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Gender as Love: A Theological Account

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GENDER AS LOVE:

A THEOLOGICAL ACCOUNT

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GENDER AS LOVE:

A THEOLOGICAL ACCOUNT

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        Despite its ubiquity in nearly all academic disciplines, gender has remained a contested

concept, so much so that there is considerable ambiguity regarding what makes one a woman or

a man and what relation such traits have with the human body. Debates typically polarize around

the positions of gender essentialism and social constructionism, though both have been shown to

have serious limitations. Additionally, theologians have typically approached these debates either

by understanding gender as a category for sustained investigation but finding that the tools and

virtues of theology are ill-suited for doing so, or by retaining the tools and virtues of theology but

keeping gender at arm's length. The motivating principle of this dissertation is that both

bifurcations—between essentialism and social construction, between treating gender seriously or

retaining theological fidelity—are false. Instead, the dissertation attempts to provide a model for

gender's basic features that is accountable to the broader conversation while employing the

recognizable tools of theology. After specifying what those are, it proposes that gender is the

appropriation of social goods according to the sexed body, where the means of appropriation is

primarily through what one loves.

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CHAPTER 1
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO GIVE A THEOLOGICAL ACCOUNT OF GENDER?

1.1 Introduction: Contemporary Theological Discussion about Gender

There is little doubt that in the contemporary theological landscape gender has emerged

as a vibrant and diverse object of investigation. The contributions made by scholars from all of

the established disciplines of theology have proliferated, so much so that Elisabeth Schüssler

Fiorenza, one of the pioneers of the field, has testified:

> I remember in the 1960s when I could read everything that appeared on feminism; in the
> '70s when I could still read everything in feminist studies in religion; in the '80s when I
> was still aware of everything published in feminist biblical studies; and in the '90s when I
> could still keep tabs on everything that appeared in feminist Christian Testament/Early
> Christian studies. Yet, today, I find it impossible to be aware of everything published in
> the field.[1]

Perhaps due to this proliferation and diversification, there has arisen a great deal of uncertainty,

obscurity and intransigence with respect to theological analyses of gender. At the same time that

theologians are focusing on the manifold ways in which gender implicates their discipline, it has

come to light that there is no settled agreement on the object of their investigation nor on the best

way one ought to proceed in investigating it.

At the risk of generalizing, it seems to me that the current state of the discussion is

plagued by two problematic yet broadly accepted bifurcations. The acceptance of these two

bifurcations is common, yet it is precisely this acceptance which has generated the malaise of the

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[1] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Reaffirming Feminist/Womanist Biblical Scholarship," *Enounter* 67, no. 4 (2006): 362.

field. The first bifurcation recognizes a distinction between gender as a *social construct* and gender as an *essence*. Much more will be said about each view as my argument proceeds, but their popular understanding seems to go something like this: on the one hand, some argue that gender is an essence, by which they mean that gender is entirely derivable from one's biological make-up.[2] On this view, gender can be read off of whatever biological components one considers to constitute gender identity, with the most frequent candidates being genes, gonads, hormones, other external genitalia and average physical ability.[3] On the other hand is the view that gender is a social construct. Heavily critical of the first option on account of the way it has made the traits which validate the oppression of women something "natural," the appeal to thinking that gender is a social construct lies in the potential it has for revealing these traits as produced by the assumptions, expectations, practices and performances within a society which go on to establish what it is to be a "man" or a "woman." Thus, a distinction is made between "sex"—seen as the biological components which differentiate males from females from intersex/DSD individuals— and "gender," which has more to do with the definitions of masculinity, femininity or otherwise as they are socially expressed.

There is a well-worn debate between these two views, though it is fairly safe to say at this point that some version of the social constructionist view predominates amongst theologians. We

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[2] Strictly speaking, such a commitment makes this view a *biological* essentialist view. It is not typically acknowledged that there are different types of essentialism about gender, with the term often reduced to the one being described. It will be one of my burdens in this work to bring to light the greater diversity of options available for thinking about gender. Likewise, it would be a mistake to think that biological essentialism is the only or best way to take seriously the data of biology. Those inclined to do so need not take on all of the commitments of biological essentialism.

[3] For a fairly recent example of this view, see Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works*, Reissue edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009), chapter 7. Pinker's particular modification of this view involves his commitment to evolutionary psychology, which does much of the heavy lifting with respect to building a bridge between biological facts and social behavior.

shall consider it in the following chapter, but it is worth noting that there is a sizeable delegation

of theologians who remain dissatisfied with it. Largely, and perhaps most vocally, these critics of

the social construction of gender have come from certain branches of Roman Catholic theology.[4]

But there are also feminist theorists who have resisted the social constructionist view because of

its incapacity to provide the moral and political normativity necessary for social change, with

some opting for some alternative form of essentialism[5] and others preferring to extend

constructionist claims to sex *as well as* gender.[6] For the moment, it is enough to observe that the

debate between those who think that gender is a social construct and those who think that it is an

essence is far from settled, with many left wondering whether there is any clear answer to the

question, "What is gender?" Because it is concerned with the basic properties of gender, think of

this first bifurcation as concerned with *ontological* matters.[7]

There is a second bifurcation which has made theological discussions of gender unduly

complex, and it is more *methodological* in nature. As has been noted, though many theologians

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[4] See, particularly, Margaret H. McCarthy, "Gender Ideology and the Humanum," *Communio* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 274–98. In point of fact, the Roman Catholic Church has consistently and explicitly rejected the social construction of gender; see Pope Paul VI, "Humanae Vitae," Encyclical Letter, (July 25, 1968); Pope John Paul II, "Mulieris Dignitatem," Apostolic Letter, (August 15, 1988); Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World," May 31, 2004, 1.2; Pope Francis, "Laudato Si'," Encyclical Letter, (May 24, 2015), paragraph 155.

[5] See here Anthony Appiah, "'But Would That Still Be Me?' Notes on Gender, 'Race,' Ethnicity, as Sources of 'Identity,'" *The Journal of Philosophy* 87, no. 10 (October 1990): 493–99 and Mari Mikkola, "Elizabeth Spelman, Gender Realism and Women," *Hypatia* 21, no. 4 (2006): 77–96.

[6] Fiorenza herself opts for such a view: the "attempt to separate biological sex from gender is…problematic since it does not sufficiently reflect that the cultural sex/gender system 'naturalizes' the category of 'sex' as biologically given rather than as discursively constructed. It does not take into account that primary and secondary physical sex differences are not 'biological facts' but are also discursively constructed" (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet*, 2nd Edition (New York: T&T Clark Bloomsbury, 2015), 42).

[7] Some might resist my use of "ontology" here, claiming that it presumes a position on the question being addressed, namely essentialism. That is not my intended use; I use "ontology" (and I shall use "metaphysics" equivalently) as a term designating the inquiry into the fundamental make-up of reality or features of the world. These include essences along with social constructs as well as whatever other kinds of entities there are.

incorporate gender into their discussions, it is rather difficult to say with specificity just what makes their contributions *theological*, in comparison with other academic disciplines. John Webster maintained that it has become "increasingly difficult for practitioners within the various disciplines of theology to state with any clarity what is specifically *theological* about their enquiries"[8]; the very same can be said about those theologians who have turned their attention to gender. Typically, an unhelpful division has tended to occur between two different theological approaches. On one side of this divide are theologians who are eager to treat gender seriously and carefully, but their treatments too often look to anchor their views in some neighboring academic discipline, perceiving that discipline to provide whatever warrant is putatively missing from a theological approach. Theology is seen as ill-equipped to guide an inquiry into a topic such as gender, so it must be bolstered (or worse, supplanted by) some alternative theory or school of thought deemed to be more reliable. In the hands of such thinkers, the tools, topics and sensibilities familiar to theology appear clumsy, antiquated and artless, and if recourse is made to the recognizable traits of Christian theology, it is done with awkwardness. On the other side are theologians whose practice is immediately recognizable to those familiar with the long line of theological practice through the ages. Yet, though these theologians produce highly sophisticated and genuinely salutary work on the various *loci* of theology, there is a tendency on their part to confine themselves to texts and questions of their own traditions, and if gender is treated in their discussions at all, it is done with a sense of suspicion and reservation. This bifurcation, then, brings to light the question of which tools and methods are best suited to discuss gender, and here too there is more intransigence than clarity.

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[8] John Webster, "Theological Theology," in *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2005), 22.

It is not difficult to find similar assessments of the state of affairs created by these two bifurcations. Thus Sarah Coakley: "It is rare indeed—although not completely unknown—for systematic theologians of any stature to take the category of gender as even a significant locus for discussion; and when they do, they tend to import a gender theory from the secular realm without a sufficiently critical *theological* assessment of it."[9] Resonances of Nicholas Wolterstorff's indictment on the modern state of academic theology can therefore easily be found in theologies of gender:

> It is my impression that a fair amount of what is not so good, and even whimsical, in theology is the completely predictable response by theologians to this indictment by our cultural elite. The theologian looks around for developments in the contemporary academy that seem to be generally esteemed, and tries to sail a bit of theology under those colors… So the theologian looks to see what language the world is currently speaking, and tries to speak in that language. Ironically, I think the result of most such attempts to be relevant is irrelevance…There is an opposite response, equally predictable. Because the world is "going to hell in a handbasket," it is best to ignore it, construct one's own little theological ghetto, read a few safe old texts from one's own tradition with one's students, and when they give the appearance of having been well indoctrinated, send them forth to propound what they have been told while railing against liberalism, postmodernism, or whatever happens to be the current demon.[10]

Either lose one's theological nerve or become parochial in one's theological conversations: those are the two equally unsatisfactory options on offer according to Wolterstorff's read of the situation. Even if it is ultimately overstated, his account nevertheless diagnoses the current state of theology with some accuracy. This diagnosis, which is easily extended to theological discussions of gender, in sum, seems to be this. First, the options available to the theologian who wishes to think about gender's ontological status seems to be reduced to two: either it is an

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[9] Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay "On the Trinity"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 34. See further Kathryn Greene-McCreight, "Feminist Theology and a Generous Orthodoxy," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 57, no. 1 (2004): 107.

[10] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "To Theologians: From One Who Cares about Theology but Is Not One of You," *Theological Education* 40, no. 2 (2005): 83.

essence or it is a social construct, although we cannot say with certainty which is the better

option. Second, theologians are forced into one of two rigid methodological alternatives: either

take gender seriously but forsake the recognizable virtues of theology, or be a serious theologian

but only think of gender in a maladroit way. It may be, of course, that the first bifurcation has

arisen because of the second, or that the two have a complex relationship of dependence.

I have been very generic in the above comments, but I suspect that this characterization

of theology's current state of affairs is at least broadly recognizable to the reader. What is

difficult to deny, in the end, is that there are ontological and methodological dilemmas when

theologians turn to gender. Recently, there has been a change of direction as some theologians

have recognized these bifurcations and sought to overcome them by questioning their very

validity. For these theologians, Eugene Rogers' statement is a summons:

> If you are looking…for "strategies" to move the churches on controverted topics in
> theology and sexuality, your search will misguide you, if you imagine "strategies" and
> theology to be at odds. There is no "strategy" apart from better theology. There is no
> better theology— and thus no strategy—apart from better exegesis, better Christology,
> better use of the liturgy, better recovery of patristic and medieval resources, and so on.[11]

What Rogers is proposing is that discussions about theology and gender have unnecessarily been

forced into a dilemma in which theologians restrict themselves to the basic categories which

make up the opposing sides of the bifurcations, and our persistence in doing so is precisely what

has hindered the advancement of theological treatments of gender. It is not surprising, then, to

see feminist theologians challenging both bifurcations. Regarding the division between gender as

an essence and gender as a social construct, Elaine Storkey pronounces that "the time has come

for me to leave these categories behind. They have done a useful job, but they have their

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[11] Eugene F. Rogers Jr., "Doctrine and Sexuality," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 53.

limitations. They are adequate for a rough sketch but far too vague and nebulous if we are trying to copy a masterpiece."[12] Instead, Storkey proposes her own ontology of gender, having much more to do with the normative structure God has created for relationships, repositioning the social aspects of human life within God's intentions. Turning to the methodological bifurcation, Beth Felker Jones asserts the viability of theology to engage questions of sex and gender in no uncertain terms. Responding to the claim that Christian theology is a "highly compatible bedfellow" with patriarchy, she is adamant that "they are the least compatible bedfellows of all…My conviction is that theology as such *is* feminist. In other words, there is no right theology that is not feminist just because God intends good for all creation, including male and female."[13] For Jones, theologians who hold to the recognizable desiderata of Christian theology have no reason to think that their tools are ill-suited for studying gender. It is exactly the opposite; it is when theology *fails* to adhere to its own principles that the theologian does the greatest harm. It is by aspiring to do theology *coram Deo*, with all that it requires, that it will be able to engage justly the most pressing issues facing the church. In this sense, theology is a bit like a Formula One car. When driving such a car, the temptation is to slow down when approaching a curve, but doing so causes the tires to lose their grip, sending the car off the track. Instead, drivers know to accelerate during curves, allowing the vehicle better to grip the track. It is when theologians let their foot off the gas that theology goes awry; when they approach gender by accelerating their theological engines, they find that they have not spiraled away.[14]

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[12] Elaine Storkey, *Origins of Difference: The Gender Debate Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 126. See also Beth Felker Jones, *Marks of His Wounds: Gender Politics and Bodily Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5: "my intent is to move beyond the standard debates about essentialism versus constructivism."

[13] Jones, *Marks of His Wounds*, 6.

[14] Notably, this is precisely what Wolterstorff recommends as a remedy to his diagnosis of contemporary theology: "It will not be adaptive theology that proves to illuminate our social world, but theology that sets its own

The present work takes up these challenges and provides an account of gender that moves beyond the overly-simplistic division between social constructs and essences. It attempts to do so *theologically*; that is, it provides an account of gender using the recognizable tools and virtues of theology, such as Scriptural exegesis and the critical retrieval of classical Christian figures, all while keeping an eye on the implications my argument will have on the health and well-being of the church.[15] That is not to say that it excludes the input of other disciplines, nor that it neglects the contributions of those outside of the theological guild; the subsequent chapters will belie my belief in the benefit of many non-theological sources. Nevertheless, these do not do the driving; they are there to *aid* the theological claims I advance. Perhaps the proof of the pudding will be in the eating and I can only demonstrate the possibility of achieving these goals by making an attempt at accomplishing them. The remainder of *this* chapter, however, will make a case for the possibility of the project by proffering a view about what it means to give a theological account of gender which does not sacrifice any of the defining traits of Christian theology. This will establish my method. It will do so by drawing upon the research program of John Webster entitled "theological theology," arguing for the conclusion that gender is best accounted for theologically when it is situated within the divine economy, a term understood as the full display of God's acts in history to create and redeem humanity. This is God's "plan [*oikonomian*] for the

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agenda, speaks with its own voice, lives out of its own communities and traditions, has the courage of its own convictions. In the case of Christian theology, it will be theology which is forthrightly the theology of the triune God who is creator and sustainer, our redeemer, and our consummator. What will prove illuminating is the work of the theologian who sees it as her task to articulate those convictions and describe how life and cosmos look when seen in their light. She will indeed engage how others think of God and engage how others see the world; ghettoized theology is as much a failure of nerve and responsibility as is adaptive theology. But her engagement will include argument and polemic; she will not merely engage others so as to conform her theology to their way of thinking…Let theology be theology" ("To Theologians," 85).

[15] This is not to say that what my proposal cannot be salutary for those who are not Christians. But I take my primary task to be in service to the church, since theology is a *ministerial* task. That is, it is a task whose defining characteristic is given to it by the community it seeks to serve, the body of Christ.

fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:10). The economy is the sum total of divine action with respect to human redemption considered in and organized by its temporal unfolding. Its shorthand is, I believe, the term "gospel." It is by understanding how gender is "gathered" into this economy, I posit, that we account for it theologically. But before understanding how to account for *gender* theologically, we must understand how to account for *human persons* theologically; the answer to *that*, moreover, is only given when we have a firm grasp on what it means to give a theological account of anything at all. Because of this, I shall proceed in concentric circles, from broad methodological considerations to more specific ones. The flow of my claims goes like this: an intellectual investigation counts as *minimally theological* when it is ontologically committed to a construal of the Christian narrative and *maximally theological* when it approaches that narrative as the ordered economy of God's triune divine action. Thus, a maximally theological account of human persons will see them in the light of that economy and attribute to them properties in accord with their position in the narrative of redemption. Finally, to account for gender theologically will thus require positioning it within the acts of God in the history of redemption. Once this is complete, the methodological impasse mentioned above will have been resolved. Only then will we be able to address the ontological impasse, which the remainder of this project will attempt to do.

1.2 Theological Theology Unpacked

My aim in this section is to present and argue for one particular view about how best to engage a topic of investigation as a theologian. I present and apply John Webster's vision for theology for at least two reasons. First, few individuals invested as much time and experience into considering carefully the task of theology. Webster was the master charter-setter for

theologians, helping a whole generation of scholars to rediscover the riches and life-giving effects of theological work. He was confident in the intrinsic merits of Christian theology,[16] but he was also keenly aware of the important role theologians played in the intra-disciplinary life of a university.[17] His work, therefore, represents one of the distinctive streams of Christian systematic theology with unique sophistication. More relevant to our topic, however, is the manner in which Webster attempted to avoid theology's perceived cultural marginality. When theologians begin to speak about issues concerning the complexities of human life, he noted, one readily finds that they "are largely ignored, and occasionally repudiated, outside the sphere of the Christian confession; where they still retain profile, it is often only in crude versions."[18] For this reason, attempts to account for gender that draw on theological premises are avoided (both by theologians and their non-theological interlocutors), often because they come across as ham-fisted or parochially confined to debating the grammatical details of a few biblical proof texts. Webster's remedy was neither to appropriate external disciplines to supply theology with greater credibility, nor was it to retreat further into a theologically defensive enclave. Instead, he maintained that the theologian speaks most helpfully to those who are of other fields and persuasions when she makes concrete theological claims with clarity and confidence. Only then will her claims be judged according to their merits, and only then will disagreements be had with

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[16] Notice, for instance, how one of the beneficiaries of Webster's methodology describes the central insight of theological theology: "Christian theology will be most vigorous and will flourish as a discipline insofar as it *simply is itself*, displaying sufficient confidence to deploy its own resources, rather than feeling as though it were obliged constantly to borrow materials from other disciplines and to conform to the standards that apply in cognate fields of study" (Darren Sarisky, "Theological Theology," in *Theological Theology: Essays in Honour of John Webster*, ed. R. David Nelson, Darren Sarisky, and Justin Stratis (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 1).

[17] Webster had many essays on theology's place in the university, but most recently, see "God, Theology, Universities," in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology*, vol. Volume II: Virtue and Intellect (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 157–72.

[18] John Webster, "The Human Person," in *Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 219.

understanding and light. This, I think, injects new life into the kinds of contributions theologians can make in discussions surrounding gender.

In the light of these convictions, Webster advanced an approach to Christian theology he entitled "Theological Theology." One useful way to grasp its unique contribution is to make an initial distinction between something's being *minimally* or *maximally* theological. An inquiry is *minimally theological* when it meets whatever basic conditions are necessary for counting as theology *as such*, whatever its quality. Sameer Yadav has recently called these "the norms that tell us what counts as engaging in the dogmatic task *simpliciter*—norms that someone has to satisfy in order to count as engaging the task of dogmatics at all, whether well or badly."[19] By contrast, something is *maximally theological* when it *also* meets those conditions needed for doing the theological task *well*; they are "norms that tell us what counts as engaging in the dogmatic task *properly*, in doing it well rather than badly."[20] In order to give a maximally theological account of something, that account will first need to be minimally theological; but not every minimally theological account will also be maximally theological, or even maximally theological in the same way. There are different judgments about the conditions for being minimally theological, but they typically involve statements about the subject matter of theology as well as statements about the tools best used for investigating that subject matter. On Yadav's view, an inquiry is minimally theological when it is "engaged in the task of making explicit some sense in which Christians are ontologically committed to a narrative of creation and redemption. To formulate and commend Christian doctrine, I claim, is at a minimum, to formulate and

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[19] Sameer Yadav, "Christian Doctrine as Ontological Commitment to a Narrative," in *The Task of Dogmatics: Explorations in Theological Method*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 74.

[20] Yadav, "Christian Dogmatics as Ontological Commitment," 74.

commend ontological commitment to a narrative."[21] To commend ontological commitment, moreover, is to hold that there is "something (or some things) that makes that [narrative] true."[22] Christians will differ on what that something is; for instance, classically-minded theologians will hold that there is an objective reality depicted by the narrative, while those persuaded of the view that theological statements express attitudes of dependence or existential commitments will hold that those attitudes or commitments are the truthmakers for the narrative. Moreover, proponents will differ on the specific contours of the narrative, particularly the details of creation and redemption. This is precisely what affords this view the ability to accommodate alternative proposals for theological inquiries of gender, even when it rejects them. The point, in the long run, is this: as long as *some account* is given of what makes one's rendering of the Christian narrative of creation and redemption true, then it is ontologically committed; and if it is ontologically committed, then it is minimally theological.[23]

"Theological Theology," however, is *not* a view specifying the requirements for minimally theological proposals. It is rather a view about what it means to perform the theological task *well*, or how to be *maximally* theological. This requires providing further specifications of the details of the Christian narrative of creation and redemption as well as an account of the particular truthmakers for that narrative. For Webster, as we will see, this means viewing the narrative as an *economy* and viewing its truthmakers as the *actions of the triune*

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[21] Yadav, "Christian Dogmatics as Ontological Commitment," 75-6.

