

The Philosophy of Transgenderism: A Christian Evaluation and Response

MIKE MOSES

Western culture has come into what has been called a “transgender moment.”¹ For many, the tipping point of this moment arrived June 1, 2015, when Bruce Jenner declared himself to be a woman named Caitlyn. Jenner was hardly the first to make such a declaration, but he was perhaps the most famous American yet to do so. Jenner had become a celebrity for accomplishing a distinctly masculine feat: winning the 1976 Olympic decathlon in record-breaking style. Yet thirty-nine years later, he identified as a woman, claiming: “I’m so happy after such a long struggle to be living my true self.”² Mainstream Hollywood culture immediately embraced this move, as *Vanity Fair*’s cover featured Jenner in a dress, and *Glamour* named him Woman of the Year.

“Caitlyn” Jenner’s declaration was followed by a tidal wave of transgender-related headlines.³ Controversy surrounded men’s and women’s restrooms in early 2016, as several organizations invited people to use the restroom of their gender identity rather than their birth sex. When the state of North Carolina resisted, the NCAA responded by removing national basketball tournament games from the state. Later in 2016, the Obama administration’s departments of Justice and Education teamed up to encourage schools to allow transgender students to use the restrooms and locker rooms of their choice. Increasingly, elementary-age students are taught about gender identity and invited to consider the possibility that their sex and gender

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

2. Quoted in Alan Branch, *Affirming God’s Image: Addressing the Transgender Question with Science and Scripture* (Bellington, Wash.: Lexham Press, 2019), 1.

3. Branch, *Affirming God’s Image*, 3.

do not match. Those who indicate a transgender identity may receive puberty blockers at a young age, followed by hormone treatments. On fields and in arenas, transgender athletes have begun dominating women's sports. In early 2017, Texas girl Mack Beggs won the state wrestling title while taking male hormones, to the applause of some and the outrage of others. In 2020, a landmark ruling by the United States Supreme Court applied the 1964 Civil Rights Act to transgender individuals.⁴

Examples of trans-related controversies could be multiplied, but ultimately the transgender conversation is not just about issues but about people. Even by conservative estimates, there are hundreds of thousands of people in our world today who identify as transgender.⁵ What is the reasoning, if any, behind the denial of one's own birth sex? Though many who identify as transgender cannot express their feelings and experiences in philosophical terms, the statements and reasonings of transgender activists reveal an underlying philosophy of humanity. This article will evaluate the philosophy of transgenderism and compare it to biblical anthropology. It will demonstrate that the philosophy of transgenderism, in the stream of antiteleology, contains body-demeaning metaphysics, subjective epistemology, harmful ethics, and a plethora of logical contradictions. A biblical philosophy of gender is grounded in reality and leads to a true hope.

Understanding Transgenderism

Before evaluating the philosophy of transgenderism, key concepts and background information must be understood.

Definitions and Clarifications

The American Psychological Association defines *transgender* as “an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression, or behavior does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth.”⁶ Typically this is seen in a

4. *Bostock v. Clayton County*.

5. Branch, *Affirming God's Image*, 21.

6. “Answers to Your Questions about Transgender People, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression,” *American Psychological Association*, 2014, www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/transgender (accessed November 1, 2020). Note the nonsensical phrase “sex assigned at birth,” implying that sex is assigned by the attending physician rather than evident in the newborn's biology.

male transitioning to female identity and expression, or vice versa. A transgender person who transitions his or her body through medical interventions is transsexual.⁷ Some who do not transition their bodies may still express their gender through cross-dressing (though not all transvestites identify as transgender).⁸ Some would not identify as either male or female but as nonbinary or genderqueer, rejecting the “gender binary.”⁹

This paper is not about intersex, a rare “range of disorders of sex development (DSDs) where there is some biological ambiguity in a person’s genitals or gonads, or more rarely still, their chromosomes.”¹⁰ Though transgenderism activists often point to DSDs to refute the “gender binary,”¹¹ intersex is “an objective diagnosis based on clearly defined and observable criteria, while transgenderism is based on a person’s subjective testimony of their psychological experience.”¹² Very few people born with a DSD identify as transgender or nonbinary,¹³ and most do not wish to be represented by the trans agenda.¹⁴ Nor is this article about gender dysphoria, the “distress experienced by those whose psychological or emotional gender identity differs from their biological sex.”¹⁵ There are various reasons why people may find themselves in this psychological state, but many who experience gender dysphoria are not interested in advancing an agenda.¹⁶

7. Branch, *Affirming God’s Image*, 24.

8. Branch, *Affirming God’s Image*, 24.

9. Branch, *Affirming God’s Image*, 28.

10. Robert S. Smith, “Responding to the Transgender Revolution,” *Christ on Campus Initiative*, 2017, www.christoncampuscci.org/responding-to-the-transgender-revolution/ (accessed November 1, 2020).

11. Using intersex to argue against the gender binary is an example of the is-ought argument, which David Hume exposed as fallacious. See John Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2015), 203.

12. Branch, *Affirming God’s Image*, 43.

13. Vaughan Roberts, *Transgender* (London, U.K.: The Good Book Company, 2016), 15.

14. Smith places non-fertile intersex in the first category of “eunuch” mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 19:12. Smith, “Responding to the Transgender Revolution.”

15. Smith, “Responding to the Transgender Revolution.”

16. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, Introduction.

This article is about transgender ideology, and the underlying philosophy of transgenderism. It is not mainly about those who *feel* like a woman trapped in a man's body (or vice versa), but about the "experts" who tell those individuals: "You *are* a woman trapped in a man's body." One difficulty in addressing the philosophy of transgenderism is expressed by Ryan T. Anderson in his book *When Harry Became Sally*: "The thinking of transgender activists is inherently confused and filled with internal contradictions. Activists never acknowledge those contradictions, but opportunistically rely on whichever claim is useful at any given moment.... The claims of transgender activists are confusing because they are philosophically incoherent."¹⁷

Another difficulty in approaching this topic is that some would deny a unified philosophical approach among transgenderism activists. Trans philosopher Sophie-Grace Chappell criticizes "abstract overgeneralizations" of "the untidy complexity of actual human experience."¹⁸ However, there are a great number of common themes and arguments employed by transgenderism which reveal a general underlying philosophy.¹⁹

A foundational axiom of transgenderism is the historically recent distinction between sex and gender. The American Psychological Association provides these oft-cited definitions:

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

17. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, ch. 2.

18. Sophie-Grace Chappell notes distinctions in the experience of transgender people in the areas of journey, wants, scope, intensity, and assurance. Sophie-Grace Chappell, "Transgender: A Dialogue," *Aeon*, November 15, 2008), <https://aeon.co/essays/transgender-identities-a-conversation-between-two-philosophers> (accessed November 1, 2020).

