from our deviation from biological facts, namely the appearance of sexual dimorphism 1.2 billion years ago—a phenomenon that is fixed in mammals (not in clownfish) and is the only one by which mammals, and therefore humans, “survive.” Given the solidity of those facts, Joyce argues, one might well *feel* like the other sex; but that doesn't make one to *be* the other sex.

Joyce is for *being*, not feeling, as she puts it. On the face of it that's a good choice. But there's a problem and it's not a minor one. For her, *what* we are—our being—means and demands very little when it comes to what we do with ourselves. Much of Joyce's objection to the current gender ideology is that it is “sexist” and “homophobic,” committing us to “stereotypes,” at the level of interests, habits of dress, etc. but also at the level of sexual inclination and behavior—“heterosexuality,” which is now also a “stereotype.” Joyce shows us convincingly that indeed a great number of women who think of themselves as men, are probably just

women with less conventional interests and that many of the men who now think of themselves as women are probably just men with same-sex attraction (our word). Joyce is, of course, right to say that liking cargo pants doesn't make a girl a boy nor does feeling attraction for the same sex make one a member of the opposite sex. But it doesn't follow that the two sexes should be able to "behave however they damn well please" (as Joyce puts it).

What can she mean when she defines the *being* of the sexes as "classes of organisms defined by the developmental pathways that evolved to produce gametes: eggs and sperm" and then advocates for homosexuality, same-sex "marriage," cheap contraception, abortion, and the feminist "girl project," all of which undermine the finality of those pathways: bringing men and women together in the kind of union adequate to their potential as mothers and fathers? In the end, Joyce's argument for the *being* of the sex distinction is too thin. But then so is the biology to which she is committed; however unwittingly; the biology which, as it happens, is currently hard at work *overcoming* the need for the sex distinction for reproduction.

One might reasonably ask: if, sexual dimorphism is only a "biological fact"—however many millions of years it has been so—a "fact" that can now be substituted by other means of "survival," and if the sexual ordering of man to woman and vice versa is *not* natural (but only one of several, equally valid "orientations") what is left to the *being* of a man and a woman? Why is *that* so sacrosanct? In the end, to be *for* the *being* of the sexual distinction, one must see that sex identifies something essential to human existence and affirm it *in its entirety*—in being and action.

Fortunately, though, no one is entirely defined by his or her ideology, nor consistent with it, especially when one is a truth seeker and invested in the future, as Joyce is. Thus, notwithstanding her commitments, it is striking to read the following:

As embodied creatures, we are connected by ties that have deep evolutionary significance. The categories of man and woman underpin those of father and mother, and the relationship of each to their children. If such categories are to become a matter of self-declaration, then those ties must be dissolved. Families become meaningless and individuals create themselves.

If it was feminism's hatred of the family, motherhood, fatherhood, and the dependency of birth, that put us on the trajectory towards the elimination of the sex distinction, it seems right that a mother from among its ranks, bring us back to those very things.

*Margaret Harper McCarthy is an Assistant Professor of Theology at the John Paul II Institute and the editor of Humanum. She is married and a mother of three.*