[22] Yadav, "Christian Dogmatics as Ontological Commitment," 79. Here Yadav is actually discussing Bradley Rettler's understanding of ontological commitment to a sentence, but he endorses the view for his own regarding the Christian narrative. See Rettler, "The General Truthmaker View of Ontological Commitment," *Philosophical Studies* 173 (2016): 1405-1425.

[23] For a similar account of what holds theology together despite the vast differences separating theological approaches, see Oliver D. Crisp, *Analyzing Doctrine: Toward a Systematic Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 22.

God, with a basis in God's immanent life. Those two elements, I posit, make up Theological Theology as a maximally theological method.[24]

Webster begins with what he calls the "subjective cognitive principle of theology," namely, "regenerate human intelligence."[25] As a genuine intellectual discipline, theology does not proceed from any special human faculties, faculties not already possessed and in use when one reasons about other topics and disciplines. It is an activity of the mind, requiring no other creaturely mental equipment than that already had by human persons. Theology's employment of the mind differs, however, from other disciplines in at least two ways. First, "Christian theology is biblical reasoning. It is an activity of the created intellect, judged, reconciled, redeemed, and sanctified through the redemptive works of the Son and the Spirit."[26] That is, the work of theology requires a mind in which the healing and reparative work of God on one's epistemic faculties has begun. Those who stand in epistemic antagonism in relation to God cannot reasonably be said to come to know God and say true things about God, especially when "know" is not only taken to be knowledge *about* God but also knowledge of God by *acquaintance.* Because we have become "futile in [our] thinking" (Rom. 1:21), we need God to do the work of "scattering the darkness of sin, reconciling lost creatures, overcoming ignorance and establishing the knowledge and love of himself."[27] Here I take Webster to be practicing a form of virtue

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[24] For a fuller account of the historical development of Webster's method, see Michael Allen, "Toward Theological Theology: Tracing the Methodological Principles of John Webster," *Themelios* 41, no. 2 (2016): 217–37. I have attempted to articulate these principles with closer attention to divine action in Fellipe do Vale, "Divine Action is Constitutive of Theology: William Abraham, John Webster, and Theological Theology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* (forthcoming, 2021).

[25] John Webster, "What Makes Theology Theological?," in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology*, vol. I: God and the Works of God (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 217.

[26] John Webster, "Biblical Reasoning," in *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 115.

[27] John Webster, "On the Clarity of Holy Scripture," in *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II*, 42. See also John Webster, *Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 8: "Theology is an aspect of the

epistemology, according to which certain data are unknowable (or at least unknowable in the right kind of way) apart from certain moral states obtaining in the knower. Webster was well known for his insistence that the task of theology and the reading of Scripture (more on which below) require both the revelation of God *and* the right kind of reader. "Reading Scripture is thus a moral matter," he asserts, "it requires that we become certain kinds of readers, whose reading is taken up into the history of reconciliation."[28] The language of virtue is apposite here, but these should not be mistaken for virtues acquirable through natural or normal means. The virtues in question—like attentiveness, consistent prayer, fear of God, teachability, freedom from self-preoccupation, studiousness, the rejection of curiosity and the like[29]—are direct products of the redeeming work of Christ applied by the Holy Spirit and so they are gifts of grace. Thus, though no new faculties are employed in theological theology, those faculties require reparation by God before they can perform the theological task well.

The second way in which theology's employment of reason differs from that of other disciplines is that it has God as its object and inquires about all other topics in the light of God as their source and true end. For Webster, disciplines are not known or evaluated on the basis of some external or universal standard for what counts as rational or as knowledge; rather they are known and evaluated on the basis of their objects and what it might take for those objects to be

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sanctification of reason, that is, of the process in which reason is put to death and made alive by the terrifying and merciful presence of the holy God."

[28] John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 87.

[29] This list is an *ad hoc* set of examples drawn from a variety of Webster's writings. For particular discussion, see Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 90; John Webster, *The Culture of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 145-147; and John Webster, "Curiosity," in *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 193–202. Note, however, that it is not meant to be definitive, for "[a]ny selection of virtues for the purposes of portraying theological existence is bound to be occasional—that is, an idealized picture which emphasizes certain features over others because in the present context they are considered to be of prime importance" (*The Culture of Theology*, 145).

successfully known (criteria which will be discipline-specific).[30] For our purposes, note that the "principal object or matter of Christian theology is God."[31] But though that is a *necessary* condition for a maximally theological account, it is not a *sufficient* condition, for God is an object of investigation in other disciplines as well (say, psychology, philosophy, religious studies, sometimes even nuclear physics!). Rather, what makes theology unique is that it speaks of God *in terms of divine action*: "The distinctiveness of Christian theology lies elsewhere, however," namely, "in its invocation of *God as agent* in the intellectual practice of theology. In order to give account of its own operations, that is, Christian theology will talk of *God and God's actions*."[32] Or again: "A theological account of theology describes its nature and functions by invoking language about God, describing the human actions of creating and reading theology *in relation to divine agency*."[33] The unique object of theology, then, is not merely God, but God considered through the array of actions performed in the history of redemption as well as the particular places all creatures have within that history. More on that in moment.

If the object of theology is God and God's actions, then it is fruitful to inquire about how this agent relates to the particular actions performed. Webster locates the source of these particular actions in God's *perfection* in the immanent Trinity and then maintains that God's acts are directly attributable to the character of that perfection. "Perfection" here does not describe any particular property had by God (like omniscience) but rather the quality of God's life

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[30] Cf. "Theological Theology," 15. This has significant overtones with William Abraham's advocacy of epistemic particularism when it comes to divine revelation and theology in general. See his *Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), ch. 2 and 3.

[31] Webster, "What Makes Theology Theological?," 213.

[32] Webster, "Theological Theology," 25. Emphasis added.

[33] John Webster, "Reading Theology," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 13 (1997): 55. Emphasis added.

considered within itself and not with regard to creatures. Thus Webster contends that "reflective participation in the economy of God's works prompts an intellectual…movement which considers God's works not only as they present themselves in their outer face or temporal structure and effect, but also in terms of the uncreated depth of God from which they flow…What systematic theology may say of it is said because God's acts in time are transitive, directing theological reason to their agent and his mysterious, antecedent glory (1 Chron. 19:6f.)."[34] The task of the theologian is to see divine acts as derivative of the divine agent who performed them, specifically the kind of perfect life enjoyed by the triune persons and their relations. The basic point being made is trivially true: some of the characteristic actions I perform (say, writing a paper) will indicate certain traits about me (say, my qualities as a writer). When this point is applied to God, however, we see that the actions appropriated to the divine persons reveal something about the particularities of those divine persons and the perfection they enjoy immanently. As the Son is sent into the world from the Father, for instance, we perceive the love shared between them in the relation of eternal begetting (see, among many examples, John 3:34-35). Taken the other way around, we can say that divine action discloses God; God is necessarily trinitarian; thus, divine action must also be necessarily trinitarian in its disclosure. It thereby reveals to us the perfection of that necessary trinitarian life. In the end, this captures the very old Christian confession that the trinitarian missions match with or correspond to the trinitarian processions and that the actions of God are indivisible with respect to the three persons, all of whom share in the perfect life of God.

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[34] John Webster, "Principles of Systematic Theology," in *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 143.

This brings us to the point at which Webster defines his particular construal of the narrative of creation and redemption to which Christians are ontologically committed. The theologian has as her object God as a divine agent who performs characteristic divine actions, and those actions have a certain overall *structure* or *order* to them, something Webster terms the "divine economy," keeping practice with scriptural (cf. Eph. 1:10, 3:2) and patristic terminology. The economy is the "historical form of God's presence to and action upon creatures," so, as God acts, those actions comprise a structure or pattern given to it by the missions of the divine persons.[35] But just what is included in the economy? Webster uses very expansive terms to answer this question: "By 'the economy', we refer to the comprehensive scope of God's dealing with creation and humanity—as creator, as savior, and as the one who will bring his purposes to perfection. The panorama of what the triune God does is the execution of God's being."[36] Or again, the economy "is a history of comprehensive scope, *gathering up all of God's acts toward the creature*."[37] The economy, it appears, is the narrative of human history told from the perspective of what God has done to create, redeem, sustain and perfect creatures. History is evaluable for Webster, and a correct evaluation of it must make reference to the acts of the Creator of all things and the appointed ends of those actions brought about through Jesus Christ. The divine economy, then, is the story of human history told with specific reference to what God has done and is doing to redeem creatures. These acts are triune, for as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit enjoy a perfect immanent life, the Father sends the Son and the Spirit to impart that life to

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[35] Webster, "Biblical Reasoning," 117.

[36] Webster, *Holiness*, 40.

[37] John Webster, "The Holiness and Love of God," in *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 125. Emphasis added.

creatures who, once lost in sin, now find their identities in this grand drama. A simpler way to make this point is to say that the divine economy is the great story of the gospel.[38]

Of course, all of these details are by no means *obvious* to the observer of the events of history, even to the Christian who stands as a beneficiary of such divine gifts. At this point one must double back to Webster's virtue epistemology and note that viewing history as an economy is only possible when one approaches it with the requisite epistemic virtues. Yet one must also attend to divine revelation. Webster's theology of revelation is nuanced and demands a treatment of its own. We can rest satisfied with connecting it to his broader theology of divine action. For Webster, revelation *just is*, in its most basic description, divine action. "Revelation is nothing other than the history of God's covenant with humanity in its own intrinsic perspicuity. God's actions are such that they draw us into the knowledge of God…Revelation is the eloquence of divine action."[39] This is not a far cry from our considerations thus far. If certain characteristic actions performed by an agent indicate something about that agent, it is conceivable to say that those actions are *revelatory* of that agent. Thus, God is revealed by the actions God performs. This is centralized, moreover, in Holy Scripture, for "the revelatory presence of God is *set forth in Holy Scripture*."[40] God has acted to inspire Scripture in an effort to perform revelatory

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[38] On this, see John Webster, "What Is the Gospel?," in *Grace and Truth in the Secular Age*, ed. Timothy Bradshaw (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 109–18. Note how seeing the economy in this way requires a much more expansive understanding of the gospel than one commonly encounters in contemporary theology and churches. The gospel is not *merely* the forgiveness of sins (though it certainly *includes* that!) but is rather the full record of the dealings of God with humanity.

[39] Webster, *The Culture of Theology*, 121. See also *Holy Scripture*, 13: "Revelation…is a way of talking about those *acts* in which God makes himself present" (emphasis added). In the that same paragraph, Webster cites Barth as saying that revelation is "divine presence."

[40] Webster, *Holiness*, 17. Emphasis original. Divine revelation is not *identical* to Scripture for Webster, for God can be revealed to individuals, say, in a dream. But Scripture is the primary and most authoritative locus of divine revelation, the source to which theologians turn in order to go about their business. For no other reason, this is because it is the appointed means by which we learn about the economy.

communicative actions. What we have in Scripture, then, is the norming norm of theology, that which provides theology with its subject matter *precisely because it reveals God and the divine economy*. Holy Scripture, then, is not a mere repository of facts, but something which, when read with the right Spirit-produced virtues, enables the reader to encounter God. Thus, Scripture *discloses* the divine economy *and* plays a pivotal role within it.

The task of the theologian is thereby transformed on account of the fact that it has a *shape* to which it is accountable. It is not merely the creative assembling of facts into interesting bricolage, but something to which the theologian must first listen before she can speak.[41] This means that one of the "main tasks of theology is to exemplify and promote close and delighted reading of Holy Scripture as the *viva vox Dei*, the voice of the risen Jesus to his community," indeed that "the theologian's occupation is primarily exegetical and that the necessary concern with other business is only derivative or by extension."[42] Yet, we must not mistake Webster for an advocate of a certain kind of wooden exegesis from which it is very difficult to extract theological claims, the kind of exegesis concerned exclusively or mainly with the historical background of the text being studied. Webster was a proponent of *theological* interpretation, though he was not given the time to specify his own brand of approach.[43] We may assume that it involves careful attention to the way figures of the Christian past exposited Scripture,[44] as well as

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[41] For a powerful articulation of this point, see John Webster, "Article Review: David F. Ford, Self and Salvation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54, no. 4 (2001): 548–59, especially 551.

[42] Webster, *The Culture of Theology*, 64-65.

[43] For statements of theological interpretation indebted to and influenced by Webster, see Darren Sarisky, *Reading the Bible Theologically* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019) and Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

[44] On this, see John Webster, "Theologies of Retrieval," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 583–99.

attention to cultivating readerly virtues. Yet, I maintain that Webster's central devotion to theological interpretation is marked out by a commitment to seeing the way a particular claim is *situated* within the divine economy.[45] But what does it mean to situate something within the divine economy? Here we must move beyond Webster to develop in a little more detail the exegetical task of the theologian.

We might consider the relationship between Scripture and a particular theological claim as occupying one of three levels, where that relationship is one where Scripture *validates* the claim. At its most basic level, a claim may be a mere translation of Scripture; one may argue for the view that God is love simply by citing 1 John 4:8, a passage which effectively says in the same words the claim being argued. This level of relation is very rare indeed, for theologians are often more interested in making claims of a more complex nature. At a second level, then, a claim may be *entailed* by Scripture, where a claim is entailed by supporting premises if it follows *necessarily* from those premises. It may be argued that the existence of God is one such claim; though no one Scripture passage says, *verbatim*, "God exists," if what Scripture has to say about God is true, then it necessarily follows that God exists. At a third level a particular claim may be neither a mere translation of a biblical passage nor a necessary entailment of Scriptural teaching but may be *inductively* related to Scripture. The options available here are more expansive and open to negotiation and debate, but examples include the way that a particular claim is *most fitting* with respect to the breadth of biblical teaching, or how it has the greatest explanatory scope, or that it does the most adequate job of accounting for the entirety of the canon, or that it is most sensitive to the narrative progression of Scripture. The list can go on, and it is

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[45] This is clearest in his dogmatic discussion of Holy Scripture. When one considers the reader of Scripture, one must always keep in mind that she is "located within the economy grace" (*Holy Scripture*, 123).

determined, of course, by one's ontology of Scripture. If Scripture is believed to be a book like any other book, then one's exegetical principles will be drawn in a general way; but if Scripture is believed to have some property that renders it unique (say, inspiration, a locus of divine encounter or a role in God's economy), then one's exegesis must be flexible enough to give sufficient relief to that property. However one construes it, it is at this third level that it becomes difficult to obtain Scriptural validation, but it is also where the canny theologian is able to display her craft. Here, ultimately, one is able to situate a claim within the divine economy. A claim is validated Scripturally when it recognizes its place in the economy and displays sensitivity to the scope and canon of Scripture.[46]

All of this counts as exegesis, and though Webster did not present his preferred exegetical method in just this way, I suggest that it is a particularly helpful heuristic for understanding how a claim may be situated in the divine economy, particularly when the divine economy is disclosed in the canonical text of Scripture. "Situating" something there is neither a matter of translation nor entailment, but it is a matter of taking the whole breadth of the economy and seeing the way it implicates the subject matter in question. This will differ, I believe, depending on what claim or claims the theologian is considering for validation. I am concerned, however, with how views about human personhood, particularly human *genders*, are situated in the divine economy. This will require its own considerations about how best to be situated in the economy, considerations likely unique to theological anthropology. We will turn to that next, but allow me first to summarize. A minimally theological account requires, recall, (a) ontological commitment to a narrative and (b) some account of the truth of that to which one is ontologically

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[46] I have attempted to elucidate this view in much more detail in Fellipe do Vale, "On Thomas Aquinas's Rejection of an 'Incarnation Anyway,'" *TheoLogica* 3, no. 1 (2019): 152-57.

committed. All theology, if it is to merit the title, must meet these criteria. Maximally theological accounts, however, make claims about what it means to do theology *well* or *properly* by specifying the nature of the narrative and its truthmakers. Webster's account is one such account (though, of course, there are others). On his view, (a) the narrative in question is the divine economy, revealed through God's triune missions in their appropriated divine actions, by means of which God reconciles lost creatures back to their true Source and End in God; and (b) the truthmakers of that narrative are the divine actions themselves, such that a defeater to the possibility of divine action would constitute a defeater to theological theology itself.[47] With that established, we have an answer to first of our three questions from the introduction, namely, what it is for something to be treated theologically.

1.3 Theologically Theological Anthropology and Theologies of Gender

With what has already been established, the pieces are largely in place for understanding what it would take to address human persons and their genders theologically, namely, *situate* them in the divine economy to see how the litany of divine actions disclosed by the gospel gives them their distinctive character. In the amount of writing that Webster did devote to theological anthropology, it was precisely this for which he advocated:

> The task of Christian theological anthropology is to depict evangelical (that is, Gospel-constituted) humanism. It aims to display the vision of human identity and flourishing which is ingredient within the Gospel's announcement that, in the being, action, and speech of Jesus Christ, the crucified who is now alive and present in the Spirit's power, the good purposes of God the Father for his human creation are established and their completion is promised. Christian theological anthropology offers a portrayal of the nature and destiny of humankind by explicating the Gospel's disclosure of the works and ways of the triune God…the context in which a theology oriented to the Christian

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[47] On this front, Webster's vision of systematic theology is remarkably similar to that of William Abraham. See William J. Abraham, *Divine Agency and Divine Action, Vol. 1: Exploring and Evaluating the Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 32: "The deep and abiding significance of divine action in the Christian tradition is made visible in this: when its central claims about divine action are attacked from within, the whole tradition is in deep trouble. Divine action cannot be confined to the mighty acts of God in history; but if even these are undermined the very future of Christianity is at stake."

confession pursues its interpretation of human nature and destiny is a consideration of the economy of grace. What it means to be human can only be grasped in its full scope and integrity on the basis of a depiction of the gracious work of God, Father, Son, and Spirit, in his saving self-communication with us.[48]

Notice the emphases of this exhortation. Theological anthropology, the theological discussion of human persons, is to have as its focus the ways in which the gospel casts light upon what it means to be and flourish as a human. The means of doing so will make references to the "works and ways" of the triune God, that is, to divine action. This is what it means for humanity to be situated in the "context" of the economy of grace. To think theologically about human personhood (and gender) is to see the ways in which they are implicated by the divine economy.

As an overall view of what must be done, these statements suffice, but more must be said if we are to arrive at a suitable position for thinking about gender theologically. I shall now argue that it follows from the above considerations, particularly about exegesis as "situating" a claim in the economy, that theological considerations of human nature and their particularities must be *narratively-indexed*, that is, humans have the properties they have in virtue of occupying a certain stage of the economy. We should generally be cautious of statements regarding human nature *simpliciter*, for it may turn out that the properties predicated of human natures are in point of fact mistaken or isolable to only one moment of the divine economy but not others. I have not met a human being who is not also a sinner, but it would be a mistake to conclude from this that human nature is sinful. It is no part of the *definition* of what means to be a human that one is sinful; instead, the state of sin is a *universal* property shared by all humanity (exempting Christ and the saints in glory) downstream of the Fall. Instead of broad-sweeping anthropological

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[48] Webster, "The Human Person," 219, 224. For an extension of this claim, see Michael Allen, "Toward Theological Anthropology: Tracing the Anthropological Principles of John Webster," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 19, no. 1 (January 2017): 6–29.

claims, we should commit ourselves to two principles. First, human persons have the properties they have in virtue of occupying one particular place in the economy or another. Specifying the moments of the economy will in turn detail what is most salient about humans at each stage. Beth Felker Jones has recently articulated this insight well: "no statement…on the body can ever be taken at face value without first understanding the place of that statement in God's work of salvation. Are we speaking of the body of Adam, good but able to sin? Are we speaking of the fallen body, plagued by the mutability which will bring it death? Are we speaking of the risen body, blessedly unable to do other than reflect the glory of God?"[49] Second, it is only with the *entire economy* in view that we can say with clarity just what is *natural* to humanity and not merely presently universal. Sin once again serves as a fitting example; it is only by recognizing that creation was good and without sin and that one day there will exist humans in the new heaven and earth who know no sin that we can say that it is perfectly possible to be human and to be without sin. Oliver O'Donovan, whose methodological impulses mirror Webster's in significant respects, has warned against relegating the consideration of moral issues, including issues surrounding human nature, to only one moment of the economy: "The conclusion we should draw is that the organization of ethics into creation, reconciliation and eschaton cannot provide a self-evident principle for arranging the *specific* subject areas that ethics interests itself in. It was a mistake to think that everything that needed to be said about human society could be included under the doctrine of reconciliation. *Each area has to be given, as it were, a salvation-history of its own*."[50] Issues regarding human nature and gender will not be settled merely by

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[49] Jones, *Marks of His Wounds*, 36.