19. Efforts such as the Trans Philosophy Project (transphilproject.wordpress.com) seek to advance the philosophical credibility of transgenderism. Talia Mae Bettcher is a leading trans philosopher; Amy Marvin lists several others: Andrea Pitts, Perry Zurn, Grayson Hunt, Robin Dembroff, Ash Williams, Rachel McKinnon, Ephraim Das Janssen, Mel Chen, Yannik Thiem, Eli Clare, Tamsin Kimoto, Natalie Wynn, and Alyson Escalante.

themselves. While aspects of biological sex are similar across different cultures, aspects of gender may differ.²⁰

Putting it simply, *sex* refers to male and female while *gender* refers to masculine and feminine. Sex is seen as objective, a biological fact, while gender is portrayed as subjective, a psychological feeling. Though we must make this distinction for the purpose of analyzing our subject matter, we will see later that, biblically speaking, sex and gender are never separated. Albert Mohler correctly notes that “the distinction between sex and gender is not just a matter of linguistic choice—it is essential to the worldview of the transgender movement.”²¹ This false distinction has led to the recently coined term *cisgender*, referring to those whose birth sex and gender identity correspond.²² This loaded term implies that a sex/gender match, though common, should not be taken as normative. This is one of many examples of language playing a key role in transgender ideology.

Historical Development

Though the “transgender moment” of Western culture is new, transgenderism has existed in various forms since ancient times. In the early church era, male priests of the goddess Cybele would ceremonially mutilate their genitals, then dress in female garments, hair, perfumes, and makeup. The symbolism was clear, according to historian Robert Turcan: they “consecrated themselves to Cybele by sacrificing their manhood to her.”²³

In modern times, Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935) was a pioneer of transgender ideology. He saw gender not as binary but as a spectrum; the human person as “not man *or* woman, but rather man *and* woman.”²⁴ Hirschfeld “once calculated there were 43,046,721 possible

20. “Answers to Your Questions about Transgender People, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression.”

21. Albert Mohler, *We Cannot Be Silent: Speaking Truth to a Culture Redefining Sex, Marriage, and the Very Meaning of Right and Wrong* (Nashville, Tenn.: Nelson Books, 2015), 71.

22. *Cisgender* was devised by Volkmar Sigusch, an activist who argued in 1998 for “dismantling the old patterns of sexuality and reassembling them anew.” Volkmar Sigusch, “The Neosexual Revolution,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 27, no. 4 (1998), 331.

23. Robert Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992), 49.

24. Quoted in Branch, *Affirming God’s Image*, 9.

combinations of sexual characteristics, then indicated that the number was probably too small.”²⁵ An acquaintance of Hirschfeld, Harry Benjamin (1885–1986), authored the influential book *The Transsexual Phenomenon*. In it, he rejected any form of “conversion therapy” for transgender persons as useless and impossible.²⁶ Benjamin later advocated for “sex change” surgery: “If [the transsexual] cannot alter the conviction to fit the body, should he not, in certain circumstances, alter the body to fit the conviction?”²⁷

The sexual revolution of the late 1960s undoubtedly prepared the way, morally, for today’s “transgender moment.” This revolution “saw Christian sexual ethics as repressive and the imposition of a false and constraining morality that impeded human freedom...an idea that now pervades America. Seen in this light, transgenderism is the ultimate rejection of Judeo-Christian sexual ethics.”²⁸ Second-wave feminism also arose around this time, and though transgenderism and feminism “don’t have the same objectives and are sometimes at odds,”²⁹

25. Quoted in Branch, *Affirming God’s Image*, 9.

26. Harry Benjamin, *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (New York: Julian Press, 1966), 91.

27. Quoted in Branch, *Affirming God’s Image*, 13.

28. Quoted in Branch, *Affirming God’s Image*, 17.

29. Feminists who don’t fully accept transgenderism are known as Gender-critical philosophers, or (derogatorily) labeled “TERFs” (trans-exclusionary radical feminists). *Harry Potter* author J. K. Rowling is a notable “TERF.” Holly Lawford-Smith summarizes the disagreements between Gender-critical and transgenderist philosophers:

Gender-critical feminist philosophers oppose a policy of self-identification alone, oppose the inclusion of male people in women’s sports, oppose the inclusion of male people in women’s single-sex spaces or services (such as changing rooms and domestic-violence or rape shelters), and oppose open access to women’s single-sex provisions (such as women’s prizes or award shortlists). They are concerned with the impacts of the wider “gender-identity” narrative upon children and young people, and on gay and lesbian youth, particularly as it displaces the idea of gender as a set of harmful norms, imposed on the basis of sex. They urge caution in regard to policies that demand immediate “affirmation” in regard to trans-identified children. They deny that sex is socially constructed, and they make a sex/gender distinction. Such feminists generally use “man” and “woman” as terms relating to sex, not gender, and contest the idea that “transwomen are women” in the simple, sloganeering way that has become popular. They also are skeptical about the idea of a “gender identity” that apparently exists in the same way that many religious people have thought that souls

they have drawn inspiration from each other in problematizing gender and detaching it from biology.”³⁰

The Antiteleological Philosophical Forerunners of Transgenderism

Though transgenderism activists may not claim them as influences, there have been key philosophical developments that paved the way for modern ideologies such as transgenderism. Each of these developments pushed philosophical thought in an antiteleological direction, away from a divine designer.

Modernism and Postmodernism

In her timely book, *Love Thy Body*, Nancy Pearcey argues that “all of modern philosophy has divided into two major streams,” two distinct but sometimes related philosophical worlds.³¹ One stream, sparked by the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment, sees the *fact* realm as the primary reality and encompasses philosophies such as empiricism, rationalism, materialism, naturalism, and modernism. The other stream, powered by the Romantic movement, sees the *value* realm as the primary reality, emphasizes justice and meaning, and encompasses philosophies such as idealism, Marxism, existentialism, and postmodernism. Transgenderism draws from both of these philosophical streams, embracing some modernist facts and some postmodernist values.³² We should not be surprised, then, that transgenderism has disconnected sex (fact) and gender (value).³³

Hegelian Evolution

Georg Hegel (1770–1831), an idealist pantheist, rocked the philosophical world with his “historicist” dialectic approach. Knowledge

exist. Holly Lawford-Smith, “How the Trans-Rights Movement Is Turning Philosophers Into Activists,” *Quillette*, September 20, 2019, <https://quillette.com/2019/09/20/how-the-trans-rights-movement-is-turning-academic-philosophers-into-sloganeering-activists/> (accessed November 1, 2020).

30. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, ch. 7.

31. Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions About Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2018), 13.

32. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 31.

33. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 202.

evolves through trial and error: a *thesis* is contradicted by an *antithesis*, eventually resulting in a higher *synthesis* which combines the best features of both. This synthesis in turn becomes the new thesis, and the process continues. Hegel saw this process as the means by which the “Universal Mind” evolves and actualizes over time.³⁴ His dialectic replaced the thesis *being* with the synthesis *becoming*,³⁵ meaning that all ideas are evolving: law, morality, religion, art, philosophy, and politics. But if everything is evolving, then Nietzsche is correct in stating that “there are no eternal facts, as there are no absolute truths.”³⁶

The Hegelian dialectic prepared the way for the understanding that one’s gender identity may not only differ from one’s birth sex, but may also change over the course of a lifetime.³⁷ An author in the *Utne Reader* writes of “pomosexuality”:³⁸ “We’re seeing a challenge to the old, modernist way of thinking ‘This is who I am, period’ and a movement toward a postmodern version, ‘This is who I am right now.’”³⁹ But this philosophy is an unsteady foundation, for, as John Frame observes, “Hegel’s dialectic implies that whenever we think we have knowledge, we can expect that knowledge to be negated...so we never know for sure when we have truth.”⁴⁰

Darwinian Evolution

After Hegel theorized about the evolution of ideas, Charles Darwin (1809–1882) theorized about the evolution of species. Though Darwin is known as a naturalist and biologist, philosophical convictions drove his research. Pearcey writes: “Darwin could not deny that

34. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 205.

35. The influence of Hegelian evolution can be seen in panentheist Process Theology, which envisions a god who changes along with the universe (Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 439–48). Process philosopher/theologian Christina Hutchins applies Hegel to transgenderism: “Congregations in ‘open and affirming’ processes seem to display a spiritual vitality, a sense of church not as *being*, not as fixed, but as *becoming*. Perhaps there is a burst of energy when we release ourselves from the hegemonic illusions of simplicity and order that accompany a metaphysics of substance.” Christina Hutchins, “Holy Ferment: Queer Philosophical Destabilizations and the Discourse on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Lives in Christian Institutions,” *Theology & Sexuality* 15 (2001), 21–22.

36. Quoted in Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 205.

37. Quoted in Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 203.

38. The word is formed by combining *Postmodern* and *sexuality*.

39. Quoted in Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 202.

40. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 277.

nature appears to be designed. But having embraced the philosophy of materialism, he wanted to reduce that appearance to an illusion. He hoped to show that although living structures *seem* to be teleological, in reality they are the result of blind, undirected forces.”⁴¹ If the human body has evolved purposelessly, apart from a Creator, then human minds are free to manipulate their “clumps of matter” to “serve the human agenda, like any other natural resource.”⁴²

Without a purposeful Designer, we cannot even speak of a human nature, so Foucault and Butler argued against moral ideals and Sartre stated that “Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself.”⁴³ Without an unchanging Creator God to whom we are accountable, modern man is left to create his own reality, and may live as if his gender identity need not match his physical sex. Darwin’s naturalism is not only existentially depressing but also philosophically and scientifically deficient. J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig write: “The field of origin of human life studies is in turmoil, as all the old scenarios of the chemical origin of life in the primordial soup have collapsed, and no new, better theory is on the horizon.”⁴⁴ This has reopened the door for many philosophers to re-consider the existence of a God who designed the universe and human life.

The Body-Demeaning Metaphysics of Transgenderism

Metaphysics is “the philosophical study of the nature of being or reality.”⁴⁵ The primary mantras of transgenderism activists are metaphysical claims which ultimately demean the human body. Anderson writes:

People say that we live in a postmodern age that has rejected metaphysics. That’s not quite true. We live in a postmodern age that promotes an alternative metaphysic. At the heart of the transgender moment are radical ideas about the human person—in particular, that people *are* what they claim to be, regardless of contrary evidence. A transgender boy *is* a boy, not merely a girl who *identifies as* a boy.... The rhetoric of the transgender

41. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 23.

42. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 24.

43. Quoted in Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 206.

44. J. P. Moreland and William L. Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2017), 493.

45. Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 159.

moment drips with ontological assertions: people *are* the gender they prefer to be. That's the claim. Transgender activists don't admit that this is a metaphysical claim. They don't want to have the debate on the level of philosophy, so they dress it up as a scientific and medical claim.⁴⁶

Anti-Science

For being such a “progressive” movement, transgenderism is appallingly opposed to biological science. This is particularly seen in the treatments and surgeries meant to “change” one's sex to match their gender identity. Princeton philosopher Robert George correctly notes that “changing sexes is a metaphysical impossibility because it is a biological impossibility.”⁴⁷ Surgeries altering male or female genitalia are merely cosmetic mutilations: “An MtF [male-to-female transsexual] will never ovulate, menstruate, become pregnant, give birth, or nurse a child. An FtM [female-to-male transsexual] will not have a prostate, will never produce sperm, will never father a child.”⁴⁸ Furthermore, bodies are male or female beyond their reproductive organs. Around 27.2 trillion cells in the body (over 70% of total cells) contain either XY or XX chromosomes, and “sex change” surgeries cannot change that scientific fact. Moreover, there are distinct differences in average male and female height, weight, and strength. Male and female brains are “wired” differently, and there are notable differences in vision and hearing.⁴⁹ Sex “reassignment” surgery can change none of this, and hormone therapy cannot alter the presence or absence of the Y chromosome at the molecular level.

Not only are these surgeries anti-biological science, they also appear to be anti-psychological science. Paul McHugh, former psychiatrist-in-chief at Johns Hopkins Hospital, stopped doing sex-reassignment surgeries when he found that patients' “subsequent psycho-social adjustments were no better than those who didn't have the surgery.” Recognizing the medical axiom “Do no harm,” McHugh concluded that “producing a ‘satisfied’ but still troubled patient seemed an inadequate reason for surgically amputating normal

46. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, ch. 2.

47. Quoted in Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, ch. 5.

48. Branch, *Affirming God's Image*, 102.

49. Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2018), 871–72.

organs,” and that psychological treatment is a better course of action. The fact is, sex-change surgery is not harmless. It stunts growth, causes infertility, and appears likely to cause other physical challenges such as heart disease and cancer.⁵⁰ “Perfectly healthy and functioning urological and reproductive organs are destroyed, removed, and irreversibly transformed and damaged.”⁵¹ This is profoundly anti-science, and results in deep regret for many who later “detransition” but are literally scarred for life.⁵²

Mind-Body Disconnect

Why would transgenderism advocate such damage to the body? At the heart of transgenderist metaphysics is a severe disconnect between mind and body. A number of ancient philosophies “disparaged the material world as the realm of death, decay and destruction,”⁵³ including Manichaeism and Platonism, but the most notorious of these was Gnosticism. Numerous Christian commentators have noted the similarity between Gnosticism and transgenderism:

- Alan Branch: “The ancient heresy of Gnosticism argued the soul was good because it was spiritual, but the body is evil because it is matter. In such systems, the body is somewhat likened to a cage that constrains a good spirit. In this way, the modern claims that ‘I am a man *trapped* in a woman’s body’ or ‘I am a woman *trapped* in a man’s body’ have strong Gnostic overtones.”⁵⁴
- Andrew Walker: “Gnosticism says that there is an inherent tension between our true selves and the bodies we inhabit. The idea that our true self is different than the body we live in communicates that our body is something less than us, and can be used, shaped, and changed to match how we feel.”⁵⁵
- Oliver O’Donovan: “If I claim to have a ‘real sex,’ which may be at war with the sex of my body and is at least in a rather

50. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, ch. 6.