[50] Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), xvii. Final emphasis is mine.

attending to, say, creation. Doing so will prove too myopic an approach, for it may grant too dignified a status to non-natural properties or fail to account for the complex way human nature is experienced in reaction to the reconciling and perfecting acts of God. What is required is attention to the full scope of the divine economy with respect to humanity, maintaining an eye on the way God transforms human beings along the way to salvation. Taking these two principles together results in a view in which gender must be run through the full economy to achieve a proper theological understanding.

None of this is to deny that there is such a thing as human nature.[51] I will be addressing that kind of view in the next chapter, and it will be seen to have problems of its own, problems whose faults warrant rejection on Christian theological grounds. What I am attempting to argue is that our views about human nature must be seen as a direct result of considerations about the divine economy. In fact, Webster's own attempts to situate humanity in the divine economy *require* the positing of a human nature and human ends, but for reasons unique to the economy. Theological anthropology operates within "the framework of an account of the drama of *human nature*, origin and destiny, a drama presided over by the triune God who will bring it to its consummation at the appearing of the Lord Jesus."[52] This framework, continues Webster, requires the theologian to posit at least two constitutive components of what it means to be human. She will affirm the existence of a distinctively human *end* and a distinctively human *nature*. Her reasons for doing so will nonetheless be drawn from theological considerations, and this will prove to be valuable for guiding theological thought about gender.

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[51] Neither is it to say that there can be no *natural* knowledge of human natures, where natural is knowledge is acquired by means separate from divine revelation. My claim is rather that we ought to be careful with such claims, because their epistemic footing is far less secure.

[52] Webster, "Eschatology, Anthropology and Postmodernity," 27. Emphasis added.

First, situating human personhood within the economy requires the affirmation of a uniquely human end or telos, a commitment strongly required by a proper understanding of Christian eschatology. Eschatology consists in the details of that final stage of the economy, and whatever else is involved in those details, Christians confess that this is when human beings will finally be complete. There will no longer be any tears for they will be wiped away (Rev. 21:4); we shall finally be united to God in a way unhindered by sin (1 John 3:2). Under the influence of such texts, many Christians have argued that this eschatological state will comprise of the beatific vision, or perhaps something like deification. However we prefer to construe these details, Webster maintains a firm link between this state and the final end or purpose of human persons: "I want to suggest that there is a strong connection between Christian eschatology and a certain understanding of the human person, and that the severing of that link by proposing strictly non-teleological anthropology does severe damage to our understanding as moral and political agents."[53] Whatever Christian eschatology amounts to will constitute the fulfillment or good of humanity. The proper understanding of eschatology, then, requires the strong affirmation of a uniquely human teleology, otherwise the promises fulfilled at the final stage of the economy will lose their intelligibility and worth.

From this it follows, second, that there is a distinct human nature. Webster clearly maintains that if there is a uniquely human end or telos, there must also be a uniquely human nature to which that end corresponds: "Christian theology cannot but affirm the necessity of speaking of human 'nature.' To be human is to be a particular *kind* of being, one who has a certain kind of (extraordinarily complex, mobile and malleable but nevertheless distinct and

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[53] Webster, "Eschatology, Anthropology and Postmodernity," 25.

determinate) identity."[54] I take it that he means to adopt the following fairly standard

metaphysical picture (though he may not have put it in quite these terms). First, one helpful way

to classify all that exists is to attribute to them natures, understood as "kind essences."[55] Kind

essences list the properties the bearing of which constitute necessary and jointly sufficient

conditions for being a member of a certain kind. Thus, being a member of the kind "cat" requires

that thing to be, say, a four-legged furry feline. Bearing these properties means membership in

the kind, and membership in that kind means having that nature.[56] There is a human kind, and

those who bear the properties necessary and jointly sufficient for being human are members of

the human kind, and by extension, have a human nature. In order to bear these properties,

however, one must first be the kind of thing that can bear properties; these are substances.[57]

Substances bear properties; certain of these properties are necessary and jointly sufficient for

being a member of a certain kind; bearing the properties relevant for humanity means that a

substance has a human nature.

All of this may at first seem only vaguely relevant to theological work and maybe even

more remote from the divine economy. But it is not. That is because among the properties

requisite for a human nature is the possession of the distinctively human end that constitutes

humanity's perfection or flourishing (an end that is required and defined by Christian

eschatology). If there is no such thing to which we can attribute certain distinctively human

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[54] Webster, "The Human Person," 226. Emphasis added.

[55] For kind essences in theology see Oliver D. Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity: The Incarnation Reconsidered*, Current Issues in Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 41; see also Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 39.

[56] A further requirement may be that the kind in question be a "natural kind."

[57] Thus Webster: "the concept of 'substance' is central to an elaboration of a theological anthropology" ("The Human Person," 34).

properties, then we cannot reasonably speak of the goods proper to that thing (especially if there is nothing that makes one distinctively human). But this is *precisely* what the gospel does. It picks out a particular kind of being who, having been created in the image of God, has been alienated from that God by sin. It tells the story of the divine actions necessary for the reconciliation of those beings. It concludes with an account of how complete reconciliation is what is truly best for those beings, what it means for those beings to be truly complete. Without human natures and ends, this cannot be confessed. In order to understand how God has acted to redeem humanity and granted them a superlative hope, we must say that this hope is distinctly suited to humans. For that, we need a human nature.

There are noticeably different motivations at play for positing a human nature and telos than is typically encountered in feminist theory and theology. Feminist theology has *rightly* been concerned to point out how discussion of human natures is weaponized to oppress women. What has happened far too often is that the conditions for being human are infiltrated with conditions which go on to harm women. Certain traits are prized above others, and these traits are often thought to be exemplified by men (such as rationality and ambition). The result is that men come out appearing more excellently human than women. This is abject and should be corrected.[58] It does *not* mean, however, that talk of natures is rendered bankrupt. It *does* reveal the constant corrigibility of our understandings of human nature as well as the sinful motivations which produced such pernicious understandings of humanity. My view is not meant to encourage any such thing for the simple reason that it does not claim the authority to fabricate statements about what it takes to be human. A theological account of human nature must be derived from and held

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[58] This is also the line of reasoning which has resulted in feminist theology broadly rejecting biological essentialism.

accountable to the divine economy. It must be held accountable to *God*, that is. If it can be

demonstrated that a particular understanding of human nature is facilitating systemic trauma to

significant swaths of its participants, then that construal must be abandoned, for it could not be

from God, for God is not a God of unjust harm and evil (cf. Amos 5:24).

Where does this leave us with our original question? How can one give a theological

account not just of anything at all, not just of human persons, but of *gender*? It will be the task of

the remainder of this project to give an adequate answer. I will propose a view of the ontology of

gender, motivated by reflections on what God has done, and then to see the ways in which this

construal of the ontology of gender is given shape in the different moments of the divine

economy. For the fuller details of this view the reader will have to continue on to the following

chapters. I realize, however, that the standards I have set for myself may appear too lofty and that

no reasonable theologian interested in gender has or will attain to such criteria. Am I simply

requiring that all theologians follow my self-appointed lead? In an effort to circumvent such an

objection, allow me to recall the new generation of theologians who are articulating theological

accounts of gender which move beyond the bifurcations I posited. These theologians, it seems to

me, are doing something not dissimilar from Theological Theology, especially to the extent that

they aware of situating gender in the economy. Thus, Sarah Coakley sees the way beyond the

simple alternatives of secular gender theory and unreflective Christian positions as making

recourse to the "theological concepts of creation, fall, and redemption which place the

performances of gender in a spectrum of existential possibilities *between* despair and hope. What

one might call the fallen, 'worldly' view of gender relations is open to the future, and to change;

it is set in an unfolding, diachronic narrative both of individual spiritual maturation and of

societal transformation."[59] It is by situating claims about gender within this unfolding narrative, claims Coakley, that one is able to see beyond the simplistic articulations of gender provided by current theories to a more theologically helpful vista. Beth Felker Jones advocates for precisely the same move. She attempts to "place gender and sexuality in theological context by thinking about them in relationship to the big-picture biblical arch from creation to redemption…We're not just left in the lurch, for God has chosen to reveal his goodness to us…Thinking about sex [and] gender in light of creation, fall, and redemption points us toward a hopeful vision of our bodies as witnesses to the God who is love."[60] Finally, in her monograph on theologies of gender, Janice McRandal affirms: "Christian doctrine tells a particular story of God, a God who creates and redeems, and I will argue that this story can inform a contemporary discourse about difference, and can reframe theoretical questions for a contemporary feminist theology…within a Christian systematic theology the subject always and only ever subsists insofar as it is located in the movement of the divine economy. The subject is sustained by, drawn into, and lovingly transgressed by the Triune life."[61] All three of these feminist theologians have sought the solution for the apparently rigid divisions surrounding gender in the "works and ways of the Triune God," for it is by seeing what God has done and the structure of such deeds that one is able to see gender more clearly.[62]

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[59] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 53-54.

[60] Beth Felker Jones, "Embodied from Creation Through Redemption: Placing Gender and Sexuality in Theological Context," in *Beauty, Order, and Mystery: A Christian Vision of Human Sexuality*, ed. Gerald L. Hiestand and Todd A. Wilson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 21.

[61] Janice McRandal, *Christian Doctrine and the Grammar of Difference: A Contribution to Feminist Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 17, 175.

[62] See further Jana Marguerite Bennett, "Telling the Old Story in Gendered Keys: The Theological Revivals of Katherine Sonderegger, Kathryn Tanner, and Sarah Coakley," *Anglican Theological Review* 101, no. 2 (2019): 277–88. Bennett's focus is on the theological revival represented by the figures in her title, theologians who I self-consciously will follow in this work. Her analysis is that what unifies the efforts of these figures and has made them so appealing is the fact that "we live in a time and place where big stories of God, as depicted in these systematic

This is not to say that the adoption of this method will yield exactly the same conclusions about gender's ontology or any other gendered issue. I have significant reservations, for instance, with McRandal's proposal, particularly her dissolution of the concept of gender into that of "difference." "Difference," though popularly used in feminist theory and theology, is not itself sufficiently informative to be evaluated on its own terms. The *kind* of difference in question, it seems to me, is important, and some instances of difference will be good (the difference between creature and Creator, in my view) and others will be evil (the differences that motivate racist institutions). It is not enough to inspect "difference" on its face, but the relata being differentiated must be evaluated case by case. The same goes for "binaries," a term McRandal takes to be roughly equivalent to "difference." Some of these will be helpful and true, others will not. Her failure to recognize this reveals an important weakness in her book, yet I find it to be an entirely commendable project in the *way* it attempts to consider difference and gender. The method is difficult to distinguish from what I employ in the remainder of this work, even if the conclusions will be very different.

My theological account of gender will unfold as follows. In chapter two I will offer an explication and analysis of the most prominent view regarding gender's basic properties, namely, that it is a social construct. It will begin with a historical overview of its development and a consideration of the views two of its main proponents, Sally Haslanger (a philosopher) and Katheryn Tanner (a theologian). With an understanding of the claims being made, I will then raise two kinds of objections. First, if gender is a social construct, then the issue of "commonality" is unavoidable. Since social constructs are always context-bound, there is

theologies, are crucial…proper attention to gender concerns will require not piecemeal essays, but rather telling the whole wonderful story of salvation—the 'old, old story'—yet again, with new tones" (278).

nothing women and men from different times and cultures share in common. That means that there are no women and men as such, only women and men specific to particular times and places. This would undercut much feminist theory and theology. A second objection follows from the first. If we cannot speak of genders that are identifiable across times and places, then the moral norms employed for evaluating good and bad instances of gender are also context specific. Societies could not be evaluated *qua* gender as a result. We could not speak of things like gender-based violence or women's rights, for it could be that the characteristics against which rights are asserted or that promote gender-based violence could part of society's expectations for that gender. The result would be an inability to ground the necessary critique of gendered injustice witnessed in the world. I finally consider the more revisionist claim that it is not only gender but also *sex* that is socially constructed, famously put forward by Judith Butler.

Chapter three offers my alternative. Though I reject the social construction of gender, I do not simply revert to a simple biological essentialism instead. From a reading of two theorists who are attempting to move beyond the social/natural bifurcation, namely Charlotte Witt and Mari Mikkola, I derive four theses that serve as an initial step toward a salutary ontology of gender. They are:

1. Gender is an essence, though this is not reducible to or identical with biological determinism or biological essentialism.
2. The complexity of gender, the noetic effects of sin and the current conditions of oppression complicate our epistemic access to gender's essence. All the same, we can be assured that gender will be fully known in the eschaton.
3. Any theory or theology of gender must be consistent with and supportive of the cultivation of justice.
4. Gender is concerned with selves or identity and the way selves organize social goods pertaining to their sexed bodies.

The remainder of the chapter is dedicated to proffering theological warrants for each of these theses, with special attention being given to some *exegetical* reasons to maintain them.

The fourth thesis provides the basis from which chapter four proceeds. If gender is concerned with who we are and the way we organize social goods pertaining to our sexed bodies, and if this happens in a way that is social (but not socially constructed) and natural (but not biologically essentialist), then some account of what it means to bear an identity that adequately takes into consideration these features is necessary. I put forward St. Augustine's theology of human love as a prime candidate. For Augustine, human beings are what they love. This is true because of their creation, making them *naturally* lovers, but also motivates and shapes the character of social living. With Augustine's help, a theological account of humanity comes into view, one that is of immediate help in developing a view of gender that avoids the false dichotomies described above. The basic Augustinian point I hope to raise is this: since our identities are defined by our objects of love, then our *gendered* identities are defined by our objects of *gendered* love. For Augustine, this is no simple call to love aimlessly, for all love has its source and culmination in God, and the qualities of our loves must be evaluated according to their ability to be found in God.

Chapter five introduces the argumentative core of the project, for it is here that the pieces introduced in the previous chapters are assembled into a constructive proposal. I begin with a presentation of the theology of gender put forward Sarah Coakley, for it bears a remarkable resemblance to the one I will defend. She argues that gender is fundamentally a *desire*, one which is caught up in the nexus of human and divine desires transformed by prayer and redeemed according to the Triune divine economy. I think this is a suggestive position, yet it requires several modifications to succeed. I shall argue that "desire" is far too conceptually thin to accommodate a full-fledged theology of gender. My aim will be to bring forward some critiques raised by philosopher Harry Frankfurt on the nature of desire, replacing Coakley's

understanding of it with my account of love expatiated in the previous chapter. Doing so reveals that gender is both natural and social, having a foot in who we are as sexed beings and a foot in who we are as social creatures. I support this view with a theological reading of the Song of Songs and conclude by showing that it is able to handle concrete questions about gender in society.

In the sixth and final chapter I shall attempt to meet the requirements specified in this chapter by attempting to situate gender within the divine economy. I shall cover creation, fall, redemption and consummation, with these categories serving as a helpful and familiar heuristic for the biblical storyline. I will keep a close eye on the different ways gendered love manifests itself in these moments, striving to highlight the way it is implicated by what God is doing at each point. Created genders will be seen as good and properly functioning, set on a path toward eschatological completion. Fallen genders are those produced by those sinful loves which bring lovers to dominate the beloved. Redeemed genders participate in the grace of Christ, thereby losing the attributions of worth usually associated with social capital. In the community shaped by grace, gender matters cannot serve as standard for worth. When gender is consummated, we will finally experience what we were meant to be as women and men, without the painful tinge of sin. At each stage, I consider salient case studies regarding gender. In creation, I consider how intersex individuals (or individuals who have a Disorder of Sexual Development or "DSD") can understand the goodness of their sex. In the fall, I turn to sexual assault and rape as paradigmatic instances of gendered sin, but in the harm caused to the assaulted and the sinful motives of the assailant. In redemption, I explore how grace can be a consolation to those who have experienced great shame and worthlessness due to a gender-related incident (including intersex/DSD individuals and victims of sexual assault). Finally, I explore how our hopes for

gendered justice are fulfilled in the consummation of all things, granting to us a way to imagine

the way things are not yet the way they are supposed to be.

In closing, I have sought so far to elucidate a view about what it means to treat gender

theologically. It is *gender* we are treating, so it will not do to ignore the questions and categories

raised by such a vital topic. But it is also *theology* we are doing, so it is equally pernicious to

discard the tools and sources suited for inquiring about God and all things in relation to God. Far

too much theology has ignored gender and far too many thinkers concerned with gender have

been inhospitable to theology. But this need not be the case. The gospel of the triune God is

sufficient, I believe, to guide our thinking about the most vexing of issues, and the Christian

theologian can be confident of this. She can, ultimately, apply Nicholas Wolterstorff's final

commendations to her thoughts on gender:

> To my young grad students who aim to become theologians I say, with all the emphasis I can muster: *be theologians*. Do not be ersatz philosophers, do not be ersatz cultural theorists, do not be ersatz anything. Be genuine theologians. Be sure-footed in philosophy, sure-footed in cultural theory, and the like. And struggle to find a voice that can be heard, if not agreed with, not just by theologians but others as well. But then: be theologians. There will be cultural theorists around to tell us how things look from their perspective; there will be sociologists around to tell us how things look from their perspective. What we need to hear from you is how things look when seen in the light of the triune God—may his name be praised!—who creates and sustains us, who redeems us, and who will bring this frail and fallen, though yet glorious, humanity and cosmos to consummation.[63]

Let us turn to doing so now.

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[63] Wolterstorff, "To Theologians," 91-92. Emphasis original.

CHAPTER 2
UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

My aim in this chapter will be to explore the claim that gender is a social construct. Among those who write about gender in the academy, this is the view that predominates, so it merits careful attention. I shall begin with some contextualizing comments about what intuitions, motivations and arguments underpin the wide acceptance the view has generated. From there, I shall turn to an exposition of what it means to say that gender is a social construct, beginning with a historical overview of significant figures who have contributed to the view's basic tenets and ending with contemporary philosophical and theological attempts on how best to understand it. That will be followed by a set of objections, which I take to be sufficient to consider it an untenable view. I shall conclude by considering the promise of claiming that sex as well as gender is socially constructed. In the end, this too will be shown to be indefensible and theologically unviable. My conclusion will be that social construction should not be the view championed by theologians who want to account for gender, but neither are they forced into a simplistic biological essentialism as the only alternative.

2.1 Contextualizing the View

When my wife and I found out from our doctor that we were having a daughter, we kept the sex of our baby a secret shared only between the two of us. We enjoyed having something only we knew about and it allowed us to paint a more defined mental picture of our anticipated daughter. With such a decision, however, came a complication: how were our loved ones to

purchase gifts for us when they did not know the sex of the child? Initially, we did not realize this would prove to be an obstacle. When we did, my wife and I attempted to work our way around it in various ways; we recommended gender-neutral colors and items, but even this did not quite work. Even the most banal of items, like baby socks, proved to be gendered in some respect—*these* were boy socks, and *these* were girl socks, though it was beyond us in virtue of what each was what it was (they were both white, after all!). In the end, our friends and family were able to find gifts, but when my daughter was born, much of what she had to wear was not *obviously* gender-specific. So when we went out, those who encountered us could not tell if she was a little boy or a little girl (where is the pink? where are the sports figures?). Most of the time, we were told that we had a lovely little boy.

This short anecdote is not particularly shocking or unique, but it helpfully illustrates something that many contemporary theologians and theorists consider to be sufficient to show that gender is a social construct. Whether my daughter was going to be perceived as a boy or a girl depended on our ability to find the right social cues for others to recognize. The question of what kind of body she had was something we found out from the doctor (though even that has been argued to constitute an important part of social construction), but the question of whether she was recognized as a boy or a girl was entirely reducible to her ability to fit within categories defined by certain social rules and not others. If she was going to be a girl, she needed to have pink clothing, for instance; our failure to clothe her accordingly only revealed and strengthened the social conditions required for one's gender. At least that is how the thinking typically goes.

These sorts of scenarios pump the intuitions of many who hold that gender is a social construct. The Icelandic philosopher Ásta formalizes the intuition in the following way: "if a property chiefly figures in explanations of social facts, and not natural facts, that suggests that

the property is a social property, and not a natural property…one should consider in what kinds of explanations the property occurs."[1] Being a girl, on the example above, is indicated by wearing certain types of clothes and not others. Wearing clothes that are of one type or another is, of course, a social fact. So, being a girl must be a social property. It is because of these considerations that the view that gender is a social construct is simply *intuitive* for many. It may be anchored to some other non-social property, like the sex recognized on an ultrasound, but it is no less social considered on its own. As a result, *whether* gender is socially constructed is a foregone conclusion in many circles. Kate Bornstein's popular work, among many others, testifies to this: "There's a…simple way to look at gender. Once upon a time, someone drew a line in the sands for a culture and proclaimed…'On this side, you are a man; on the other side you are a woman.'"[2] That, anyway, gives one a clue about the predominance, indeed the canonical status, of the view. It appears that it is simply assumed that if gender is recognized as *social* in a basic sense, then it must be socially *constructed* more specifically.