51. Branch, *Affirming God’s Image*, 106.

52. See, e.g., Walt Heyer, *Trans Life Survivors* (self-published, 2018).

53. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 35.

54. Branch, *Affirming God’s Image*, 108.

55. Andrew Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate* (London, U.K.: The Good Book Company, 2017), ch. 2.

uncertain relationship to it, I am shrinking from the glad acceptance of myself as a physical as well as a spiritual being, and seeking self-knowledge in a kind of Gnostic withdrawal from material creation”⁵⁶

Contrary to the Christian view that “the human being is an embodied soul,” body and soul forming an “integrated unity,”⁵⁷ the transgenderist worldview is “a profoundly fragmenting dualism that separates body and person.”⁵⁸ An example of this fragmentation is seen in the “Gender Unicorn” student resource, which illustrates five dimensions of gender and sexuality: gender identity, gender expression, sex “assigned at birth,” physical attraction, and emotional attraction. Pearcey observes that this colorful graphic, created for children, expresses “the message that a human being is composed of disparate bits and pieces.”⁵⁹

The essence of transgenderist metaphysics is to see the body as incidental and the inner being as the true self. But this view is unsustainable and does not correspond to reality. Again, Anderson exposes the philosophical conundrum:

If the real me is something other than my body.... What exactly is this real me, the conscious self that is distinct from the body? What is it sensing when it has an ‘internal sense of gender’? What does it mean for the inner self to have a ‘gender identity’? What do transgender activists actually mean when they claim that people who identify as the opposite sex really *are* the opposite sex?... There’s nothing really *there* for a person who identifies as transgender to latch on to.⁶⁰

56. Oliver O’Donovan, “Transsexualism and Christian Marriage,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 11, no. 1 (1983): 147.

57. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 21.

58. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 18. Scott Bader-Saye protests: “To make the body the lone arbiter of gender—is no less a bifurcation of body and soul.... Transitioning the body is not best seen as Gnosticism but rather as a mending of the self that allows for human participation in God’s redemption of the whole person” (“The Transgender Body’s Grace.” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 39, no. 1 [Spring–Summer 2019]: 89–90). Bader-Saye’s argument, however, ignores the fact that transsexuals are not actually biologically transitioned and do not tend to feel “mended” after sex-change surgery, as explained in the previous section of this paper.

59. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 208.

60. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, ch. 5.

The Christian view is far more coherent: “Our souls, while embodied, are somehow and in some respects dependent on our bodily states as a physical grounding for consciousness and as a means of perceiving reality outside ourselves.”⁶¹

The Subjectivist Epistemology of Transgenderism

Epistemology “is the branch of philosophy that tries to make sense out of knowledge, rationality, and justified or unjustified beliefs.”⁶² Transgenderist epistemology is characterized by an extreme subjectivity, going so far as to say that the *feeling* that you are something *makes* you that something.⁶³

Existentialism

The subjective nature of transgenderism naturally flows from philosophical existentialism. Robert Smith explains:

The older understanding (which we might label *biological essentialism*) claims that a person’s gender is determined by the objective fact of their biological sex. Where there is a felt ‘mismatch,’ then subjectivity should be helped to yield to objectivity. The newer understanding (which we might label *psychological existentialism*) claims that the objective facts of biology do not determine gender identity. In fact, all objectivity should give way to a person’s own subjective perception of their gender.⁶⁴

Jean-Paul Sartre, who popularized an atheistic version of existentialism, wrote that “man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself...and he himself will have made what he will be.” Tom Gilson follows up:

It took today’s transgender movement really to bring his doctrine to life. For what is this movement about, but trans persons’ declaration that they have no human nature or essence but what

61. Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 516.

62. Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 61.

63. “We should think harder about making a transgender identity only a matter of what one subjectively feels is true about oneself right now.” Kathleen Stock, “How Can Philosophy Help Us Understand Transgender Experiences?,” *Institute of Art and Ideas*, July 26, 2019, <https://iai.tv/articles/how-can-philosophy-help-us-understand-transgender-experiences-auid-1250>.

64. Smith, “Responding to the Transgender Revolution.”

they decide for themselves? Sartre was all about radical freedom, not being constrained by anything but one's own decisions. What could be more free than finding freedom from your own biology? This looks a lot like existentialism in action.⁶⁵

Transgenderism activists embrace the existential approach to life. For example, Chappell writes: "What would ethical life look like, if our social milieu gave us *no* guidelines or clues or cues about how to act, behave or be in all the various particular situations in which we find ourselves? Such a life sounds a bit like the radical freedom of the existentialist individual."⁶⁶

Existentialism is the basis for trans philosophy's emphasis on experience rather than arguments.⁶⁷ Holly Lawford-Smith explains that, for the transgender person, "one has privileged (albeit not infallible) access to one's own mental states, including one's beliefs, desires and feelings, and...one's gender identity is just such a mental state."⁶⁸ But despite having no convincing argument for why transgender feelings determine reality, activists demand that society cater to their subjective claims.⁶⁹ Subjectivism also makes trans orthodoxy a moving target. Anderson observes that transgenderism activists "are always changing their creed and expanding their demands...yesterday's enlightenment will be tomorrow's benighted bigotry; yesterday's requirements of Science and Medicine and Justice are tomorrow's suicide-inducing oppression."⁷⁰

Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl saw the world of science as describing only part of reality and instead focused on the world of experience.⁷¹ Some

65. Tom Gilson, "Transgenderism and the Failure of Atheism's Best Philosophy," *The Stream*, July 12, 2019 <https://stream.org/transgenderism-failure-atheism-philosophy/> (accessed November 1, 2020).

66. "Transgender: A Dialogue."

67. "Trans philosophy attempts to illuminate trans experiences in an everyday that is confusing and hostile." Talia-Mae Bettcher, "What Is Trans Philosophy?" *Hypatia* 24.4 (September 2019).

68. Lawford-Smith, "How the Trans-Rights Movement Is Turning Philosophers into Activists."

69. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, ch. 2.

70. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, ch. 2.

71. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 343.

trans philosophers have employed Husserl's phenomenology as a guiding system.⁷² For example, Sara Ahmed "proposes that a queer phenomenology might investigate not only how the concept of orientation is informed by phenomenology but also the orientation of phenomenology itself."⁷³ Like existentialism, phenomenology bolsters the subjectivism of transgenderism. It also prioritizes utilitarianism over truth.

Turning from basic biological science and toward experience-based "truth" makes it difficult to affirm basic common-sense facts. Talia Mae Bettcher diffidently muses: "Once we ask the question of what a woman is, things immediately become more complicated philosophically."⁷⁴ Virginia Molenkott is more blunt: "We do not know for sure what a woman is."⁷⁵ Assuming that truth claims should correspond to reality, trans epistemology is clearly lacking.

The Harmful Ethics of Transgenderism

Ideas have consequences. The philosophy of transgenderism does not limit itself to theories of being and knowledge but spills over into real-life values and behaviors. And when the roots (metaphysics and epistemology) are rotten, the fruit (ethics) will be rotten as well, and more visibly so.⁷⁶ Though presented as compassionate and life-giving,

72. Some would argue that phenomenology does not technically belong to epistemology (what we *know*), since it is more about what we *experience*. For trans philosophy, however, there does not appear to be much of a distinction between experience and knowledge.

73. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006). Another philosopher, Henry Rubin, uses phenomenology to compare transgender perception to those who perceive phantom limbs or do not recognize existing limbs (*anosognosia*). Henry Rubin, "Phenomenology as Method in Trans Studies," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 4, no. 2 (1998).

74. Talia Mae Bettcher, "'When Tables Speak': On the Existence of Trans Philosophy," *Daily Nous*, May 30, 2018, <http://dailynous.com/2018/05/30/tables-speak-existence-trans-philosophy-guest-talia-mae-bettcher/> (accessed November 1, 2020).

75. Quoted in Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 204.

76. "The *reality question* boils down to this: Is it really the case that a person can be born with 'the wrong body,' or is the person who feels this way simply confused at the level of their mind? The *morality question* follows on from this, but has numerous faces to it, as well as various legal implications. For example, should children with gender identity issues be given puberty blockers? Should a person be allowed to use the bathroom that corresponds to their subjective gender identity? Should Medicaid pay for sex reassignment surgery? How should we regard the marriage of a man to a trans-woman or vice versa?" Smith, "Responding to the Transgender Revolution."

the ethics of transgenderism are harmful both to people who experience gender dysphoria and to those around them.

Absolute Freedom of Choice

John Stuart Mill advocated the complete liberty of each person: “Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.”⁷⁷ The modern person is told not to ask “Who am I?” but “What do I identify as?” Nothing is a given; everything may be chosen freely.⁷⁸ Transgenderism values freedom of choice to an extreme degree. But the one thing you are not free to do is oppose transgenderism. Vaughan Roberts notes the irony: “We may have rejected the concept of objective truth as a culture, but we still expect everyone to hold to certain fundamental convictions—and one of them is the absolute right of each individual to define themselves as they wish. Any perceived challenge to that right is regarded as heresy and is strongly resisted, no matter what it’s based on.”⁷⁹

Neo-Marxism

Following Marxist categories of power and liberation, postmodern neo-Marxism extends these categories beyond class conflict to areas such as feminism, critical race theory, non-Christian religions, and LGBT+ advocacy. Many transgenderism advocates frame their statements in terms of privilege and oppression. Mohler explains:

One of the central tenets of postmodernism is that “reality” itself is socially constructed. In other words, reality is not an objective fact or a comprehensive truth, but a set of socially constructed ideas and social systems used by people in power to restrain and oppress the less fortunate. A driving concern of postmodernism was its claim to liberate those who suffered from oppression caused by patriarchy, capitalism, or Christian civilization.... The idea of gender as a socially constructed reality is indispensable to the transgender worldview. Transgender pioneers and theorists employed the worldview of postmodernism in an effort to capsize and deconstruct traditional notions of sex and gender, which, in their view, are inherently oppressive.⁸⁰

77. *On Liberty*, ed. Elizabeth Rapaport (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979), 9.

78. Smith, “Responding to the Transgender Revolution.”

79. Roberts, *Transgender*, 33.

80. Mohler, *We Cannot Be Silent*, 71.

An example can be found in the words of “radical feminist activist” Julie Bindel:

Gender is nothing more and nothing less than a social construction based on sex stereotypes. By thinking philosophically about what it means to be a woman, or a man, we can differentiate between biological sex, and the rules imposed upon women and girls, in order to render us socially, sexually, socially [sic] and politically insubordinate to men.⁸¹

Neo-Marxism categorizes people inaccurately and fosters envy among the “oppressed,” which ultimately results in “prejudice, injustice, and totalitarianism.”⁸² It is not an ethic that breeds love, compassion, and understanding.

Language Deconstruction

Language is an important tool of human discourse and understanding. In recent nominalist⁸³ philosophical thought, however, language is seen as “not only an instrument of communication, but an instrument of *power*.”⁸⁴ Nietzsche and Foucault viewed speech mainly as a means of dominating others. So deconstructionist thought proposes that “the path to liberation and freedom is to throw off the constraints of language, particularly in relation to gender.”⁸⁵ According to Pearcey, in transgenderism “language takes priority over biology.... The flesh has been made word.”⁸⁶

A notorious example of transgenderism’s manipulation of language is the choice of “preferred pronouns” according to gender identity, not birth sex. These pronouns are not limited to he/him and she/her, or even the more generic they/them, but also ze/hir, zhe/zir, ey/em, xe/xem, and more. As difficult as it is to keep up with the

81. Bindel, “How Can Philosophy Help Us Understand Transgender Experiences?”

82. Mike Moses, “Privilege, Oppression, and the Gospel: A Biblical Response to Intersectionality,” *Presbyterion* 45/1 (Spring 2019), 138.

83. Nominalism “suggests that there is no Reality, or that if there is Reality, it has no inherent meaning.” T. David Gordon, “Finding Beauty Where God Finds Beauty: A Biblical Foundation of Aesthetics.” *The Artistic Theologian* 1 (2012), 16.

84. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 503.

85. Branch, *Affirming God’s Image*, 16.

86. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 214.

expanding list of pronouns,⁸⁷ the list of terms denoting sexual identity and gender expression is far more extensive. In 2014, Holiday Simmons and Fresh! White [sic] expanded the LGBT acronym to 13 letters, LGBTTT2QQAIIIP: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Two-Spirit, Queer, Questioning, Asexual, Allies, Intersex, Intergender, and Pansexual.⁸⁸ In 2016, the New York City Human Rights Commission expanded the list to 31 terms of gender expression. Not to be outdone, Facebook lists over 50 possible genders. This linguistic freedom is one-sided, though, as transgenderism demands adherence to its ever-changing terms and definitions. NYC employers may be fined if they refuse to use their employees' chosen pronouns and identities. Some have even gone so far as to call the intentional "misgendering" of a transgender person "an act of violence."⁸⁹

The double standard of transgenderist language deconstruction is notable. Anderson rightly states that "it is an Orwellian abuse of language to say that helping a child be comfortable in his own body is 'conversion therapy,' but transforming a boy into a 'girl' is simply allowing the child to be 'her' true self."⁹⁰ Language is no longer about finding the truth, but about forcing others to affirm a fantasy. To play along is to cheapen the truth and distort reality. Branch writes:

Literary deconstruction is actually a radical form of skepticism that denies inherent meaning to the world in which we live, other than the meaning imposed on it by humans.... There is no such thing as a man trapped in a woman's body or a woman trapped in a man's body: These concepts originate in misleading language games fostered by wrongheaded ideas rooted in deconstruction. There are only men and women, some of whom suffer confusing and frustrating ideas about gender because we live in a broken world. These people deserve our mercy. But mercy does not mean we affirm their linguistic charade.⁹¹

87. City University in New York banned pronouns altogether as "a necessary step toward protecting the rights, privacy, and safety of students." Smith, "Responding to the Transgender Revolution."