If one looks more closely, one also finds that supporting these intuitions are a series of other motivations and arguments. One common motivation is generated by the popular trend within the contemporary academy, and to an extent modern culture, to say that human nature is in some sense *plastic*, *mutable*, *unstable* or something along those same lines. Indeed, it is not too controversial to say that belief in the existence of a human nature is declining, and many who deny its existence are motivated to opt for some variety of social construction instead, whether it is social construction about particular artifacts (like natures) or about all of reality (often called

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[1] Ásta, *Categories We Live By: The Construction of Sex, Gender, Race, and Other Social Categories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 70–71. The distinction between "natural" and "social" will be an important one to keep in mind.

[2] Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 22.

"creative anti-realism"). The social construction of gender fits nicely within this broad scholarly movement (though it does not necessarily require it), for it is a view that challenges the assumption that gender is something natural to a person, and the whole point of asserting the plasticity of human nature is to challenge assumptions of this kind.

This leads to a second motivation many have for affirming the social construction gender, namely, its ability to challenge oppressive social structures. When social constructionist claims operate in this way, they have been said to be partaking in a "debunking project." The basic process involved in debunking something is this: take a trait most people consider to be defined according to a natural property, or an otherwise stable and unchangeable property. If it can be shown that this property is in point of fact *not* natural or otherwise stable, then it casts into considerable doubt whether this property is accurate as the defining feature of the category under consideration. Thus Sally Haslanger states: "This project of challenging the purported truth conditions for the application of a concept I call a 'debunking' project. A debunking project typically attempts to show that a category or classification scheme that appears to rack a group of individuals defined by a set of physical or metaphysical conditions is better understood as capturing a group that occupies a certain (usually 'thick') social position."[3] Once the property is debunked, the category can be done away with, or perhaps heavily revised. This is desirable because many of these categories have been shown to be oppressive, and social construction can be a tool used for debunking oppressive construals of gender, particularly ones that serve to disfavor women. For this reason, the social construction of gender is a view seen to have *political* benefits, the view being a powerful instrument for challenging oppression.

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[3] Sally Haslanger, *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 132. For Haslanger, a "thick" social position is a position one holds in society with the ability to empower or disempower the continued performance of the individual holding the position.

These, strictly speaking, are not *arguments* for the view that gender is socially

constructed but rather *motivations* that support a common intuition. That being said, arguments

for the view do exist, and there are three basic types.[4] The first is an argument from *exclusion*:

when the category "woman," so the argument goes, is under consideration, it is far too often the

case that what one has in mind is a particular *class* of women, usually mirroring that of the

person making the argument. The danger is that if the operative concept for a particular gender is

restricted only to a sub-section of persons of that gender, those who stand outside of that sub-

section will be excluded as proper members of that gender. The famous example of this is found

in early feminist theories, which were alleged to be restrictively white and suited for women of a

certain economic standing. When thinking of women's rights, then, the danger arose that those

rights would not extend to, say, economically poor black women. In the words of Elizabeth

Spelman, who provided one of the most influential articulations of this argument, "the real

problem has been how feminist theory has confused the condition of one group of women with

the condition of all."[5] The argument from exclusion is likely the most common and persuasive

one in the literature, and we shall have recourse to return to it later. The basic idea is that once

one realizes that it is *social* factors which provide the criteria for exclusion, one begins to see the

ways in which the conditions for being of a certain gender are deeply embroiled in social factors.

The second and third arguments for this view are not as common but are nonetheless

present in the literature. There is the argument from *the instability of language*, according to

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[4] I borrow this classification from Charlotte Witt, "Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Theory," *Philosophical Topics* 23, no. 2 (1995): 321–44.

[5] Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), 4. Of course, it was the experience of exclusion that led to the rise of *womanist* theory and theology, one of the main figureheads of this movement being Alice Walker. In theology, the work of Delores Williams stands out as having great priority on this point.

which all of the basic categories which structure human life are necessarily linguistic, making them both social (since language is a social construct) and unstable (since language is understood to be an unstable reality).[6] If that is so, then gender (surely a category of human life) is unstably socially constructed. Finally, there is the argument from *power*, which finds its inspiration in the work of Nietzsche, Derrida and Foucault and has Judith Butler as its best contemporary defender. We will consider the views of Butler specifically at the end of this chapter, but the basic idea is that gender categories emerge from a web of power relations and these thinkers expose this web as deeply socially contingent. Taken together, these three represent the most commonly found arguments for the social construction of gender in the literature.

There are, then, some diverse motivations and arguments for thinking that gender is a social construct, motivations that empower the intuitions many already hold about the matter. If one has an intuition that gender is socially constructed on the basis of scenarios like the one I mentioned at the outset of this section, then the motivations and arguments listed here give theoretical and political heft to the position. Yet, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, I do not think that gender is a social construct. Nor do I think that it is a mere component of a biological essence. I think such a simplistic bifurcation is problematic. Still, this does not prevent me from seeing the purchase, both argumentative and intuitive, of the considerations just mentioned. It is highly counterintuitive to think that there is nothing *social* about gender,[7] and I find the argument from exclusion to be particularly powerful and far-reaching. Debunking putatively natural categories is also critical, though I think that this is best done on epistemic rather than

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[6] See Witt, "Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Theory," 330–334 for an analysis and critique of arguments such as these. She takes the work of Drucilla Cornell to be representative of such views.

[7] Though that does not of itself yield the conclusion that gender is socially *constructed*, especially if it can be shown (like I plan to do in the following chapter) that there are more ways of bearing a social identity than through construction.

metaphysical grounds.[8] So, though I will argue against the view that gender is socially

constructed by the end of this chapter, I should not be taken to be repudiating it altogether as

wholly untenable. In fact, some of its more redeemable features will be rehabilitated in the next

chapter. What is required, then, is an inquiry into whether social construction is the theory which

provides the most satisfying explanation for these intuitions, motivations and arguments. That

will require understanding the finer points of the view. What does it mean, therefore, to say that

gender is socially constructed?

2.2 The Metaphysics of the Social Construction of Gender

Three points must be noted at the outset if a clear account of the social construction of

gender is to be given. First, there is no *one* view about the social construction of gender. In

reality, it is a family of views clustered around some primary principles and convictions. There

are things common to all social construction theories, as I plan to show, but it would be culpably

reductionistic to say that there is just one way to think about it. This should suggest that at the

center of this cluster of views are varieties of social construction which make stronger claims

than the ones at the edges and that just outside of the cluster are views which *resemble* the social

construction of gender but are not construction views themselves. Recognizing this diversity is

the first step, I believe, in breaking the bifurcated deadlock between construction and essence.

Second, the social construction view is a *philosophical view*.[9] This is true even of those

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[8] See the previous chapter's section on "Theologically Theological Anthropology and Theologies of
Gender" for some of the reasons why. Basically, claims about what is natural to being human must go through heavy
contextualization in the divine economy before being accepted as such since human nature is always "narratively-
indexed."

[9] By calling it a "philosophical view," I intend a broad definition of philosophy similar to the one I
proposed about "metaphysics." Some of the figures I will consider would not like to be considered philosophers if
by "philosophy" we meant something like a discipline which has prized male perspectives and contributions. But, if
by "philosophy" we mean to say that these figures are undertaking an inquiry into the basic properties of those
things which inhabit our lives and worlds, then it should not be controversial to call them philosophical. Though

theologians who hold to it.[10] I say this not to deride it, not even as a reason to reject it. Rather, to say that gender is socially constructed is to make a statement about the fundamental makeup of an entity in our social world, something traditionally taken to be the task of philosophy, specifically, metaphysics. That means that this chapter will be more philosophical than the ones that will follow, because I believe that these views must be described and evaluated on their own intrinsic merits.[11] There are few theologians who have argued for the position in distinctly theological ways and we shall have reason to consider one of them in the later portions of this chapter. By and large, however, theologians *assume* this view is true on the purported philosophical basis it claims to have. That is not to say that there cannot be theological *reasons* for thinking that gender is socially constructed, but those reasons will not serve as an *explanation* of what means to hold the view. They will only be reasons for why we should (and alternatively, should not) prefer it.

Third, in virtually *all* social construction views, social construction is taken to be the direct and incompatible opposite of what is biological, natural or essential.[12] Sometimes, that is

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other disciplines, like sociology, have contributed to the discussion, it seems to me that the discussions therein take the form of social metaphysics.

[10] For substantiation of this, see Cynthia R. Nielsen and Michael Barnes Norton, "Contributions from Philosophy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. Adrien Thatcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 137–52. The entirety of this chapter is devoted to the philosophers who have given the social construction view its shape, such as Judith Butler and Linda Martín Alcoff, and it gives the impression that it was the distinct contribution of philosophy to provide theologians with the view.

[11] That is, my initial evaluation will be a species of what Jeffrey Stout calls "immanent criticism," according to which criticism of a view is done only by drawing on premises and concepts either inherent to the other's position or which the other person already finds true. See Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 73, for more details. I shall also offer non-immanent criticism, or reasons for rejecting social construction views that their adherents do not hold. These will be reasons from Christian theology, which not all proponents of social construction think are true. But since I see this work as benefiting body of Christ, these reasons remain relevant.

[12] Recall Ásta's distinction between "natural" explanations and "social" explanations in the first footnote; the distinction in that context is clearly between biological and non-biological properties.

because the terms are poorly defined and understood; nevertheless, this assumption is broadly held and creates one of our major bifurcations. But it rests on a fundamental mistake, namely, the identification of what is *biological* with what is *essential*. Charlotte Witt makes this point brilliantly: "although it is strictly speaking false to equate essentialism and biologism, biological descriptions are *one* way of specifying the essence of women, a way that has predominated in patriarchal thought both in the past and today…It is thus assumed that the thesis that gender is socially constructed, in itself, entails a rejection of essences."[13] To illustrate why biology should not be conflated with an essence, consider the example of the computer on which I type.[14] It is not a biological entity, on the common understanding of that term; indeed, it is a socially-constructed artifact. But does it have an essence? On one common definition of an essence, namely, the properties required for a thing to be the *kind* of thing that it is, the answer is yes. For my computer to be a computer, it must have the property of being able to, say, to process software. It is *essential* to its being a computer that it is able to perform such a function. If it cannot do that because it is broken, then we tend to think that it *should* be able to, given the kind of thing that it is. If it could not have processed software because it does not have the requisite parts (perhaps because it was made of cleverly decorated cardboard), then we would be justified in thinking that it was not a computer after all. This computer has an essence, part of which is its ability to process software. But it is not a biological entity, and so it would be mistaken to think that only biological entities have essences. Yet it has been the motivation of many social construction theories to deny the existence of essences on the basis of their social construction.

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[13] Witt, "Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Theory," 325.

[14] I modify the example Witt employs of a Coke machine in "Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Theory," 325–326.

That approach, however, is ill-fated, and realizing this begins to question the very foundation on which this debate was founded. In light of these three observations, let us turn to the finer points of the family of views by considering a historical overview.

2.2.1 Historical Overview: Three Central Figures

It is generally acknowledged that the social construction of gender, as we know it, emerged sometime in the 1960s and '70s during the second wave of feminism. The view is, in reality, a good deal older than that. Though it did not achieve the significance it has now, articulations of the view can be traced to the seventeenth century, as we will see. In this section, I will consider the views of three figures: François Poulain de la Barre (1647-1723), John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) and Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) to demonstrate the origins of thought about the social construction of gender.[15]

From our analysis, a few observations will arise. First, as mentioned previously, the motivations for putting forth the view are philosophical, and if effort on the part of authors is made to be in conversation with theology, it is only typically to show its compatibility with Christian thought. Second, it arises from deep concerns for justice and equality for women and is thus a view which is coterminous with the origins of feminist reasoning. Third, all three figures argued for the social construction of gender on the basis of our epistemic access (or lack thereof) to the basic components of human nature. In their own time, not unlike ours, the traits that defined womanhood were taken to be natural to women simply because they were observed to be

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[15] I must clarify that what follows should not be mistaken for a history of the view, but if one were to be written, these three figures would be central to it. There are actually few full-length historical treatments available. One might begin with Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) and with Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman: The Search for Communion of Persons, 1500–2015*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), although both intermingle their own argumentative motivations with their historical presentations, making it difficult to discern in whose voice each figure is writing at a given moment.

so. All three authors offer counterexamples, alternative explanations and counterfactual cases showing that just because some trait is observed to predominate among women does not mean that it is natural to them. There are, they maintain, *epistemic difficulties* in discerning the finer points of human nature, and their preferred alternative was to argue that those traits were the products of social construction, particularly of a lack of access to education. I shall pick up on this insight in the next chapter; though I do not think that social construction is the best alternative explanation, it does seem important to recognize the need for proper epistemic conditions for the acquisition of knowledge about natural human traits.

We begin with François Poulain de la Barre, a Parisian born into a Roman Catholic family.[16] He studied theology throughout France in the 1660s, also serving as a teacher of language. During this time, and into the 1670s and early 1680s, Poulain became acquainted with the philosophy of René Descartes, from whom he learned not only to be suspicious of claims to authority but also acquired many of his epistemic principles, which he went on to apply to questions regarding the equality of women. It was during this time that Poulain also wrote several works on the equality which out to be enjoyed between men and women, the most famous of which is *A Physical and Moral Discourse on the Equality of Both Sexes, which Shows that it is Important to Rid Oneself of Prejudices* (1673). It is an irony of history, then, that the earliest articulation of the view which has come to be representative of feminist theory finds its progeniture in a Cartesian theologian whose solid commitment to the philosophical principles of Descartes motivated his unwavering commitment to gender equality. This is so even if both Cartesian philosophy and Christian theology have at times been seen as inconsistent with

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[16] For further detail on Poulain's life, see Siep Stuurman, *François Poulain de la Barre and the Invention of Modern Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

feminist thought. In any case, Poulain continued his work, eventually developing Calvinist

sympathies in the 1680s and writing on themes like predestination and biblical interpretation. His

work on gender, however, enjoyed popular reception due to its translation into English, inspiring

figures like Mary Wollstonecraft and Simone de Beauvoir. Since *A Physical and Moral*

Discourse is his most thoroughly stated argument, it shall be our focus.

Poulain's commitment to Descartes shows up in many places, but it is perhaps most

obvious in his desire to disabuse the minds of his readers from "prejudice," as the lengthy title

indicates. Descartes was famous for his desire to "raze the house of knowledge" on account of

the prejudices dwelling within (like belief in an external world), and Poulain picks up on the

need to eliminate prejudice in the quest for truth. Thus, he begins his treatise by stating:

> The best idea that may occur to those who try to acquire genuine knowledge, if they were educated according to traditional methods, is to doubt if they were taught well and to wish to discover the truth themselves. As they make progress in this search for truth, they cannot avoid noticing that we are full of prejudices, and that it is necessary to get rid of them completely in order to acquire clear and distinct knowledge.[17]

Why must he begin a treatise on the equality of the sexes like this? It all depends, of course, on

which prejudices stand in the way of knowing truth about sex and gender, and for Poulain, the

relevant prejudice was this:

> Among all the prejudices, no one has found a more appropriate one which to illustrate my thesis than that which is commonly accepted about the inequality of the sexes…When I examined this opinion by applying the criterion of truth—which is not to accept anything as true unless it is based on clear and distinct ideas—I came to two conclusions. One was that this opinion is false, and is based on prejudice and popular belief; the other was that the two sexes are equal, that is, that women are as noble, as perfect, and as capable as men.[18]

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[17] François Poulain de la Barre, "A Physical and Moral Discourse Concerning the Equality of Both Sexes," in *The Equality of the Sexes: Three Feminist Texts of the Seventeenth Century*, trans. Desmond M. Clarke (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 119. Hereafter cited as *PMD* followed by pagination in this edition.

[18] *PMD*, 120.

It is just as startling to see a claim for gender equality argued in 1673 as it is to see the bold-faced Cartesian influences in Poulain's statement. Already noticeable in the quote is the emergence of a social construction view, for though the inequality of the sexes was often taken to be something natural, Poulain maintains that it was produced by nothing more than epistemic prejudice. But what prompted this? "Popular belief," and, he will go on to say, from living too long in a society structured to favor men.

As a good philosopher of the modern period, Poulain was concerned with epistemology, and in this treatise, he puts forward an epistemic principle motivated by his refusal to abet prejudice in his mind. It can be construed like this: *Mere perception does not yield knowledge of natures; we acquire knowledge of natures from perception in conjunction with a hypothesis made on the basis of already-held thoughts and present sensations*. In another text, Poulain remarks that it "would be a mistake to accept the way things occur in people's minds as the way they occur in nature, because the former does not always give us an idea of the latter."[19] When we perceive something, claims Poulain, our knowledge of it is produced by the object *along with* the internal and external dispositions brought about by and associated with the object, which are formed into a hypothesis. There is thus a duty to examine those dispositions and hypotheses on the part of the knower so that she can be assured that they are not leading her astray:

> All the scientific knowledge that one tries to acquire about such things is reducible to knowing truly what particular internal or external disposition of each object produces the thoughts and sensations that we have of it. The only thing that teachers can do to help us acquire such knowledge is to apply our minds to what we perceive, so as to examine its appearances and its effects, without hurry or prejudice, and to show us the order that we must follow in arranging our thought in order to find what we are looking for.[20]

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[19] From *De l'éducation des dames*, translated in Desmond M. Clarke, "Introduction," in *The Equality of the Sexes: Three Feminist Texts of the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 40.

[20] *PMD*, 155.

It is when we fail to undertake this critical task that prejudices arise in our minds, claims Poulain. When evaluating whether or not we know something is natural, specifically if inequality is natural to the sexes, we must be careful to test whether or not our hypotheses are not producing prejudices rather than accurate knowledge of reality. Thus, to "judge soundly whether our sex has some natural superiority over women, one would have to consider the question seriously and without self-interest, and to reject anything that we had believed merely on the basis of someone else's report without having examined the matter ourselves."[21] As it turns out, those who believe the inequality of women to be a natural state of affairs have failed to undergo such examination, and they hold their belief on the basis of a faulty and pernicious principle, which then creates their prejudice. This principle can be called the "Incapacity Fallacy."

Desmond Clarke helpfully compares the Incapacity Fallacy with a logically sound principle familiar to scholasticism, namely, *ab esse ad posse valet illatio*, or "from the fact that something is the case, it is valid to conclude that it is possible."[22] The Incapacity Fallacy attempts to negate both sides of this conditional, claiming that if something *is not the case*, then it follows that that *it is not possible*. Of course, this is obviously false—it is not the case that Liverpool Football Club won the Premier League in the 2018-2019 season, but it was surely possible. Despite the obvious falsehood of the Incapacity Fallacy, many in Poulain's day applied it to the case of women. Because it is not the case that women performed certain activities allowed to men, they thought, it must be impossible (or unnatural) for them to do so. Armed with this prejudice, many were keen to deny certain rights and privileges to women.

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[21] *PMD*, 123–124.

[22] Clarke, "Introduction," 38.

Poulain explicitly refuted the Incapacity Fallacy in his treatise, asserting that the observation of what is not the case for women does not entail or even suggest that it is not possible for it to be the case. In fact, such a mistaken hypothesis is the source of many prejudices in the mind, not the least of which is the inequality between men and women. So he asserts, in another remarkable passage:

> If we press people a little, we will find that their strongest reasons come down to saying that, as far as women are concerned, things have always been the way they are at present; that this is a sign that things should be as they are; and *if women had been capable of studying the sciences and holding offices, men would have admitted them alongside themselves*…No one reports ever seeing women otherwise. It is known that they have always been like that, and there is no place on earth where women are not treated as they are here…People find it very difficult to imagine that things could easily have been different, and it even seems as if we could never change the current situation no matter how hard we tried.[23]

Poulain's notion seems to be this: claiming that something is and has always been the situation with respect to women does nothing to prove that it could not have been different. Just because women have not been scientists, states Poulain, does not mean that they *could not* have been scientists. To make such an inference is modally irresponsible and reflects the possession of a pernicious prejudice in the mind of the person making the claim. It reveals the irrational dependence of those who wish to deny women equality on the Incapacity Fallacy, the principle responsible for a multitude of prejudices. Remember, if a claim to knowledge is based upon a faulty hypothesis, then it fails to be knowledge of reality. Thus, "the common view about women is a popular and ill-founded *prejudice*."[24] And prejudice, of course, was for Poulain the most grievous of epistemic errors.

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[23] *PMD*, 125–126. Emphasis added.

[24] *PMD*, 146. Emphasis added.