88. "Our Many Selves," in *Trans Bodies Trans Selves: A Resource for the Transgender Community*, ed. Laura Erickson-Schroth (Oxford University Press, 2014), 9.

89. David Edwards, quoted in Branch, *Affirming God's Image*, 115.

90. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, ch. 6.

91. Branch, *Affirming God's Image*, 18.

Anti-Child and Anti-Family

Perhaps the most aggressive ethic of transgenderism activists is their willingness to disrupt otherwise healthy families and to experiment on confused children. Children may be given puberty blockers around age 10, despite health risks and little evidence of psychological benefit.⁹² Minors given puberty blockers and hormone treatments often end up with regret and resentment, since 80-90 percent of children who experience gender dysphoria do not carry these feelings into adulthood.⁹³ But these facts do not stop activists from mistreating children and disturbing families.⁹⁴ “From the perspective of many modern mental health professionals...transgenderism itself isn’t the cause of negative mental health outcomes. Rather, these problems are associated with the stress of living in a social environment that is not friendly to transgenderism.”⁹⁵ Social workers are trained to see parents with a traditional worldview as a suicide risk for trans minors. Due to this “threat” to life and wellbeing, DHS workers may actually remove a trans child from an “unsupportive” home.⁹⁶

The Logical Contradictions of Transgenderism

If the philosophical positions of transgenderism seem inconsistent or self-refuting, there’s a reason for that. The arguments of trans activists often break the law of non-contradiction:⁹⁷

- Gender is innate, except when it is fluid.
- Gender is a social construct and sex is an inflexible reality. But also gender is an inflexible reality and sex is a social construct.

92. Jane Robbins, “Why Puberty Blockers Are a Clear Danger to Children’s Health,” *The Federalist*, December 14, 2018, <https://thefederalist.com/2018/12/14/puberty-blockers-clear-danger-childrens-health/> (accessed November 1, 2020).

93. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 223.

94. Consider the case of Jeffrey Younger, who is fighting for his son not to receive puberty blockers (the boy’s mother insists he is a girl). Senator Ted Cruz called the child “a pawn in a left-wing political agenda.” Quoted in Teo Armus, “A Texas Man Says His 7-year-old Isn’t Transgender. Now His Custody Fight Has Reached the Governor’s Office,” *The Washington Post*, October 24, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/10/24/james-younger-luna-transgender-greg-abbott/> (accessed November 1, 2020).

95. Branch, *Affirming God’s Image*, 32.

96. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, ch. 2.

97. Much of this section is inspired by Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*.

- You are free to identify however you wish. Also, you are not free to contradict a queer person’s chosen (and sometimes changing) identity.⁹⁸
- The material world is all that matters. Also, the immaterial self should not necessarily draw its gender identity from its material body.⁹⁹
- There is no difference between man and woman, but you can transition from one to the other.¹⁰⁰
- Truth is subjective, but you must discover your objective, hidden “real self.”
- Transitioning your gender identity is beautiful and brave, and transitioning your racial identity is horrid and shameful.¹⁰¹
- Your gender identity may change throughout your lifetime. Also, you should consider permanent bodily alterations.

Transgender philosophy is an unsteady foundation. Thankfully, there is a better way to understand ourselves.

The Biblical Philosophy¹⁰² of Gender

It would be misleading to imply that the entire transgenderism movement is atheistic or non-religious. But any type of religion or

98. “They promote a radical expressive individualism in which people are free to do whatever they want and define the truth however they wish, yet they try to enforce acceptance of transgender ideology in a paternalistic way.” Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, ch. 2.

99. “On the one hand, they claim that the real self is something other than the physical body, in a new form of Gnostic dualism, yet at the same time they embrace a materialist philosophy in which only the material world exists.” Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, ch. 2.

100. “Ironically, queer theory actually reinforces rigid gender stereotypes” (Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 198).

101. Consider the outrage over Rachel Dolezal, who was an NAACP chapter president until it was discovered in 2015 that she had been born to white parents and merely identified as black. In 2017, feminist philosophy journal *Hypatia*’s editorial board split in controversy over an article comparing transgenderism and transracialism (Colleen Flaherty, “By Any Other Name,” *Inside HigherEd*, June 6, 2018, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/06/philosophy-really-ignoring-important-questions-about-transgender-identity> [accessed November 1, 2020]).

102. This section will treat philosophy and theology synonymously, since theology is essentially biblically-based philosophy. “Christian theology is Christian

spirituality that harmonizes with transgenderism is at odds with the theology of the Bible. Roberts suggests that transgenderism is a return to ancient Greek thought, in which “salvation was all about the freeing of the soul from the body that dragged it down.”¹⁰³ Owen Strachan links it to neo-pagan thought, which teaches that “spirituality is a matter of internal alignment rather than external obeisance [and] views redemption as a project of self-actualization.”¹⁰⁴ Liberal Christians who embrace transgenderism sometimes employ Whitehead’s process theology,¹⁰⁵ which imagines a (perhaps feminine) god changing along with his/her universe and favoring novelty and risks.¹⁰⁶

Rather than retrofitting religion to fit transgenderism, why not invite transgender-identifying persons to embrace God-designed reality? Theologian/philosopher Augustine wrote in the fifth century that for a person “not to live after the fashion for which he was designed is to live a falsehood.”¹⁰⁷ Christians know their designer, and have His Word to guide their lives. Tom Gilson summarizes:

Human nature is nothing other than what God has made it to be. God had a specific purpose for humans in mind, and we can either fulfill or deny that purpose. In fact, to deny our nature and purpose is to struggle not just against ourselves or each other, but against reality itself. In the end, reality must always win, which is to say, God Himself wins, and the reality-deniers lose. Those who align their lives with reality, on the other hand, share the joy of God’s victory in it.¹⁰⁸

Our hearts should be moved with compassion for those who genuinely wrestle with questions of identity, especially those who have had no opportunity to hear the words of the God who made them. The good news is that biblical anthropology properly accounts for everything that is right with us and everything that is wrong with us. Scripture holds in tension two massively consequential realities: every

philosophy, or philosophy with a Christian worldview.” Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 4.

103. Roberts, *Transgender*, 38–39.

104. Owen Strachan, *Reenchanting Humanity: A Theology of Mankind* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2019), 202.

105. See, e.g., Hutchins, “Holy Ferment.”

106. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 439–48.

107. *City of God*, quoted in Branch, *Affirming God’s Image*, 142.

108. Gilson, “Transgenderism and the Failure of Atheism’s Best Philosophy.”

human is created in God's image, and every human is fallen in sin. The answer to this tension? Jesus, the only human who never sinned, who restores every believer to God's image.