After establishing this point, the bulk of Poulain's treatise is devoted to providing alternative hypotheses to commonly held beliefs about women's inferiority in the form of counterexamples and counter-factuals. Doing so reveals that many of the restrictions placed upon women are not in fact natural, since they could have been otherwise. Thus, to explain the current structure of the society in which he lives, Poulain offers a "just-so" story in which the privileges men enjoy and women are denied were produced by men who sought to retain the power they had garnered. After considering how this *may* have happened, Poulain concludes: "It seems clear from this historical conjecture, and is consistent with the behaviour of all men, that men retained the public benefits from which they excluded women only by their power."[25] This need not be *true*, for all Poulain is attempting to show is that women's inequality can be explained without making recourse to their natures. If their subjection can be explained without an appeal to nature or some other essential property, then it *could have been* otherwise. This is because if a state of affairs could have been different than they are actually, then they are not necessarily the way that they are. Though it is likely that Poulain thought that his just-so story was indeed true, all he attempts to show by it is that there is another way the expectations attached to women and men could have shaped up. This, note, is where he advances a social constructionist view of gender: it is not because of their nature that women are not, say, scientists, but it is because of other social factors, primarily their exclusion from education.[26] Women's social position, maintains Poulain, has been socially constructed by a culture in which those who held power arranged it so that they retained their power and denied it to those who lacked it. Therefore, being a woman is not a

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[25] *PMD*, 131.

[26] Cf. *PMD*, 188: "We worry needlessly by trying to explain why we are subject to various faults and behave in unusual ways, because we fail to realize how we are influenced by habit, practice, education, and our external circumstances, that is, by the effect of our sex, age, fortune, employment, and our social class."

natural fact but a socially constructed one: "All the arguments of those who hold that the fair sex is not as noble or excellent as ours are based on believing that, since men exercise all this authority, everything must be arranged for their benefit. I am convinced that one would believe the exact opposite, and with even greater conviction—namely that men are there for the sake of women—if women held all authority, as they did in the amazon's empire."[27] The observable traits of femininity, concludes Poulain, are not natural, for we cannot make conclusions about what is not natural from what is not presently the case. Rather, these traits can be explained entirely by social factors, like the exclusion of women from education. *If* women were provided with different social opportunities, then we would observe that they could do anything men could do (and Poulain considers all of the main occupations held by men). To be a woman, then, is the product of social arrangements, expectations and so forth. To be a woman, for François Poulain de la Barre, is a social construct.[28]

To summarize Poulain's thought, then, we can say the following. Perception of anything at all requires a perceived object plus a hypothesis formed on the basis of the impression the object makes on the mind. If we are not in the habit of investigating the quality of our hypotheses, we run the risk of acquiring a prejudice rather than knowledge. So it was with those who thought that women were naturally unequal to men; since they believed this on a faulty principle which maintains that we can infer impossibility from what is not currently the case,

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[27] *PMD*, 149.

[28] And, perforce, the same goes for being a man. Desmond Clarke also notices this conclusion in Poulain's thought: "If gender is understood as a cultural construct, as the sum total of the ways in which men and women are thought of and treated in a given culture, then the primary issue to be addressed when discussing the equality of men and women is neither their souls (understood as separate, immaterial substances) nor their sexual differences, but the entrenched misogynistic traditions that supported spurious philosophical explanations of inequalities that resulted merely from custom rather than from nature" ("Introduction," 43). In a footnote on the same page, Clarke affirms that Poulain held to the sex/gender distinction, a required first step in thinking that gender is socially constructed.

they wrongly concluded traits about women's nature. These traits can be explained another way, maintained Poulain, namely, as a product of a society in which powerful men excluded women from the privileges enjoyed by men. This is just another way of saying that gendered traits, particularly feminine ones, are socially constructed.

As we move to our next figure, John Stuart Mill, we begin to see similar themes emerge. Mill was born in 1806 near London to James Mill, the associate of Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham and Harriet Barrow. James Mill personally raised John with a rigorous education in order to "make of the younger Mill a leader in views of the philosophical radicals."[29] His training turned "the young Mill into an extremely efficient 'reasoning machine.'"[30] This capacity to reason led Mill to some considerable success in the East India Company, garnering enough public recognition that in 1865 he was elected Liberal MP for the Westminster constituency.[31] As an MP, he attempted to modify the Reform Bill of 1867, hoping to grant women the right to vote (unfortunately, it did not pass). In addition to his political efforts, Mill was an established author, the most famous of his writings being the political treatise, *On Liberty*. In it he attempts to delineate "the nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual," and for him the only appropriate time "for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against

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[29] Fred Wilson, "John Stuart Mill," ed. Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2016 edition, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/mill/.

[30] Stefan Collini, "Introduction," in *On Liberty and Other Writings*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), viii. Further detail into the development of Mill's education can be found in his *Autobiography*, especially chapters 1–3, published in 1873.

[31] Collini, "Introduction," ix. Interestingly, Mill was so popular that he refused to canvas or campaign in order to win; he wished to attain the position solely on the strength of his reputation as a writer.

his will, is to prevent harm to others."[32] *On Liberty* was (and continues to be) massively

influential in Western political thought, unlike the treatise to which we shall now turn, *The*

Subjection of Women, which was something of a commercial flop when it was written in 1869.

There are some structural similarities between the ways Mill and Poulain make their

cases, and Mill may fairly be understood as continuing a line of thought Poulain had begun.

Mill's main conclusion is stated at the outset of the work: "That the principle which regulates the

existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other—

is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought

to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side,

nor disability on the other."[33] Like Poulain, Mill sets his sights on the inequality existing

between men and women, claiming instead that what should govern their relations is a principle

of equality. Also like Poulain, Mill's rationale for such a conclusion comes from the agnosticism

he claims human beings ought to have with respect to their knowledge of natures. On Mill's

view, the nature of women cannot be known with very much confidence because they can only

be observed in a garbled and distorted state, namely, a state of inequality and subjection. Mill

knows this state to be distorting because of his prior commitments to what he *does* know about

human nature, namely, that all who share in it must exist in a state of social and legal equality (a

claim for which he argues in *On Liberty*). If that is so, equality becomes a necessary epistemic

criterion for accurate perception of what is natural to someone. Equality is so basically natural to

human beings that its absence obscures all of the other properties that may also be natural to

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[32] John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty," in *J. S. Mill: "On Liberty" and Other Selected Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 5, 13.

[33] John Stuart Mill, "The Subjection of Women," in *J. S. Mill: "On Liberty" and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 119.

them. Since it is the social standing of women to be unequal to men, whatever properties are

natural to them are thereby made unclear.[34]

Mill presents the set of ideas summarized in the previous paragraph as a response to the

claim that the subjection of women in society is natural on the basis of the mere examination of

culture, both present and past.[35] In reply, Mill introduces the central thrust of his argument:

> I deny that any one knows, or can know, the nature of the two sexes, as long as they have
> only been seen in their present relation to one another. If men had ever found in society
> without women, or women without men, or if there had been a society of men and
> women in which the women were not under the control of men, something might have
> been positively known about the mental and moral differences which may be inherent in
> the nature of each. What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial
> thing—the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in
> others.[36]

Shortly after, Mill reiterates the same idea with greater force: "Hence, in regard to that most

difficult question, what are the natural differences between the two sexes—a subject on which it

is *impossible* in the present state of society to obtain complete and correct knowledge—while

almost everybody dogmatises upon it, almost all neglect and make light of the only means by

which any partial insight can be obtained into it."[37] Implicit in Mill's view is that knowledge of

natures can only be obtained by means of observation, that is, the data we have available to us

for discerning which aspects of humanity are natural or unnatural rely entirely upon our ability to

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[34] Thus Collini: Mill "refuses to allow any standing to claims about women's presumed 'real nature', on the grounds that we can have no access to their 'nature' other than as expressed in and shaped by the circumstances of inequality under which they have always lived" ("Introduction," xix).

[35] See Mill, "The Subjection of Women," 129 for Mill's expression of this view.

[36] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," 138. Mill actually alluded to this claim in "On Liberty:" "The morality between Spartans and Helots, between planters and negroes, between princes and subjects, between nobles and roturiers, between men and women, has been for the most part the creation of these class interests and feelings" (10). What we find in "The Subjection of Women," then, is the mature version of the view applied specifically to gender.

[37] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," 140. Emphasis added.

process what our sensory faculties deliver to us. Given his philosophical views that, at the very least, it *is* an aspect of human nature to live in freedom and equality,[38] should any human society lack that feature, then that society creates conditions in which the observations on which we necessarily rely for our knowledge of human nature are clouded, making certain particulars of human nature impossible to know. In that case, society has constructed an entirely *unnatural* state for understanding natures.

Just as Poulain challenged the inference between what is not the case to what could not be the case, Mill similarly asserts that we do not know whether or not a person is capable of performing a particular task unless she is given the chance to be successful at it. He argues that the successful performance of an action entails the performer's qualification for doing it: "any woman, who succeeds in an open profession, proves by that very fact that she is qualified for it."[39] This informs Mill's understanding of our epistemic restriction regarding natures, for it means that it cannot be said of someone that a particular task is unnatural for them if they demonstrate their ability to be successful at it. Along these lines, Mill concludes that since women have not yet been given a chance to perform tasks like voting, we do not know yet whether they will be successful. By extension, we still do not know if it is part of their nature not to vote.[40] So, once again, we see the conditions of inequality obscuring not only the properties of human nature, but even our means of evaluating just what is or is not natural. How can we know if women are natural voters, according to Mill? Extend to them right to do so and then observe; if

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[38] "After the primary necessities of food and raiment, freedom is the first and strongest want of human nature" ("The Subjection of Women," 212). For Mill, equality is a necessary condition for freedom, an idea he develops more lucidly in *On Liberty*.

[39] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," 169.

[40] Interestingly, Mill argues that even if only a few women vote successfully (and the majority do not), then it is still sufficient to disprove that it is against their nature to vote.

they prove successful in voting, then it cannot be unnatural to them. The fact that no such investigation has occurred only reaffirms the bias of the social structures of his day, according to Mill.

It is to those social structures that Mill turns next, and here he is willing to accord a greater role to social forces in forming the cultural expectations and performances of women than he does to their nature. This, like Poulain before him, is where Mill advocates for the social construction of gender. Reiterating our inability to know human nature in an unnatural state of inequality, Mill says:

> I consider it presumption in any one to pretend to decide what women are or are not, can or cannot be, by natural constitution. They have always hitherto been kept, as far as regards spontaneous development, in so unnatural a state, that their nature cannot but have been greatly distorted and disguised; and no one can safely pronounce that if women's nature were left to choose its direction as freely as men's, and if no artificial bent were attempted to be given to it except that required by the conditions of human society, and given to both sexes alike, there would be any material difference, or perhaps any difference at all, in the character and capacities which would unfold themselves. I shall presently show, that even the least contestable of the differences which now exist, are such as *may very well have been produced merely by circumstances, without any difference of natural capacity*.[41]

Though it is *possible* that these differences of inequality are directly traceable to the nature of women and men, it is highly unlikely due to what we already know about human nature and the warping effects of an unequal society. Instead, Mill allows social forces to bear the bulk of the responsibility for producing the traits we commonly attribute to masculinity and femininity. These are influences *external* to nature, produced by the social arrangement in which human

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[41] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," 173. Emphasis added. See also "The Subjection of Women," 139: "Of all difficulties which impede the progress of thought…the greatest is now the unspeakable ignorance and inattention of mankind in respect to the influences which form human character. Whatever any portion of the human species now are, or seem to be, such, it is supposed, they have a natural tendency to be: even when the most elementary knowledge of the circumstances in which they have been placed clearly points out the causes that made them what they are…if only by showing the extraordinary susceptibility of human nature to external influences, and the extreme variableness of those of its manifestations which are supposed to be most universal and uniform."

persons find themselves. It is not because there is something within their nature that voting was commonly thought to be an activity unfit for a woman; it is rather because of the state of subjection in which women live, key factors of which include denied opportunities and burdensome expectations. Mill also considers other putatively feminine traits—smaller body size and brain sizes, the inability to write philosophical tracts, absence of mathematical acumen, the relatively small amount of literary and theatrical contributions—and demonstrates how such traits and abilities can change if alterations to circumstance, like greater and improved education for women, were made. His conclusion is that all of the differences we typically consider to be natural to women are far more likely to be the product of social circumstance, not nature.

The year 1869 was an interesting one for the philosophical discussion of gender. In the same year that *The Subjection of Women* came out, the American pastor and theologian Horace Bushnell also wrote a treatise entitled *Women's Suffrage: The Reform Against Nature*. In it, he affirms just the opposite of Mill's views. Not only should women's suffrage be rejected, but we do not need Scripture to tell us anything more than what our eyes can tell us regarding the matter:

> The Scripture has nothing to say of this matter, which is at all variant from what we see with our eyes. Indeed no scripture revelation, which at all disagrees with the bisexual facts of our existence as they are, could be true, or have any authority over the revelations made by such facts. The scriptural revelations might interpret the revelations of nature, and let us farther into their meaning; or they might impart new disclosures that go farther and give us additional knowledge; but I do not see, in this particular case that they do either. They seem merely to reiterate, and put in stronger emphasis, just what we learn by the sight of our eyes—that, and nothing more.[42]

Though Bushnell was aware of Mill's diametric opposition to his views, he does not indicate any knowledge of Mill's arguments against the ability of our eyes to discern women's nature.

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[42] Horace Bushnell, *Women's Suffrage: The Reform Against Nature* (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1869), 73–74.

Perhaps it was for this reason that William James (a scholar of no ill-repute himself), when reviewing both books in the year of their publication, paid Mill a great compliment: "It may be that he is only more far-seeing than the majority…If this is so, there can be little doubt that this small volume will be what the Germans call 'epoch-making,' and that it will hereafter be quoted as a landmark signalizing one distinct step in the progress of the total evolution."[43] It seems to me that James is correct in his estimation of Mill, and his failure to pay a similar compliment to Bushnell is itself a portend to the eventual dominance of the social construction of gender.

The final figure for consideration in this historical overview is Simone de Beauvoir, who stands in the greatest proximity to contemporary thought on gender and whose views therefore directly influence the current landscape. Beauvoir was familiar with both Poulain and Mill, and her work is an admirable advancement upon theirs. She has also enjoyed considerably greater recognition than either of the other two. Influencing both philosophers[44] and theologians,[45] many have recognized Beauvoir as the archetypal social constructionist of gender, especially by making explicit the distinction between sex and gender.[46] Considering her work, *The Second Sex*, will be paramount to gaining a clear grasp on the debates underway today.

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[43] William James, "Women's Suffrage; the Reform Against Nature by Horace Bushnell and The Subjection of Women by John Stuart Mill," *The North American Review* 109, no. 225 (October 1869): 565.

[44] Cf. Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex," *Yale French Studies*, no. 72 (1986): 35–49.

[45] Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, First Edition (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968).

[46] Some Beauvoir interpreters will deny that she actually held to this distinction. See Nancy Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy, and Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001) and Toril Moi, *What is a Woman? And Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), part one. They claim that only when she is read through Butler is she seen to be a social constructionist, but if read in the context of her cultural and intellectual inheritance, she appears to hold no such view. For more on this context, see Kate Kirkpatrick, *Becoming Beauvoir: A Life* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2019). In what follows, I will follow the "mainline" interpretation of Beauvoir, fully aware that it may be incorrect; even so, the incorrect interpretation has had a significant impact on the contemporary landscape, and for that reason it is worth recounting.

As a native of Paris before, during and after World War II, Beauvoir saw her city flourish culturally after its previous destruction. She was herself a pivotal force in Paris' post-war renaissance and her capacities as a multi-genre author enabled her to gain a prominent place in Parisian society. As Judith Coffin states, "Beauvoir raised topics made timely by France's economic and cultural postwar transformation…At the same time, highbrow intellectual production in postwar France became enmeshed in a rapidly growing mass culture, from radio and television to the mass-circulation weekly and monthly magazines…Intellectuals such as Beauvoir and Sartre peopled the pages of glossy post-war weeklies featuring personalities, fashion, world events, sports, and splashy visuals."[47] Because she wrote about relevant topics (like gender) at a time when her fellow compatriots were interested in having those questions answered, she gained popularity for her accessibility, honesty and intellectual nous. (In fact, she became so popular that Nescafé even invited her to endorse their coffee—no small honor for Parisian café regulars like Beauvoir!)

Beauvoir's greatest contribution to the philosophy of gender is her massive work, *The Second Sex*.[48] In its initial French publication, the work amounted to eight hundred pages in two volumes, covering in detail all that Beauvoir thought relevant to the experience of women in her day, including biology, history, literature, politics and childhood development into maturation. What is of greatest interest to the present work, however, is her presentation of gender as a social construct. In an article on Beauvoir, Debra Bergoffen states that "*The Second Sex* gave us the vocabulary for analyzing the social constructions of femininity and a method for critiquing these

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[47] Judith G. Coffin, "Sex, Love, and Letters: Writing Simone de Beauvoir, 1949–1963," *The American Historical Review* 115, no. 4 (October 1, 2010): 1062, 1068.

[48] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993).

constructions."[49] The means by which Beauvoir accomplished such a tremendous feat is by

asking a deceptively simple question: "What is a woman?"[50] As it happens, this was a difficult

question for her to answer because there are different sufficient conditions for being a woman

and for being female. She notes how

> in speaking of certain women, connoisseurs declare that they are not women, although they are equipped with a uterus like the rest. All agree in recognizing the fact that females exist in the human species; today as always they make up about one half of humanity. And yet we are told that femininity is in danger; we are exhorted to be women, remain women, become women. *It would appear, then, that every female human being is not necessarily a woman.*[51]

Beauvoir's central contention is that it is problematic to hold simultaneously that being a woman

is a matter of a possessing a certain biological make-up *and* that one can fail to be a woman. For,

apart from horrible tragedy, how can one fail to possess this biological make-up? Beauvoir is

writing at a time when it was commonly asserted that there is a "feminine essence" to which

women needed to aspire, with the result that "functioning as a female is not enough to define a

woman"; that is, women who have the requisite female biological constitution have still not done

enough to be women.[52] Beauvoir then notes that biological properties and cultural properties

appear to require different conditions for their attribution, thereby conceptually distinguishing

sex from gender. Thus, "[f]emininity can be in danger…only if it is not an inevitable outgrowth

of being born female—in other words, only if gender is not the same as sex."[53] The dénouement

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[49] "Simone de Beauvoir," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2015, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/beauvoir/), §6.

[50] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, xxxvi.

[51] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, xxxvi. Emphasis added.

[52] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, xxxviii.

[53] Georgia Warnke, *Debating Sex and Gender* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5.

of this observation is that since what it takes to be of a certain sex (biologically understood) is

not the same as what it takes to be of a certain gender (culturally understood), then sex is not the

same as gender.

If that is so, what does it take to be a woman, on Beauvoir's understanding? Ultimately,

to be a woman is to be an "inessential Other."[54] In order to understand this claim, one is aided by

the requisite background of Beauvoir's existentialist ethics as they are expounded in an earlier

work, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.[55] In it, she denies the existence of a human nature pre-loaded

with meaning or teleology: "Universal, absolute man exists nowhere."[56] Instead, human beings

must look for meaning "only in the human world established by man's projects and the ends he

sets up…Man makes himself a lack, but he can deny the lack as lack and affirm himself as a

positive existence…And the condemned action, insofar as it is an effort to be, finds its validity

insofar as it is a manifestation of existence."[57] Though there is no natural, objective meaning

attributed to humanity, humanity is nevertheless *tasked* with creating meaning by way of projects

each individual sets up according to the freedom allotted to her or him, and these projects are

valid insofar as they are successful in the creation of meaning. On Beauvoir's existentialist

ethics, there are exactly two duties, the first being the pursuit of an authentic human life by way

of meaning-creating projects and the second being a prohibition against the prevention of anyone

else's attempt to do so. In fact, shirking either duty constitutes such bad faith that one is rendered

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[54] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, xl.

[55] She herself gives us such a clue: "…for our perspective is that of existentialist ethics. Every subject plays his part as such specifically through exploits or projects that serve as a mode of transcendence; he achieves liberty only through a continual reaching out toward other liberties" (*The Second Sex*, liv).

[56] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Citadel Press, 1976), 112.

[57] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 11, 13.

less than human: "Reduced to pure facticity, congealed in his immanence, cut off from his future, deprived of his transcendence and of the world which that transcendence discloses, a man no longer appears as anything more than a thing among things which can be subtracted from the collectivity of other things without its leaving upon the earth any trace of its absence."[58] This is another way of saying that the person not engaged in projects of meaning creation are *inessential* to the world and to those around them—they have not filled in their lack of meaning through their freedom.

Beauvoir perorates her argument by claiming that this is precisely what it means to be a woman. A woman is someone who, because of the social standards and confinements applied to her, is precluded from any opportunity to engage in the projects necessary for meaning. The freedom required for these projects has been denied to her, forcing her into a cul-de-sac of meaninglessness that makes her little different than the chairs on which she sits or the tables off of which she eats. Note that this is not something women *lack*, as though they would be better women if they were given these freedoms back. Rather, it is part of the *definition* of being a woman that one should lack these freedoms, shirk the duties to create meaning and fail to achieve authenticity: "Now, what peculiarly signalizes the situation of woman is that she—a free and autonomous being like all human creatures—nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other. They propose to stabilize her as object and to doom her to immanence since her transcendence is to be overshadowed and forever transcended by another ego (conscience) which is essential and sovereign…How can a human being in woman's situation attain fulfillment?"[59] The upshot here is that to be human is

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[58] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 100.