Made in God's Image, Male and Female

Sophie-Grace Chappell claims: "I don't have a good theory of what it is to be a trans woman; I just am one," then asks, "Do cis people have a good theory of what it is to be cis?"¹⁰⁹ There is in fact an excellent theory of what it is to have one's gender identity match one's biological sex, and it is found in God's Word.

Beginning in Genesis, we find that the first man was created by a personal God. God formed him, gave him life, and "man became a living creature [נֶפֶשׁ]" (Gen. 2:7).¹¹⁰ This verse refers to the first person as essentially a unity. The Bible goes on to elaborate that each individual consists of two unified parts—an outer body and an inner spirit (2 Cor. 4:16)—both affirmed as "good" by the Creator.¹¹¹ This stands in sharp contrast to Gnosticism and other body-demeaning philosophies. In Genesis 1:26, we find that man was created in God's "image [צֶלֶם]" and "likeness [דְמוּת]" for a purpose, to be God's ruling steward over the rest of earthly creation. This stands in sharp contrast to antiteleological philosophies. Pearcey notes that those influenced by transgenderism and similar agendas

think their body is just a piece of matter that gives no clues about who they are as persons...think their identity as male or female has no special dignity or meaning...[and] view their body negatively as a limitation on their authentic identity. By contrast, how can we present the biblical view as anything but radically positive and affirming? Christianity gives the basis for a high and humane view of the person as an integrated whole."¹¹²

Genesis 1:27 is a highly significant Scripture for a theology of gender. "So God created man [אָדָם] in his own image, in the image of God

109. Lawford-Smith, "Transgender: A Dialogue."

110. All Scripture quotes are from the *English Standard Version* (ESV).

111. "The physical structure of our bodies reveals clues to our personal identity. The way our bodies function provides rational grounds for our moral decisions.... A Christian ethic always takes into account the facts of biology... [it] respects the teleology of nature and the body." Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 23.

112. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 204.

he created him; male [זָכָר] and female [נְקֵבָה] he created them.” God not only makes people in His image; He distinctly creates each as male or female. “Genesis 1:27 affirms that sexuality is not an accident of nature, nor is it simply a biological phenomenon. Instead, sexual identity and function are part of God’s will for his image-bearers.”¹¹³ There is no place in God’s design for mismatching sex and gender.¹¹⁴ Denny Burk explains: “God created sexual differentiation. The terms *male* and *female* are not cultural constructs. They are not social roles foisted upon mankind by the accretion of culture and tradition. *Male* and *female* designate the fundamental distinction that God has embedded in the very biology of the race.”¹¹⁵ This is an objective, firm foundation on which to base one’s identity.

Genesis 1–2 is not the only section of Scripture to emphasize the God-designed “gender binary.” Roberts states: “The fact of the creation of human beings as male and female is woven deep into the fabric of the Bible’s story, and therefore into the understanding of the world and ourselves that Christians embrace.”¹¹⁶ Marital sex distinctions point to the drama of redemption: Christ’s love for His bride, the church (Eph. 5:32; Rev. 21:2). “Nature itself” teaches that there are physical distinctions between men and women (1 Cor. 11:14).¹¹⁷ So we should not be surprised to find that in both Old and New

113. Branch, *Affirming God’s Image*, 41.

114. Robert Smith notes, “The clear implication of [the] move from ‘male’ and ‘female’ (in Gen 1) to ‘man’ and ‘woman’ (in Gen 2), an implication everywhere confirmed as the biblical narrative unfolds, is that *a person’s biological sex reveals and determines both their objective gender (what gender they, in fact, are) and certain key gender roles (should they be taken up)*. That is, human males grow into men (and potentially husbands and fathers) and human females grow into women (and potentially wives and mothers).” Smith, “Responding to the Transgender Revolution.”

115. Denny Burk, *What is the Meaning of Sex?* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2013), 160.

116. Roberts, *Transgender*, 41.

117. The woman “does not have the same body as the man; they are both human and both image-bearers, but they have different bodies, and their bodies have the shapes they do because of the plan of God for the sexes, for marriage, and for the family. God made the woman’s body for the bearing and feeding of children, while the man has neither capacity. God made the man stronger and faster and more aggressive in order to drive him into his duties; he has on average 1,000 percent more testosterone than women, one of the more startling realities of human biology.” Strachan, *Reenchanting Humanity*, 145.

Testaments “there are multiple passages¹¹⁸ that assume that someone is either a man or woman, and that society regularly will be able to know the difference between them.”¹¹⁹ This does not mean that each man and each woman should fit every cultural stereotype, but it does mean that each ought to embrace their God-given gender role and reflect it to some extent in their appearance.

The Fall and the Curse

Not long after they were created, the first man and woman rebelled against God. The subsequent divine curses were appropriate for each sex: the woman’s good calling of childbearing would be made painful (Gen. 3:16) and the man’s good calling of labor would be made painful (Gen. 3:17). All of creation suffers under a curse (Rom. 8:20–22)—we live in a good but painful world, tangled with thorns and thistles. The image of God in humans remains (Gen. 9:6), though marred by sin and brokenness. Roberts writes, “The Bible’s insight that we are all both created and broken is vital for understanding not just transgender questions but every kind of human affliction—physical or psychological. We have all been profoundly impacted by the fall.”¹²⁰

A notable outworking of mankind’s fall into sin is sexual behavior that is “contrary to nature” (Rom. 1:26). Though sex is innate in our biology, the effect of the curse is to pervert desires¹²¹ so that one may deeply feel a need to identify or behave contrary to their God-given sex. However, as Robert Smith writes, “There is no reason (either biblical or scientific) to believe that a person can have either the brain or soul of one sex and the body of the other. It may be a person’s strong feeling or deeply held conviction, but it is not an objective fact. As one

118. Grudem lists Lev. 12:2–5; 18:22; 20:13; 27:2; Num. 27:8–9; 30:2–3; Deut. 20:13; 22:5; Rom. 1:26–27; 1 Cor. 11:2–11; 1 Tim. 2:8–12; 5:1–2; Titus 2:2–6 (*Christian Ethics*, 873).

119. Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 873, emphasis his. Strachan concurs: “The Word of God clearly addresses bodily presentation and urges the followers of God to take care that they honor God’s creative design.” Strachan, *Reenchanting Humanity*, 171.