[59] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, liv.

incompatible with being a woman—the former entitles someone to the free pursuit of projects for the creation of meaning, while the latter dooms her to precisely the opposite.

If this is Beauvoir's read of gender in her circumstances, what does she make of sex, a purportedly biological category? Though Beauvoir admits that "the division of the sexes is a biological fact, not an event in human history,"[60] she is, like Poulain and Mill, very critical of what is given the status of "natural" in her day: "It is, in point of fact, a difficult matter for man to realize the extreme importance of social discriminations which seem outwardly insignificant but which produce in woman moral and intellectual effects so profound that they appear to spring from her original nature."[61] Beauvoir thinks that many of the properties typically attributed as *natural* to women are really products of social forces that shape them. This comes out most clearly in her chapter, "The Data of Biology." She claims at the outset that biology is often a veneer for justifying the subjection of women: Man "wishes to find in biology a justification for [his hostility]."[62] Much of what is considered naturally feminine finds "no basis in the nature of things nor any explanation through observed data…the significance of which we cannot comprehend *a priori*."[63] Even if we had some data in support of the traits often taken to be feminine, Beauvoir affirms that these are not given the significance they have for our gender theories apart from our giving it to them. That is, some observed natural fact is not elevated to being an essential component of gender without our making it so, for observation alone does not give it the normativity necessary for social observation and continuation. What tends to happen

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[60] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, xliii.

[61] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, li.

[62] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 3.

[63] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 9–10.

is that some observed fact (say, the physical differences between men and women) is

extrapolated to become a social norm (such as, "women cannot occupy a certain social role

because they are weaker than men"); but, by making this second move, says Beauvoir, we have

moved beyond the dictates of biology to our own projections: "it is not reality that dictates to

society or to individuals their choice between the two opposed basic categories; in every period,

in each case, society and individual decide in accordance with their needs. Very often they

project into the myth adopted the institutions and values to which they adhere."[64] There is

nothing intrinsic to physical differences that entails any one social order. For that, human

interpretation is necessary. Thus, though *some* room is given for biological sexes, Beauvoir is

very skeptical of any prescriptions for gender that can be drawn from them. Very often, if not

always, the move from biological sex to social gender betrays one's own previously held

assumptions about gender retrospectively projected onto the body, while still retaining the façade

of being scientific.

Beauvoir, throughout her large book, continues this debunking project by carefully

pointing out ways in which traits taken to be natural are in fact the product of the "myths"

constitutive of a society structured to favor men. These myths culminate in the creation of

femininity as the "inessential Other," according to which being a woman is identified with the

systematic denial of the freedoms for meaning-creation. By noting that conditions for being a

female (having a body of a certain sort) and for being a woman (being the inessential Other) are

not the same, she introduced a distinction between that which is a basic biological fact and that

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[64] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 269. The "myth" is a very important concept for Beauvoir. It is the process by which socially constructed roles and definitions are reified into the "Platonic realm" and in order to become eternal and immutable. In other words, it makes that which is contingently constructed "timeless, unchangeable, necessary" (267). This, in turn, is what makes the experience of women so miserable, for not only is their experience oppressive, it is also immutable.

which is a product of social forces. Indeed, so much of what was taken as "natural" to those around her Beauvoir criticized as a product of social force, removing its status as immutable. All of this can be captured in what is perhaps the most quoted sentence of her book: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."[65] What one is born into is not femininity, for that has other conditions tied to it, conditions deeply social and deeply unjust.

In bringing this historical section to a close, let me summarize by saying that though each figure mentioned is unique in her or his advocacy of the social construction of gender, they overlap in significant ways. First, they harbor a suspicion about claims taken to hold the status of "natural," thinking that our ability to know such things is compromised because of prejudice, unjust social conditions or some other social or epistemic fault. Second, in lieu of these mistaken claims about nature, they offer alternative explanations for the gendered features in question, where social forces, expectations, restrictions and so on *cause* or in some way *define* the features. Third, doing so enables one to debunk human classifications which serve to restrict and subject women, thereby denying the immutability of oppressive categories and allowing one to imagine a world where they need not exist. Finally, there is a problem which each of their discussions highlight, namely, the problem of how to connect facts of biology or sex and facts of society and gender. Building this bridge in such a way that the former explains the latter has proven to be much more difficult than previously thought, and gender is subsequently given a different explanation, one from social construction.

2.2.2 The Contemporary Landscape: Social Construction in Philosophy and Theology

As we move into the contemporary landscape, what emerges is both similar to and importantly different from our historical considerations. The similarities pertain to the conclusion

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[65] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 281.

at which they all arrive: gender is a social construct. Their differences, however, pertain to their reasons for affirming as much and to the details of what is meant by the conclusion. I shall begin with some contemporary affirmations of the view, with special reference being made to John Searle's early work. I then give attention to two articulations of a social constructionist picture of gender, one philosophical and the other theological. Sally Haslanger, the first of the figures to be considered, is a feminist analytic philosopher. Her work conforms well to the broader body of literature known as "feminist theory," yet she and fellow scholars whose work resemble hers are often overlooked in both feminist theory and theology.[66] By giving special focus to her work, I hope to rectify this perplexing omission. After Haslanger, we shall consider the work of Kathryn Tanner, who understands theology to be a socially constructed enterprise, itself embedded within a view of culture which is thoroughly mutable. When gender is seen as aspect of culture, she maintains, it is available for theological analysis.

Contemporary social construction theorists do not typically avail themselves of the arguments from humanity's inability to know natures. There is therefore a transition from *epistemic agnosticism about natures* to the *metaphysical revision of natures*, some going as far as stating that there are no such things as natures. The conclusion that gender is not natural is the same, but contemporary thinkers seem much more willing to reconsider the properties of social and natural entities. Poulain, Mill and Beauvoir were all relatively understated in their metaphysics, preferring instead to keep silent on such matters (one has to search quite carefully to find, for example, the definition of the term "nature"). By contrast, contemporary thought has taken an emphatically metaphysical turn.

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[66] The one exception to this is Jonathan C. Rutledge, "Analyzing the Muddles of Analysis: (Some of) What Analytic Theologians Can Learn from the History of Analytic Feminism," *Modern Theology* 36, no. 3 (July 2020): 569–81.

A helpful entry point into contemporary views is found in a threefold distinction made by philosopher Muhammad Ali Khalidi, now widely recognized in the literature. According to Khalidi, social entities (things that are what they are because of some sort of relationship they have to other entities) are of three kinds. All three are social entities because they are dependent for their being what they are on human mental attitudes:

> First, there are social kinds whose nature is such that human beings need not have any propositional attitudes towards them for them to exist (e.g. *recession*, *racism*). The existence of these kinds clearly depends on the existence of human beings and depends on those humans having certain propositional attitudes…But members of that society need not have any propositional attitudes that involve the category *racism* itself…The second kind of social kind includes those whose existence is at least partly dependent on specific attitudes that human beings have towards them, though these attitudes need not be in place towards each of their particular instances for them to be instances of those kinds. This would seem to be true of social kinds like *money* or *war*. In these cases, at least some members of society need to have propositional attitudes involving these categories themselves…The third kind of social kind includes those whose existence and that of their instances are both dependent on attitudes that human beings have towards them. In this case, not only must some members of a society have attitudes towards the kind itself, each individual token of the kind can only be such if it has been considered to be such by some members of society…This may hold for a social kind like *permanent resident* in a certain jurisdiction.[67]

This is a helpful way to demarcate how entities and their kinds can be social in different ways. The key questions Khalidi employs to construct the three tiers are whether the existence of the *kind* depends on mental attitudes and whether the existences of the *instances* of the kind depend on such attitudes.[68] On the first level, both questions are answered negatively. A recession is a recession whether or not everyone involved in one believes it exists or that there are such things as recessions. It is what it is in virtue of its occupation within a particular economic system, even if *that system itself* depends on mental recognition for its existence. On the second level, the

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[67] Muhammad Ali Khalidi, "Three Kinds of Social Kinds," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 90, no. 1 (2015): 99–102.

[68] Cf. Khalidi, "Three Kinds of Social Kinds," 103–104.

existence of the kind depends on mental attitudes, but not any particular token of it. For a large-scale act of violence to be a war, human beings must recognize that there are such things as wars (with certain rules for conduct and so on), but the participants in any particular war may or may not be aware that they are in a war (was the feud, for instance, between the Hatfields and the McCoys a war or a large-scale violent conflict? Retrospectively, it has been said to have been a war, though its participants did not necessarily think as much). Finally, the third level answers both questions positively: a permanent resident is a category of person which depends for its creation on the mental attitudes of the participants of a government, but that person him or herself must also be recognized to be an instance of the kind. To say something is socially constructed, then, is more complicated than its standard statements belie.

In which tier might gender find itself? Though a case can be made for the second or third, it is likely that it is a blend of the two. The kind "man" certainly depends for its defining features on mental attitudes toward it, since so much of what is normally taken to constitute masculinity consists in expectations and rules set by society. On some views of the social construction of gender, it is required that a person is *recognized* as a member of that gender (tier 3), while on others one can be a man and not know it or not be recognized as such (tier 2). Some broader considerations about gender are required to decide, such as what one means by "gender identity."

How is it, though, that something goes from being a non-social entity to being a social one, thereby occupying one of the tiers? John Searle provided one early and influential account, and he did so by means of a simple formula: "X counts as Y in context C." Through it he intends "to show the continuous line that goes from molecules and mountains to screwdrivers, levers, and a beautiful sunset, and then to legislatures, money, and nation-states. The central span on the bridge from physics to society is *collective intentionality*, and the decisive movement on that

bridge in creation of social reality is the collective intentional *imposition of function* on entities

that cannot perform those functions without that imposition."[69] The variable X is meant to stand

in for any of those things which exist apart from "observer-relative" considerations,[70] like pieces

of wood, and the variable Y includes the social artifacts brought to exist *from* the X variable, like

a chair. The movement from X to Y is facilitated by two mental acts: collective intentionality

and the imposition of a function. Collective intentionality occurs when "several individuals share

intentional states such as beliefs, desires, and intentions."[71] When such intentionality operates in

tandem to confer upon an entity a certain function—defined as what that entity is supposed to be

for[72]—then it becomes a socially constructed artifact.[73] Thus, a certain arrangement of wood

pieces is a chair when it is given the function of being used as a seat. That is what *makes* it a

chair, rather than some arrangement of bits of wood. Through the collective imposition of a

function, maintains Searle, a social entity is brought into being. Searle summarizes: "The point is

that the Y term must assign some new status that the entities named by the X term do not already

have, and this new status must be such that human agreement, acceptance, and other forms of

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[69] John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 41. Emphasis added.

[70] Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 10.

[71] Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 23.

[72] See Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 13–23 for a full description.

[73] Importantly, Searle believes that "functions are never intrinsic to the physics of any phenomenon but are assigned from outside by conscious observers and users" (*The Construction of Social Reality*, 14). He does not argue for this, but rather claims that it was one of "Darwin's greatest achievements," effectively casting all teleology from ontologically objective items (16). Of course, simply referring to Darwin is no argument and Christians have good reason to think that teleology is in fact present in mind-independent ways.

collective intentionality are necessary and sufficient to create it…Physically X and Y are exactly the same thing. The only difference is that we have imposed a status on the X element."[74]

Collective impositions of function, moreover, only have purchase within certain contexts. When I am alone in a park and kick a ball into an open goal, it does not count as a Premier League goal. If I did it as the left winger for Liverpool Football Club in the context of a match against Manchester United at Old Trafford, then my hitting the ball into the goal certainly counts as a goal. This is an important point to notice—*socially constructed entities are necessarily context-bound*. This applies to any account of social construction of which I am aware and it will form an important aspect of my critique of the view. Relevant to our discussion, it would follow that the socially constructed kind "woman" would also be bound to a limited context while excluding others. In other words, one is only a woman in the contexts where the conditions apply.

With this rudimentary understanding of the basic features of the process of social construction at hand, it is easy to find many applying it to gender. Linda Martín Alcoff is an influential feminist theorist and maintains that gender "is not a point to start from in the sense of being a given thing but is, instead, a posit or construct, formalizable in a nonarbitrary way through a matrix of habits, practices, and discourses" throughout an individual's history. Because of this, "gender is not natural, biological, universal, ahistorical, or essential," yet one can still "claim that gender is relevant because we are taking it as a position from which to act politically."[75] Alcoff's particular contribution, as the quote indicates, is the theory of

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[74] Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 51, 69.

[75] Linda Martín Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," *Signs* 13, no. 3 (1988): 431, 433. Notice first Alcoff's intuitive opposition of what is natural and what is social. It should also be noted that the notion of an "identity politic" is key for Alcoff: "The idea here is that one's

"positionality": "The positional definition…makes [woman's] identity relative to a constantly shifting context, to a situation that includes a network of elements involving others, the objective economic conditions, cultural and political institutions and ideologies, and so on."[76] In contrast to other definitions, which ignore other identity markers possessed by an individual, Alcoff defines gender according to the *intersection* of all of the relevant social positions in which one stands. One is gendered within a variety of social spheres and the conjunction of all of these social spheres help to variegate what it means to be man or a woman or otherwise. Sally Haslanger's illustration gets at Alcoff's notion of intersectionality quite well: "Imagine race, gender, and other social positions to be like gels on a stage light: the light shines blue and a red gel is added, and the light shines purple; if a yellow gel is added instead of the red, the light shines green. Similarly, gender is lived differently depending on the racial (and other) positions in which one is situated."[77] Though she retains the biological distinction between males and females as grounding for gender,[78] Alcoff sees gender as the intersecting sum of all or many of the identities held by persons of a certain sex.

Today, many have developed the views of Searle, Alcoff and others in new directions, widening the field considerably. All the same, certain exemplary voices can be taken as representative for our purposes. Sally Haslanger, a philosopher at MIT, was one of the first in the

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identity is taken (and defined) as a political point of departure, as a motivation for action, and as a delineation of one's politics" (431–432).

[76] Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism," 433.

[77] Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 9.

[78] See Linda Martín Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*, Studies in Feminist Philosophy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 172: "*Women and men are differentiated by virtue of their different relationship of possibility to biological reproduction, with biological reproduction referring to conceiving, giving birth, and breast-feeding, involving one's own body.*"

analytic philosophical guild to give explicit attention to the metaphysics of gender. Her book of

collected essays, *Resisting Reality*, consolidates her main ideas and provides one articulation of

what it means to say that gender is socially constructed.[79] Haslanger's overarching thesis that

structures her book is this: "Construed simply, genders are those social positions, within a

particular culture, constituted by how sexed beings are viewed and treated."[80] Ingredient to her

view, then, are the concepts of a social position, how it is confined to a particular culture and

how it is produced by the views and treatments the bearer of the social position receives from

others. In order to establish this thesis, Haslanger must provide a broader view of social

construction into which her specific views of gender are situated.

The widest umbrella under which social construction is included she calls "generic social

construction": "Something is a social construction in the generic sense just in case it is an

intended or unintended product of a social practice."[81] There is a certain ambiguity in this

statement, namely, on which end of the social construction process is the social entity

encountered? Are social entities doing the constructing, or are they the result of construction? In

actuality, Haslanger's view likely includes both. Something may be a social construct if it was

produced by social practices, even if it is not itself a social entity—dog breeds are one such

social construct. Call this type of social construction *subjective social construction*, since the

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[79] Because her work is a collection of essays written across two decades, it is difficult to suggest that it paints one unified picture (though that picture is nevertheless *consistent* with itself). Her ideas and arguments are widely cast, though they are not any less profitable for being so. Theodore Bach, in his review of the book, says something similar: "*Resisting Reality* is less clear than one would hope in explaining how these…investigative projects [that structure the book] interact, what happens should they conflict, how they can be brought into equilibrium" (Theodore Bach, "Book Review: Haslanger, Sally. Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique," *Ethics* 124, no. 3 (April 2014), 614). Because of these considerations, there will be elements of Haslanger's work that I cannot incorporate here. They are important, but I have made judgments on their salience, and only the latter are showcased here.

[80] Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 196.

[81] Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 86.

relevant social entities are doing the construction, not resulting from it. Alternatively, if the

resultant product is a social construct, even if the forces that produced it are not themselves

social entities, it is an instance of *objective social construction*. Examples here are legion,

including librarians, wars, parties, money and so forth. It will turn out that on Haslanger's view,

gender is both subjectively constructed and objectively constructed, though she herself does not

use such terms.

Within generic social construction are three further subdivisions:[82] things that are *socially*

distinguished, things that are *socially caused* and things that are *socially constituted*.[83] First,

some social constructs are *socially distinguished*: "We distinguish things by classifying them,

and classification is a human activity and can be done in better or worse ways…In this task I am

appropriately guided by some epistemic goals (it would be a problem if my conditions for sorting

were inconsistent, or if I applied them haphazardly), and some practical goals."[84] This is a very

simple type of social construction. Every few months or so, my family will take time to look

through our closets and think carefully about which items we need and which items we can set

aside for donation. Thus, two piles are created, the "keep" and the "don't keep." These are

socially distinguished categories. Moreover, paradigmatic instances of each pile begin to form. A

particularly old shirt with holes in the collar characterizes the prime features for a suitable

member of the "don't keep" pile, while a shirt I know I have worn in the last week is a "keep." It

often becomes the case, as Haslanger observes, that "our attributions have the power to both

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[82] It is worth pausing here to say that these varieties of social construction are not exclusive of one another but may be considered as different angles one might take on explaining socially constructed artifacts.

[83] Cf. Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 190.

[84] Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 188. This is also what Haslanger calls a "discursive construction."

establish and reinforce groupings that may eventually come to 'fit' the classifications."[85] She

considers the distinction between "jocks" and "nerds," observing that those classified as jocks

feel pressure to conform to the paradigm of the category, and the same for the nerds. When this

happens, a further development of social distinguishing occurs, namely "pragmatic

construction": "A classificatory apparatus (be it a full-blown classification scheme or just a

conceptual distinction or descriptive term) is socially constructed just in case its use is

determined, at least in part, by social factors."[86] All that this means, claims Haslanger, is that the

distinctions are in place to suit our own ends and intentions (what must be donated, who is a jock

or a nerd) and that the members of each classification feel social pressure to conform to the

paradigms of each category. Within pragmatic construction, lastly, are strong and weak varieties.

A weak pragmatic construction is one that is only partly determined by social factors (retaining

some kind objectivity) while a strong pragmatic construction is an "illusion projected onto the

world," having no objective basis for the distinction at hand.[87]

A second category of generic construction consists of those artifacts which are *socially*

caused. This occurs when "social factors play a causal role in bringing [something] into

existence or, to some substantial extent, in its being the way it is."[88] For something to be causally

constructed, it must be produced by social factors; this is another way of designating what I have

called subjective social construction. Consider the example, cited briefly above, of dog breeds.[89]

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[85] Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 123.

[86] Haslanger *Resisting Reality*, 90. It is a bit puzzling why she says the apparatus is "socially" rather than "pragmatically" constructed. I take her to be saying something semantically equivalent.

[87] Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 91.

[88] Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 87. For an application of this to gender, see *Resisting Reality*, 130.

[89] This example is offered by Haslanger in *Resisting Reality*, 190.

There are different dog breeds because *humans* have bred different types of dog through a social

process we call *husbandry*. The social process of husbandry has caused the varieties of dog

breeds, making it a case of causal construction.[90] For Haslanger, gender is causally constructed—

social practices have created the expectations, roles and so forth that inform what it is typically

understood to make up masculinity and femininity. Interestingly, she makes the further claim

that when gender is causally constructed, it becomes a case of pragmatic construction. For

instance, a "husband is a legally married man. Being a legally married man does not *cause* one to

be a husband; it is just what being a husband consists in."[91] What she means is that when social

forces cause gender categories, those social forces just *become* the categories. To borrow a term

from Searle, they become "constitutive rules"—rules that both cause and constitute what it

means to belong to a category.[92] Becoming legally married is what caused me to become a

husband, but it is now also what *makes me* a husband. Similarly, the rule "a ball fully crossing a

goal line is a goal" caused the existence of goals in the game of soccer, but it is more aptly said

that it defines what a goal is.

    Haslanger's third category of generic construction demarcates those things which are

socially constituted: these are "defined in terms of social relations…These are constituted by a

relationship…that holds between the members of each category."[93] This differs importantly from

social causation, particularly when applied to gender: "The point being made is that gender is not

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[90] Note that the existence of subjective social construction, or in Haslanger's terms, causal construction, means that the opposite of "natural" is not social construction. A Pitbull is a "natural" entity, even if it was produced by social practices.

[91] Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 131.

[92] Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 27.

[93] Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 185.

a classification scheme based simply on anatomical or biological differences, but should be

understood as a system of social categories that can only be defined by reference to a network of

social relations."[94] Whereas the claim that gender is causally constructed concerns what was

involved in producing it from social practices, to say that gender is socially constituted points out

that what defines the category is not what caused it but the relations that obtain within it.

Consider this a shift analogous to the change from subjective construction (social practices

produced gender) to objective construction (gender is to be considered a social artifact). Here, we

might say that gender is a social construct not (or not only) because society has *caused* the

expectations attached to different genders but because of the social relations required of each

gender. Suppose that it is a masculine trait to be interested in sports. One may say that society

caused this trait to be what it is, but one may also focus one's analysis on the way this trait is

extended within a web of social relations—say, guys getting together to watch a game, the heavy

involvement of men in sports betting, the disproportionate number of women versus men who

report on sports games and so on. From this we can see that gender has a "basis in social

relations."[95] One acquires a "social position" from these social relations, which is the sum of

social relations in which an individual stands.[96] Recall from what I called Haslanger's "thesis

statement" that this is where she believes gender is located: it is a "social position, within a

particular culture, constituted by how sexed beings are viewed and treated." This definition

draws upon all three types of social construction, and the process can be summarized as follows.

Once a social distinction is made between the sexes and gender is socially caused (which creates

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[94] Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 130.

[95] Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 40.

[96] Cf. Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 40.

a pragmatic construction), one's consequent social roles constitute certain relations, the relevant ones of which become one's social position. Once that occurs, one is then subject to "gender norms," which are "clusters of characteristics and abilities that function as a standard by which individuals are judged to be 'good' instances of their gender; they are the 'virtues' appropriate to the gender."[97] Thus, the social positions that constitute particular gender kinds have paradigmatic instances, and these exemplify the traits and relations to which the members *ought* to aspire. (Think of celebrities and models, athletes and musicians; there is an impulse for us to want to be *like* those figures.) Importantly, social norms function as representatives of the socially constructed kind to which they belong, so if the ideal is problematic, so is the kind.[98]

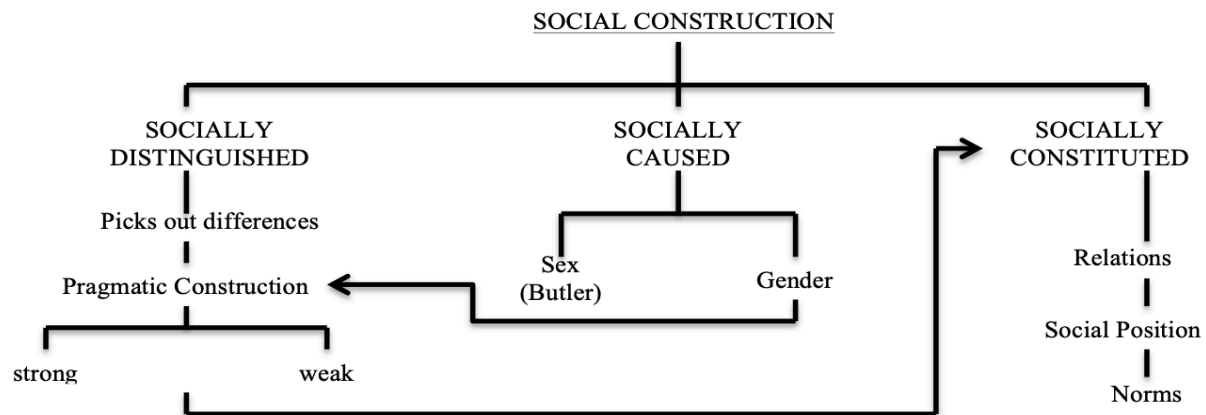Represented in a schematic, Haslanger's views of social construction can be mapped as follows:

Figure 2.1. Sally Haslanger's Account of Social Construction

From the figure, we can achieve an overview of her complex proposal. According to Haslanger, gender is socially constructed in each of the three ways depicted. Sexes are socially distinguished

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[97] Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 42.

[98] Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 46.

(those with this kind of reproductive role are on one side, those with the other kind on the other side), and these distinctions mark out the paradigmatic instances of each group according to some social purpose, making gender pragmatically constructed.[99] Gender is also socially caused, because it was society which created the norms, expectations, roles and so on that define what it means to be of a certain gender. Finally, and perhaps most important due to its ability to inform our social positions, is the fact that gender is socially constituted. It is the nexus of social relations that constitute a social position in which certain gender norms are present.[100]

Haslanger's philosophical understanding of the social construction of gender is helpfully positioned alongside Kathryn Tanner's views, particularly for those keen to promote the relationship between philosophy and theology. Tanner, throughout her work, attempts to

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[99] For her, the pragmatic construction is of the weak variety, since it will still have a basis in some non-social entity, namely, biological sex.

[100] It should not go without saying that Haslanger has given a more specific, though much more controversial, account of gender in her essay, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?" (chapter seven of *Resisting Reality*). In it, she attempts to provide a view of gender which obtains in all cultures and times *and* is consistent with feminist motivations. She sees herself as providing an ontology of gender where political goals are central, and she defines femininity as follows: "*S functions as a woman* in context C iff$_{df}$: (i) S is observed or imagined in C to have certain bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction; (ii) that S has these features marks S within the background ideology of C as someone who ought to occupy certain kinds of social position that are in fact subordinate (and so motivates and justifies S's occupying such a position); and (iii) the fact that satisfies (i) and (ii) plays a role in S's systematic subordination in C, that is, *along some dimension*, S's social position in C is oppressive, and S's satisfying (i) and (ii) plays a role in that dimension of subordination" (*Resisting Reality*, 235). The shorter version of this view is that what it means to be a woman in some context is to hold a social position in which one is oppressed in virtue of the perceived role one plays in biological reproduction. This definition, she believes, avoids the great diversity between cultural definitions of femininity: "So women have in common that their (assumed) sex has socially disadvantaged them; but this is compatible with the kinds of cultural variation that feminist inquiry has revealed, for the substantive content of women's position and the ways of justifying it can vary enormously" (*Resisting Reality*, 239). This is advantageous for feminist motivations, she believes, because it highlights how women are the unique recipients of oppression, mobilizing efforts to eliminate it. Yet, eliminating this oppression would entail eliminating women: "it is part of the project of feminism to bring about a day when there are no more women (though, of course, we should not aim to do away with females!)" (*Resisting Reality*, 239). This is a thought-provoking proposal, yet I find it ultimately unconvincing for the reason that it does not actually circumvent gendered cultural diversity in the way that she advocates. Though it may be common to being a woman that one is oppressed on the basis of perceived roles in reproduction, the particulars of one's oppression as well as the condition for being oppressed will still differ between cultures. A woman may be oppressed in a certain society for having no children, while another woman is oppressed for having too many children; surely these are not the same acts of oppression, for one would not be oppressed in the other's culture.

conceptualize the ways in which theology is embroiled in culture and how the traits of culture implicate the nature and tasks of theology. For Tanner, the social construction of gender is not particularly unique; all of reality is socially constructed, including the theology produced by theologians. Because of this, however, gender can be theologically analyzed, with the particular goal of such an analysis becoming the charting of a new social vision for women and men.

Tanner is sharply critical of those theologians commonly labeled as social trinitarians for their attempts to craft a social vision modeled after the relations of the Trinity.[101] Levelling a series of counterexamples and complexifications to their views, Tanner concludes that one should not look to the Trinitarian relations for social principles.[102] By extension, one should also not look to the Trinity to understand the ontology of human persons and their genders. Instead, for such answers we ought to look to *Christology*.[103] When we do so we find that human nature has a "lack of given definition, malleability through outside influences, unbounded character, and general openness to radical transformation."[104] She begins by affirming that the only being rightly said to be in the image of God is the Son, who in virtue of the divine nature, has *in se*

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[101] One such figure, Miroslav Volf, has actually provided a distinctly theological argument for the social construction of gender on the basis of the Trinity. For Volf, "the relations between the Trinitarian persons serve as a model for how the content of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' ought to be negotiated in the social process" ("The Trinity and Gender Identity," in *The Gospel and Gender*, ed. Douglas A. Campbell, Studies in Theology and Sexuality (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 169). Just as in the Trinity "distinct persons are internally constituted by the indwelling of other persons in them," so also gender is constituted by social relations, allowing us to "*let the social construction of gender play itself out guided by the vision of the identity of and relations between divine persons*" ("The Trinity and Gender Identity, 174, 170). Though it is truly an argument for the social construction of gender from theological premises, I hasten to add that the argument is far from sound. In addition to Tanner's own astute criticisms, it must be said that it is duplicitous to argue that the relations of constitution undergone in social construction are the same as the ones at play in the Trinity, for the persons therein cannot rightly be said to be *constructed*.

[102] "Clearly, then, trinitarianism can be every bit as socially and politically dangerous as monotheism. Everything depends on how that trinitarianism (or monotheism) is understood and applied" (Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key*, Current Issues in Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 216).

[103] Cf. Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 236–237.

[104] Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 1.

everything necessary for perfectly imaging divinity.[105] Though it is only the Son who is the

image of God, we can nevertheless say that by the Son's direct involvement in creation (see

Proverbs 8:27-31 and Colossians 1:16-18), human creatures can approximate and participate in

the image by means of their union with Christ established in the Spirit. In fact, this is what

humans were created to be: "They are created to have within themselves something they are

not."[106] That is, to be human is to be created with a particular openness to relationship with the

Son and to be transformed thereby. To be made in God's image, therefore, is to be made with a

certain natural configuration suitable for union with the Son. Moreover, if to be made in God's

image is what it means to be human, then to be human is to be made for union with Christ.

From this, Tanner derives a series of conclusions about human nature: "If human beings

were created to enjoy Word and Spirit for their own, it no longer makes sense to give isolated

attention to human nature in and of itself as if that nature were properly itself in some self-

contained fashion."[107] Such a statement requires some disambiguation, particularly if we are

going to be precise by what we mean by the word "nature." I take Tanner to mean that it is

imprecise to think of human nature as a list of *intrinsic properties*. If a human nature lists the

properties necessary and jointly sufficient for being human, then Tanner is arguing that it is

mistaken to think these are exhausted by intrinsic properties, where an intrinsic property is one

possessed by an individual apart from any relationships into which that individual enters

(primarily relationships with other persons, human or divine). Rather, included within the

properties constitutive of human natures—perhaps even primary among them—are *extrinsic*

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[105] "A perfect image of God can only be a divine image…Creatures by definition do not share the divine nature; and consequently human beings simply cannot be images of God in this way" (Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 6).

[106] Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 22.

[107] Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 28.

properties, properties one has by virtue of one's relationships with other persons. Human nature, since it is defined by its capacity for union with Christ, includes within it an extrinsic property. From this it follows that we are not fully human apart from the relationship we have with Christ. Thus Tanner: "human nature must be characterized by an expansive openness that allows for the presence of God within it. It must be the sort of nature that has or makes room for the divine within its basic operations."[108] In short, human nature is not something defined in relation only to itself, but in relation to another, namely, Christ.

Having established these conclusions about the image of God and human nature, Tanner extrapolates them for a broader account of human ontology. Though there are some natural faculties and capacities necessary for being human, she points out that there are no prescribed ways those faculties ought to be exercised: "Most of the innate and therefore fixed traits and dispositions of human nature underdetermine the character of actual human behaviors. These capacities, needs, and inclinations that make up human nature are designed to be culturally and environmentally sensitive in operation so as to take on a specific form only as shaped by environmental inputs."[109] It might be natural to have hands, but there is no one use of my hands that is prescribed by their nature, claims Tanner. This means that there is a *cultural under-determinacy* involved in human nature at the outset. Just as there is an extrinsic property that defines the image of God, it is also the case that there are extrinsic dimensions to all of the other properties constitutive of being human. She concludes: "[O]ne might say these self-formative capacities are determined by human nature, but the peculiar nature of humans as rational agents

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[108] Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 37.

[109] Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 42–43.

is just to have no particular nature to be true to."[110] One cannot account for what it means to be human, maintains Tanner, apart from the particular cultural and relational exercises of our natural capacities. This she calls human nature's *plasticity*, and it turns out that it is not just the particular exercises of our natural capacities that are labile, but also those natural capacities *themselves*, including our bodies: "It is…important to see the way that plastic or non-natured *bodies* are the ultimate issue even for these early church theologians. At the end of the day it is our bodies that are to be remade into Christ's body…Humans demonstrate that, appearances to the contrary…the material world itself is plastic—by extension just as plastic to divine influence, one might hope, as human lives."[111] There are extrinsic determinations even for physical bodies, leading us to believe that through the social exercise of faculties, particularly when they are exercised in relation to Christ, every aspect of human nature is in continual flux. Tanner's conceptual moves thus proceed from the image of God being primarily true of the Son, to that image indicating that human nature contains some extrinsic properties, to claiming that natural capacities are themselves plastic, both in their exercise and in their basic features.

Space does not allow for a lengthy pause to evaluate the inferences made in Tanner's work, but it must be said that they are not altogether defensible. It is plausible to claim that human nature contains some extrinsic properties, even that our natural faculties require social manifestation, but this does nothing to indicate the plasticity of the *faculties* themselves. There is still an identifiable human nature in question, with identifiable necessary and sufficient properties (even if they are extrinsic). The move from the social indeterminacy of natural faculties to the plasticity of the faculties themselves is similarly unwarranted, particularly since

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[110] Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 48.

[111] Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 50, 52.

the diverse ways that I can exercise my hands does nothing to indicate that their fundamental

structure is plastic. It seems to me that there are deeper theological claims at play, ones drawn

from particular readings of certain Patristic authors. Since there are other authors who make

these moves more explicitly, like Judith Butler and Sarah Coakley, we must await a deeper

analysis of their validity. Suffice it to say that, at the moment, Tanner's arguments move rather

too quickly.

Having established that human nature, both in its capacities and its exercises, is plastic on

account of its dependence for definition on social relations, Tanner sees herself free to treat

gender theologically. This is due to her account of the nature and tasks of theology, which

presume the view that all things are socially constructed and fluid. In her book, *Theories of

Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*, Tanner enumerates the basic traits of a modern view of

culture and shows how postmodern critiques require a reconfiguration of such traits, even if they

are not done away with altogether. The sixth trait she lists is that "*culture is understood to

constitute or construct human nature*. Culture does not function to regulate or repress it. Indeed,

there is nothing to human life with any definite form or shape of its own that might exist outside

of culture so as to be regulated or repressed."[112] Notice that this claim is identical to the

conclusion at which she arrived in *Christ the Key*, only there she provided a theological rationale

for it and in this earlier work she is assuming the conclusion in an effort to set forth a theological

method. Tanner maintains that the theological enterprise is *objectively* socially constructed; that

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[112] Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*, Guides to Theological Inquiry (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 27. Though Tanner is not an advocate for what she labels the modern view of culture, she does not criticize *this particular* tenet of it. In fact, she admits that the postmodern view does not differ massively in substance with the modern, only in the particulars: "After all these criticisms, what remains of the modern understanding of culture? Very few of the aspects of that understanding have actually been discarded. Most are retained with more or less their modern senses; they have just been decentered or reinscribed within a more primary attention to historical processes" (*Theories of Culture*, 56). For this reason, I attribute this feature of culture to Tanner's own view.

is, the works that theologians produce are themselves social constructs: "The most basic contribution that an anthropological understanding of culture—postmodern or not—makes to theology is to suggest that theology be viewed as a part of culture, as a form of cultural activity…Theology is something that human beings produce. Like all human activities, it is historically and socially conditioned; it cannot be understood in isolation from the rest of human sociocultural practices."[113] Human nature is a social construct and so are the efforts of theologians to understand it. This means that there is a correspondence or fittingness which obtains between the ontology of human nature and the nature of theology, namely, both are constructed by social practices.

This is good news for the theological anthropologist, according to Tanner. It means that the theologian is free to turn her attention to anything within creation, considering their relationship to God.[114] The theologian who does this is "not like a self-determined creator of cultural artifacts—say, a writer of a novel or a composer of a symphony. He or she is, instead, like an active reader or an orchestra conductor metaphorizing the artistic creation of others, diverting it from its intended course, transposing it into a new register or key."[115] This means that the theologian has a freedom and a duty to inspect social realities, because theology is itself entangled within the web of socially constructed artifacts occupying our social world. This does not mean that theology must meld its character with that of the other social sciences, but that it

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[113] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 63.

[114] This is the main argument of her article "The Difference Theological Anthropology Makes," *Theology Today* 50, no. 4 (January 1, 1994): 567–79.

[115] Tanner, "The Difference Theological Anthropology Makes," 568. I take it that by the time she writes *Theories of Culture*, Tanner would actually deny the first part of this quote. Works of theology are *both* cultural artifacts *and* reflections upon other cultural artifacts.

can take their findings and "at least undergo a transposition into a religious key."[116] In short, the

ontologies of theological work and human nature match up. Since both are socially constructed,

the former is free to investigate the latter without ignoring its basic features. Theology is a social

enterprise interested in social artifacts.

All that has been said up to this point is important for Tanner's own understanding of the

social construction of gender. She has already said enough to commit herself to the view, for if

every aspect of human nature is socially constructed (both because of her Christology and

because of her broad understanding of culture), then it follows *a fortiori* that gender is socially

constructed. And since the theologian is free to investigate socially constructed realities, then the

feminist theologian can also study gender and must do so in a particular way. Applying her

insights from cultural studies to theology, Tanner argues that feminist theologians ought to study

gender with a view to finding out "the way oppression is built into the normal processes of

everyday life by way of stereotypes and unquestioned norms, assumptions, and symbols,"

particularly "[a]ssumptions about men and women, and about ethnic and racial minorities,

standards of proper behavior, dress, and beauty…the conduct of family life and its impact on

economic opportunity for women."[117] The particular way by which feminist theologians will do

this is through the reconfiguration of Christian symbols, doctrines and figures: "Alternative

meanings and alliances of the same elements are also often circulating, with the potential,

therefore, to dislodge the currently pervasive ones. Any secured meaning or articulation is only

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[116] Tanner, "The Difference Theological Anthropology Makes," 578.

[117] Kathryn Tanner, "Social Theory Concerning the 'New Social Movements' and the Practice of Feminist Theology," in *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition, and Norms*, ed. Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 182–183. Notice that all of the objects of investigation constitute an inquiry into social structures, corresponding fittingly to a theological method which itself contributes to the social world.

relatively secure, since it is the product of ongoing struggle with contending forces."[118] That is, theology's socially constructed makeup allows the feminist theologian, himself studying a socially constructed entity like gender, to reevaluate and reconstruct those features within theology typically taken to be problematic on feminist grounds.

It is worthwhile to note that Tanner has attempted something like this herself. In an article on whether it is right to retain Anglican liturgical references to God the Father and Son, Tanner retrieves the views of ancient Christian figures like Gregory of Nyssa in an effort to show that such labels were meant to exclude any creaturely or corporeal elements from their connotations. This allows for other names, especially biblical ones (like "Word" or "Wisdom" for the second person) to counterbalance any potentially sexist understandings and uses.[119] Or again, in a recent contribution to the *Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology*, Tanner attempts to understand the impact of globalization on the lives of religious immigrant women, particularly the ways in which they are released from traditional gender expectations when arriving in a new culture.[120] Though there is little to indicate a transposition into a religious or theological key in this latter article, both examples nevertheless serve as suitable instances of the confidence she believes the theologian can have in investigating cultural realities by means of her own cultural efforts. All of it depends, in sum, on gender's social construction, itself an extension of her convictions about the plasticity of human nature.

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[118] Tanner, "Social Theory Concerning the 'New Social Movements,'" 185–186.

[119] See Kathryn Tanner, "Gender," in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglican Studies*, ed. Mark Chapman, Sathianathan Clarke, and Martyn Percy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 400–412, especially, 402–403 and 410.

[120] See Kathryn Tanner, "Globalization, Women's Transnational Migration, and Religious De-Traditioning," in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology*, ed. Sheila Briggs and Mary McClintock Fulkerson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 544–59, especially 549.

This concludes my exposition of the key features of the social construction of gender. I have attempted to expatiate the views of key representatives of the position in both philosophy and theology, demonstrating how they differ from and share similarities with the theorists who have come before them. Though the view that gender is a social construct is one with considerable breadth and variegation, its central commitments are sufficiently clear. With these in mind, let us now turn to their critique.

2.3 Objections to the Social Construction of Gender

At the outset of this chapter, I noted that one of the leading arguments put forward in favor of the view that gender is a social construct is an argument from exclusion. Conceptions of gender, it maintains, are often proffered in ways which exclude significant portions of people who are themselves of that gender. It is alleged, moreover, that this happens when a failure of sensitivity to social factors (like the relevance of race and economics) occurs. Thus, early feminist theories were seen to exclude black women, Latin American women, Asian women and so on. This was an early motivation for claiming that gender is a social construct, for doing so provides one with the theoretical framework to *include* these various social dimensions as well as to account for why they were excluded in the first place. My argument in this section, however, is that the view that gender is socially constructed is still susceptible to this very argument, even if its susceptibility takes on a slightly different form. I will claim that a social constructionist view commits one to the conclusion that there is no one social kind, "women" (and *mutatis mudandis* for any other gender); rather, there are numerically distinct social kinds corresponding to genders of different times and places. What must be realized, however, is that this has devastating metaphysical and moral consequences. It results in an incoherence in gender theory and renders particular genders *morally unevaluable*.