120. Roberts, *Transgender*, 47.

121. “A Christian stance acknowledges biological factors, the home environment, past experiences, and human volition can all contribute to gender dysphoria. . . . It acknowledges the complex matrix of variables of living in a fallen world that lead to gender confusion” (Branch, *Affirming God’s Image*, 51).

of the tragic effects of the fall, the gender dysphoric person is suffering from a pathology of the mind.”¹²²

In Deuteronomy 22:5, we find reference to a human behavior often (though not always) linked to transgenderism: cross dressing. “A woman shall not wear a man’s garment, nor shall a man put on a woman’s cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.” Strachan notes, “We see here that the instinct to wear the clothing of the opposite sex is not new; it is nearly as old as the earth.”¹²³ Understanding that transgender-type behavior is ancient¹²⁴ is not a mark in its favor, but instead helps to prove the biblical doctrine of sin. Though in the context of Old Covenant law, Jason DeRouchie clarifies that there is an enduring principle in the divine prohibition: “Loving others and God means that people will maintain a gender identity that aligns with their biological sex and will express this gender in a way that never leads to gender confusion in the eyes of others.”¹²⁵

The Gospel of Grace and Growth

Jesus Christ, God’s only divine Son, was born in human flesh (Heb. 2:14; 1 John 4:2). Contrary to body-demeaning Gnostic philosophies, the Christian faith affirms that in Jesus “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col. 2:9). Jesus personally affirmed both the integration of body and soul (Matt. 10:28)¹²⁶ and the God-designed “gender binary”: “God made them male [ἄρσῆν] and female [θῆλυς]” (Mark 10:6). Jesus lived a perfect life (Heb. 4:15), yet a conspiracy of Jewish

122. Smith, “Responding to the Transgender Revolution,” 25.

123. Strachan, *Reenchanting Humanity*, 172.

124. Alan Branch believes that Deuteronomy 23:1 “may refer to a primitive attempt to present one’s self as the opposite gender” (*Affirming God’s Image*, 46).

125. “Confronting the Transgender Storm: New Covenant Reflections on Deuteronomy 22:5,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2016), 448. Alan Branch concurs: “The point is that neither sex should make intentional attempts to deceive others concerning their natal sex.... The clothing of the cross-dresser acts as a proxy for embodiment and a corresponding rejection of God’s will” (*Affirming God’s Image*, 44).

126. “What is consistently taught in both Testaments...is a dichotomous or bipartite view.... Human beings consist of two distinct elements: body (Gk. *sōma*) and soul (Gk. *psychē*).... (Mt. 10:28) At the same time, the biblical authors view the human person as an integrated whole.... An ontological duality...within a functional holism.” Smith, “Responding to the Transgender Revolution,” 14.

religious leaders and Roman authorities led to His death by crucifixion. This was not, however, a senseless tragedy, but a willing sacrifice for the sin of all who believe (1 Cor. 15:3). After three days, He rose to life (1 Cor. 15:4), then ascended to His Father's side to prepare a place for His people (John 14:2).

The gospel of Jesus can change everything. No type of sinner is beyond the reach of His grace. Paul the apostle confirmed the grave consequence of various unrepentant sins: "Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9b–10). But he affirmed the life-changing power of the gospel: "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). Such *were* some of you—but no longer! In Christ, the chains of sin are broken and the believer's identity is transformed.

Growing in Christ has implications for a Christian's body. Paul went on to write: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:19–20). One way to glorify God in one's body is with gender-appropriate physical presentation (1 Cor. 11:3–15).¹²⁷

Scott Bader-Saye relays a creative but flawed "Christian" argument for gender reassignment surgery: "It is not only human character, but also the material creation and our human bodies which are being redeemed (Rom. 8:19–23). Human cooperation can be enlisted with God's redemptive purposes for the physical as well as the psychological and spiritual, and that cooperation need not preclude surgery."¹²⁸ However, Romans 8 clearly describes physical redemption as a future hope, and Romans 12:2 describes present sanctification as a transformation "by the renewal of your mind."¹²⁹ Christians who desire a body not theirs and who are tempted to present themselves as a sex

127. "Paul desires both men and women in general, and husbands and wives in particular, to wholeheartedly embrace and unambiguously express the gender distinctions with which we have been created, rather than to deny, diminish or disguise them." Smith, "Responding to the Transgender Revolution," 18.

128. Watts, quoted in Bader-Saye, "The Transgender Body's Grace," 90.

129. "Human passions are notoriously unreliable indicators of God's will. 'I feel this, therefore I should be allowed to do it' would not pass muster on any viable

not theirs are called to put to death the sins of covetousness (Col. 3:5) and deception (Col. 3:9–10).¹³⁰ Transgender identity and behavior is simply not in line with biblical ethics.¹³¹ God loves His children too much to allow them to lead lives of harmful fantasy. A believer perseveres in hope of a future glorified body, untainted by sin's curse, in which there will be no disconnect between inner feelings and outer reality.

Conclusion

This article has endeavored to demonstrate that the philosophy of transgenderism, in the stream of antiteleology, contains body-demeaning metaphysics, subjective epistemology, harmful ethics, and a plethora of logical contradictions. A biblical philosophy of gender is better grounded in reality and leads to a better hope.

The transgender conversation is not about issues but about people. Our neighbors who identify as transgender tend to be deeply troubled. A Transgender Remembrance Day poster states that “34% of trans people attempt suicide. 64% are bullied. 73% of trans people are harassed in public. 21% of trans people avoid going out in public due to fear.”¹³² Many have a background of abuse, trauma, mental disorder, loss, or family dysfunction¹³³—and, of course, sin. Like Jesus, Christians should be “moved with compassion” for the harassed and helpless (Matt. 9:36). Let us hate the harmful lies of transgender ideology. Let us love our struggling neighbors enough to speak the truth that can set them free.

reading of biblical ethics” (Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 2002), 451.

130. Smith, “Responding to the Transgender Revolution,” 20–21.

131. “While redemption is unmerited, an active pursuit of a ‘transgender’ life would be at odds with minimal standards for repentance, faith, transformation, and a claim to ‘faithfulness’ to Christ.” Robert A. J. Gagnon, “Gender Dysphoria and ‘Practical Application’: A Rejoinder to Mark Yarhouse,” *Robert A. J. Gagnon*, August 28, 2016, <http://robagnon.net/Yarhouse%20Rejoinder.htm> (accessed November 1, 2020).

132. Quoted in Roberts, *Transgender*, 12.

133. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, ch. 3.

Contributors

Marco Barone, MA and PhD at Queens University Belfast, Belfast, Northern Ireland, serves as an independent scholar.

Cody Edds is an MDiv. student at Covenant Baptist Theological Seminary, Owensboro, Kentucky.

Tyler Freire is Assistant Librarian and MDiv student at Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, Florida.

James S. Greenbury is a retired medical practitioner and a member of Nambour Presbyterian Church, Queensland, Australia.

Mike Moses (ThM, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary) is Associate Pastor of Discipleship at Harvest Bible Church, Westland, Michigan.

Shane W. Parker is Associate Professor of Leadership and Director of the Doctoral Educational Ministry Program at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

Thomas Parr is pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church, Anacortes, Washington.

Thiago Silva is a PhD student at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Nicholas Thompson is pastor of Cornerstone Presbyterian Church, Chattanooga, Tennessee.



PURITAN
REFORMED
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

2965 LEONARD ST. N.E. | GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN 49525

PURITAN
REFORMED
JOURNAL

Volume 13, Number 1 • January 2021