The objection I have just articulated, surprisingly, is recognized by most of the feminist theorists who write on the topic, and in this sense I do not think I am introducing a new feature to the discussion at this juncture.[121] Elisabeth Spelman, one of the architects of the exclusion argument, says as much: "For it may seem as if it is *impossible*, given the heterogeneity of women and women's situations, to make any well-founded yet nontrivial statements about all women. If that is impossible, however, its impossibility does not follow simply from the fact that such statements cannot be based on the situation of white middle-class women."[122] Spelman is willing to concede that the diversity of women in different times and places makes it "impossible" to say anything about women *simpliciter*, so long as what we mean by "differences" are not "differences *from* white middle-class women." In other words, the differences cannot be measured by an ethnocentric standard, but they exist nevertheless. Her solution is to appreciate the differences and to learn from other women about their experiences, particularly with regard to their racial and economic standing.[123] This, she assumes, can foster greater understanding amongst women despite cultural differences. Or again, Ásta's recent account of the metaphysics of social construction recognizes that "gender is radically context dependent," not only with respect to different historical periods and geographical locations, but even "the same geographical location and time period can allow for radically different contexts,

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[121] In fact, the problems I am outlining are summarized in much greater specificity in Theodore Bach, "Gender Is a Natural Kind with a Historical Essence," *Ethics* 122, no. 2 (January 2012): 234–235. What he calls the "Representation Problem" roughly corresponds to my second objection; what he calls the "Commonality Problems" correspond to my first objection.

[122] Spelman, *Inessential Woman*, 183. Emphasis added.

[123] Spelman, *Inessential Woman*, 113. Of course, the very notion of "other women" is one of those claims Spelman thinks is impossible to ascertain or say anything about. It is difficult for a view like Spelman's to avoid the charge of self-referential incoherence, itself assuming the very thing it has claimed to be impossible.

so that a person may count as of a certain gender in some context and not others."[124] So, what I will say is not something new or unrecognized by feminist theorists; rather, what I want to draw out are the unrecognized metaphysical and moral implications for this concession that often go unrealized or underappreciated.

The theory of the social construction of gender, at its most basic level, attempts to account for the creation of the social kinds or categories we call "men" and "women" (and for any other genders, if there are any).[125] A kind specifies the properties necessary and sufficient for membership within it, and in the case of socially constructed kinds, the necessary properties are themselves social properties. As the thinkers we have considered so far have conceded, this means that social kinds are *context specific*, and contexts differ among times and places (indeed, even *within* times and places). Recall Searle's formula of "X counts as Y *in C*," where C specifies a time and a place for a social artifact to be what it is. Or, we might remember that Haslanger's definition of gender restricts it to a "a particular culture."[126] Even Tanner, who is comparatively less interested in the metaphysics at play, recognizes that cultures have constantly to appreciate the amount of variegation that occurs in time and place.[127] The most forthright admission of this is found in Ásta's citation above, where I might be a man in my current context but it is entirely possible for me to hop on a plane (or into a time machine) and find myself landing in a context where I am no longer a man. This produces the result that gender kinds like

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[124] Ásta, *The Categories We Live By*, 73, 74. See again page 87: "one can be a woman in one context and not in another, because the standards of relevance to the paradigm case vary with context." This is so even though she makes recourse to a Wittgensteinian account of "family resemblances."

[125] Cf. Ásta, *The Categories We Live By*, 1 n. 1 for an explicit statement of this desideratum.

[126] Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 196.

[127] See Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 26, 43.

"man" and "woman" are context-dependent, such that what it means to be a man in one time and place is not the same thing in another time and place. Consider just one example: in 1918, it was exhorted by a clothing catalogue that young boys wear pink to indicate their gender and that young girls wear blue.[128] Today, to indicate that one is a boy or a girl, one must do precisely the opposite. This may seem like a trivial fact, but remember that these are *necessary conditions* for membership in a social kind on the view that gender is a social construct. But it is metaphysically impossible, even if it is only socially incongruous, for a social kind to have inconsistent, even *contradictory*, necessary conditions. To be a boy one must both wear pink and not wear pink; this tension must divide one social kind into two.[129] I do not mean to deny the existence of inconsistent standards for gender in society, which very much exist. There are inconsistent conditions placed upon women on a regular basis, famously depicted in the "Madonna/whore" polarization, which is a deeply unjust state of affairs. But such a recognition does not eradicate the metaphysical problem, namely, that what we create is not one historically continuous social kind, but two, "boy_{1918}" and "boy_{2020}," and they are numerically distinct. If a boy in 1918 were to hop into a time machine and travel to 2020, he must abandon his prior expectation to wear pink if he is to meet the expectations of boyhood in 2020. In doing so, according to the social constructionist framework, he would become a *different gender*, not the same gender with

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[128] For an interesting account of this, see Susan Stamberg, "Girls Are Taught To 'Think Pink,' But That Wasn't Always So," *NPR.Org*, April 1, 2014, http://www.npr.org/2014/04/01/297159948/girls-are-taught-to-think-pink-but-that-wasnt-always-so.

[129] This remains true even if a gender term is a family resemblance term or cluster concept, as suggested by Cressida Heyes in *Line Drawings: Defining Women through Feminist Practice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000) and Natalie Stoljar in "Essence, Identity and the Concept of Woman," *Philosophical Topics* 23 no. 2 (1995): 261–293. Neither a cluster nor a family resemblance, it seems to me, can consistently tolerate outright contradiction and remain operable in defining the term in question.

different conditions. As a result, there no "boys" *as such*, only "boys" with temporal and cultural modifiers and restrictors.

At first glance, this is deeply unintuitive. It seems to me that though I am relevantly different from my grandfather, who lived in Brazil in the twentieth century, I am also the same kind of thing as him, namely a man. He may have observed standards of masculinity to which I may not hold, but on the face of it, I do not think that he is something different than me. We might also consider the way that we point to exemplary women throughout history. It ought to be possible to point to paradigmatic and exemplary women of the past and raise them as examples for other women to follow. I hope to show my daughter, for instance, that she should aspire to be like the highly admirable women of history, like Harriet Tubman or Sojourner Truth, even if she is from a different time and culture than theirs. Additionally, Christianity benefits from considering examples of biblical women, considering how their faithfulness can empower their own.[130] Though this is not an argument, but an intuition, it seems to me that it is not a problematic intuition to hold. In fact, it is a good and empowering thing to be able to do this in a world which consistently fails to display and highlight the achievements and faithfulness of admirable women. Finally, it is an intuition that seems to be Scripturally assumed, minimally when Peter commends the example of Sarah in 1 Pet. 3:1-6 to an audience living in a vastly different culture. The problem is that if the social construction of gender is true, this intuition must be rejected along with the actions we perform on its basis, for they are actually misguided. The social kinds occupied by Harriet Tubman, biblical women and my daughter are all numerically distinct. They do not actually share in common the fact that they are women, but are,

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[130] For theological defenses of this, see Elaine Storkey, *Women in a Patriarchal World: Twenty-five Empowering Stories from the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2020) and Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

strictly speaking, different genders confined to their own specific time and place. If there is any commonality between them, it cannot be because they are all women in an unequivocal sense.

The issue goes deeper than intuition. There are *theoretical* inconsistencies at play too. In feminist theology, for instance, it is often assumed that the concepts "men" and "women" are in good working order for theological analysis. As will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter, most feminists are not *gender skeptics*, that is, those who hold that gender terms have no stable meaning. Yet, the metaphysical incoherence brought about by the differences of time and place—the differences which make what it is to be a woman or man in different cultures so very different—lead into a gender skeptical position nevertheless.[131] If it is impossible to state generally stable conditions for being a man or a woman, then those terms cannot be employed in theological argumentation. But this is precisely what feminist theology is. Consider a statement from the influential feminist theologian, Rosemary Radford Ruether: "The critical principle of feminist theology is the affirmation of and promotion of the full humanity of *women*. Whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of *women* is, therefore, to be appraised as not redemptive. Theologically speaking, this means that whatever diminishes or denies the full humanity of women must be presumed not to reflect the divine or authentic nature of things, or to be the message or work of an authentic redeemer or a community of redemption."[132] This is a powerful statement that crucially depends on the stability of gender concepts. Yet, to a social constructionist, we might inquire: To whom does the referent "women" actually refer? If the

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[131] For an argument that a true appreciation of the differences of gender terms between cultures leads one to think that gender terms apply only very restrictively, see Uma Narayan, "Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: A Feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism," *Hypatia* 13 (2): 86–106. The upshot of Narayan's argument—that gender terms only apply to women and men individually—is equivalent to a gender skeptical position, for there would no longer be gender *kinds* but only individuals' genders.

[132] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russel (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985), 115. Emphasis added.

necessary conditions were specified, one would find that they would be context-specific, thereby excluding other women who exist outside of that context. If the social construction of gender is true, and different conditions define different kinds, there is not *one* referent picked out by "women," but at every point *which* women in *which* contexts must be made clear. Is every diminishment or denial of humanity exhibited toward women the same, and does that matter? Surely these denials will differ from culture to culture and to various degrees, so much so that a woman experiencing one kind of oppression in one culture cannot find solidarity with another experiencing something much less severe. Suppose further that enough progress is made that *some* women are treated as fully human; would they cease to be women? Ruether does not expatiate the particular necessary conditions for participating in the social kind "women," though the term is still employed in her theology. My point, however, is that if one employs a social constructionist strategy for expatiating these conditions, the contradictions and incoherencies for what it means to be a man or woman in different cultures result in gender skepticism. That is, if what it means to be a man or woman is a constantly moving target due to social specificity, then it is no longer possible to fix the referent of the term "woman" or to know the conditions for membership in that kind. If the category of woman is lost, however, then feminism would suffer, for unless there is "some sense in which 'woman' is the name of a social collective, there is nothing specific to feminist politics."[133] In short, if feminist theory and theology is intended to advocate for the liberation of *women*, some stability is necessary about what that category

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[133] Iris Marion Young, *Intersecting Voices* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 13.

includes along with conditions for its persistence across changes of context, a clarity that cannot be provided by the view that gender is a social construct.[134]

Recall that my claim is *not* that feminist theologians are unaware of the cultural differences that obtain between women of different times and cultures. It is rather that the *implications* of the metaphysical position being advocated, the social construction of gender, are not fully perceived. As result, "most feminist theologies nevertheless implicitly tend to operate with some analogous form of essentialism or totalizing thought, even if it is refined in terms of social construction…Claiming that 'women's experience' is an identifiable, discrete category rests on the assumption of a totalizing anthropology of the feminine, even granted that we allow for the shaping of race and class."[135] The point being made is that the social construction of gender makes generalizations about a gender not difficult, but *impossible*. This is the result of views like that of Elizabeth Spelman and Ásta: statements about women *as such* are impossible, for that label may or may not apply in different contexts. But if feminist theology is anything at all, it is an attempt to talk about women *as such*. It promotes the liberation *of women*; it considers *women* in relation to God. This may be parsed out in ontological terms (is there a kind with specifiable conditions such that there is something women share *qua* women?) or semantic terms (to what do we refer, and how do we refer to it, when we refer to women?), but in either case, the problems persist with the category of "women," and with any other gender. Losing that category—or better, allowing that category to fission into variegated social kinds confined to

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[134] The objection applies equally to more generic statements about feminist theory. bell hooks, for instance, defines feminism as the movement which seeks to end sexist oppression against *women*. See bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2015), 26.

[135] Kathryn Greene-McCreight, *Feminist Reconstructions of Christian Doctrine: Narrative Analysis and Appraisal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 61. Greene-McCreight is drawing attention to the ways in which feminist theology makes recourse to women's *experience* in particular, something which only goes on to compound the issue at stake.

particular times and places—is fatal for the practice of feminist theology and for feminist theory more broadly, especially if these hope to result in some kind of social or political change in the world.

The notion of political change brings me to my second criticism of the social construction of gender, namely, that it renders particular genders morally unevaluable. Serene Jones has alluded to this worry: "If no single description of women's lives is correct and all are equally valid, what standards are available for assessing harm or the nature of justice and injustice in women's lives? Don't we need normative standards for assessing what is good and bad?"[136] Following from these concerns, my contention here is that the metaphysics of social construction actually preclude any satisfactory answer to Jones' question and loses the ability to name "woman" as a social collective, thereby losing its ethical purchase. If the necessary conditions governing the social kinds of gender are context specific, then so are the moral norms which attend specific genders. Moral claims, therefore, cannot be made with respect to women and men, claims of the sort "It is a woman's right to do x" or "It is morally wrong for a man *qua* man to do y." Rather, the best we can do, morally speaking, is to provide guidelines external to gendered concepts; the normative claims attached to masculinity and femininity are restricted to their own contexts, with the result that there are neither good or bad *men* nor *women's* rights, for those normative evaluations are produced by the social constructs constitutive of their gender.[137]

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[136] Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace*, Guides to Theological Inquiry (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 41–42. Jones' phrasing is a bit ambiguous, but I take her to be inquiring about what moral norms are available for evaluating genders within their contexts.

[137] To anticipate this approach, one may witness the otherwise excellent work of Mari Mikkola, who maintains that the injustices about which feminists speak are wrong and harmful not because of anything within the definition of *women* but within the conditions of what it means to be *human*: "these harms wrong women qua human (and not qua gendered) beings" (Mari Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice: Dehumanization and Its Role in Feminist Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 11). Though suggestive, I worry that there are some rights

There are many ways to illustrate this objection, the most obvious of which is the ongoing controversy over clitoridectomy practices.[138] Since this remains a controversial issue, consider instead the example of Pitcairn Island. Pitcairn, an island in the Pacific Ocean halfway between Australia and South America, was populated in 1790 by British mutineers who saw its locale as both uniquely attractive and isolated. Since then, a romantic culture has enshrined Pitcairn, with books, Hollywood movies and ceremonies depicting it as a haven of adventure and natural beauty. Today, and throughout its history, its population hovers at about fifty people, many of whom have ties back to the original mutineers. The shroud of paradisal attraction, however, was lifted in 1999 when several Pitcairn girls confided to a British police officer on the island that they had been raped and sexually assaulted by many of the Pitcairn men.[139] This precipitated an investigation and trial beginning in 2004 and concluding in 2007. The results of the police investigation culminated with ninety-six charges being brought against thirteen Pitcairn men, and when the men who had died by the time of the trials are taken into account, nearly every adult male on Pitcairn faced allegations of crimes that likely date all the way back to the mutiny. When evidence that was dismissed in court is also included, what was uncovered was one of the most vile and vituperative examples of sexual assault imaginable, all contained within one tiny island community.

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and obligations that are specific to one gender and not any others, such as reproductive rights had by women and not men. Due to counterexamples such as these, I do not think the general approach works.

[138] For a discussion of this, see Martha C. Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), chapter 4.

[139] I have drawn all of the details of this incident from Kathy Marks, *Lost Paradise* (New York: Free Press, 2009). Marks was one of the few journalists allowed onto Pitcairn to cover the trials and assiduously records all of the cultural details that surrounded the occurrences.

On Pitcairn, there was a carefully cultivated culture of masculinity, a key aspect of which is an entitlement of adult men to "break in" young, virgin girls, always under the age of sixteen, sometimes as young as six.[140] These men would rape and assault these young girls, causing them lasting physical and psychological harm, in full knowledge of the other islanders. Interviews conducted by the police revealed that the islanders, including the adult women (many of whom were mothers of the assaulted girls), saw these horrendous acts as "part of life," "typical of the Pitcairn men" and held that if the men were prosecuted, it would "emasculate the community."[141] As one female Pitcairner stated: "You can't blame men for being men."[142] What it means to be a man on Pitcairn, evidently, includes the right persistently to sexually assault young girls.

Equally shocking are the results of the trials held by British and New Zealand courts. They were distressingly lenient on crimes which would have been punished more severely had they occurred elsewhere, all because the judges wanted "to impose sentences which are appropriate for the island."[143] One of the men who was convicted of five rapes was given three years in a lenient and unhampered prison on Pitcairn (when the typical jail time then was about three to five times as long), only nine months of which he actually served before being sent home. The time he spent in prison was not drastically different than his day-to-day life prior to it due to the freedoms he enjoyed in custody. In comparison with a conviction in, say, Britain, the Pitcairners received little more than a slap on the wrist, leading many to conclude that their

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[140] For this language, see Marks, *Lost Paradise*, 192 and 195. Shockingly, the most powerful men of the island got to pick the "most desirable" girls, while the weakest men got to pick whatever was left, such that the power structure of the masculine culture corresponded to the order in which girls were assaulted. See Marks, *Lost Paradise*, 275.

[141] Cited in Marks, *Lost Paradise*, 43, 303 and 176, respectively.

[142] Cited in Marks, *Lost Paradise*, 150.

[143] Cited in Marks, *Lost Paradise*, 143.

crimes were not taken seriously. More accurate, however, would be to say that they were judged *as Pitcairn men*, with moral norms restricted to the island's culture. The judges in charge of the trial attributed the comparatively short prison times to the vital role the men played in the upkeep of the island and, most importantly, to factors unique to Pitcairn, like its cultural and legal isolation. All throughout the trial, moreover, the media was loud with defenses of the Pitcairners, many of whom claimed the charges were based on racism and colonialism—that is, an imposition of standards from one culture to another. This led Marks to wonder: Were the crimes "somehow less serious because they were committed on a remote island with a small population? Was [the judge] saying that the Pitcairners deserved such extraordinary leniency because… well, because they were Pitcairners?…Did they not convey the message that the Pitcairners were special, and could, to a large extent, get away with behavior that would be severely punished elsewhere?"[144] She concludes: "Their crimes—raping and molesting children—would normally have had the public baying for their blood. Instead, the islanders were seen as victims of a miscarriage of justice, perpetrated by their overzealous British rulers."[145] What seems to have happened, then, was that a unique set of rules and standards were applied to the men of Pitcairn on account of the fact that they were *Pitcairn men*, which is to say, the cultural specificity of their masculinity was seen to require an entirely different set of moral standards, one having to do with the expectations of masculinity ingredient to the island's operation.

Setting aside the legal and moral complications surrounding the British rule of a distant island, think of the Pitcairn trials instead as an instance of moral reasoning and moral judgment. The salient question was, ultimately, could persons of a different culture condemn practices that

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[144] Marks, *Lost Paradise*, 145–146.

[145] Marks, *Lost Paradise*, 158.

were seen as constitutive of Pitcairn masculinity? The awkwardness and leniency used to apply the sentences serves as a revealing case study for how a social constructionist view of gender has difficulty with giving a clear rationale for morally evaluating gender across different cultures.[146] It could not be said that the Pitcairn men were *bad men* independent of context, for they were simply behaving according to the definition of masculinity in Pitcairn. Rather, on a social constructionist view, these were men *who were bad*, where the moral valence has to be adjudicated by some other standard than the ones which go into constituting the social kind in question. Once again, this is because if gender is a context-specific social construct, then the norms and obligations for masculinity are as context-specific as the social kind. This is why, on the social constructionist picture, I am a man in the United States, but I would not be man on Pitcairn. To be an instance of the latter, one must also sexually assault young girls. The men, it could be said, were simply behaving *as Pitcairn men*. Thus, the most that can be said is that the Pitcairn men were bad *people*, not bad *men*. But this is moral blindness. It was the *men* of Pitcairn who gruesomely assaulted the *girls* of Pitcairn, and to relegate the gendered dimensions of the crimes to cultural specificity is to fail to recognize that there was one specific class of people who used their power for wickedness and that there was another class of people who are vulnerable, defenseless and served as the consistent target for violence and rape. It is of utmost importance to the proper moral evaluation of the situation in Pitcairn that these were not just bad people but *bad men*; they were bad men who preyed on young girls, and no amount of cultural specificity can circumvent that. Sadly, the trials failed to see that.[147]

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[146] There are many indications that those involved considered gender to be a social construct, not the least of which were their comments that they wanted to judge the men according to the standards of the roles they played on the island.

[147] Perhaps it can be said that socially constructed kinds can still be morally evaluated, but that their moral evaluation must come from standards that stand outside of the kinds themselves. That is, nothing *within* the kind will be morally guiding, but we might have external reasons for constructing things in one way or another. In this sense,

For these two reasons, then, I conclude that the social construction of gender is an inadequate theory. First, it makes it impossible to say anything about men, women or any gender *as such*; rather, since social kinds are context-specific, then the cultural differences between genders means that there as many men, women and otherwise as there are cultures. This has an unintuitive result, since I assume that I am the same kind of thing as my grandfather and that I can encourage my daughter to emulate great women of the past, but it also has theoretical problems, if we take into account the constantly differing necessary conditions for these kinds, which make it impossible to say anything about men or women *simpliciter*. Second, and following from the first, is the criticism that genders are not morally evaluable on the view. There is no ultimately satisfying answer to Linda Martín Alcoff's question: "What can we demand in the name of women if 'women' do not exist and demands in their name simply reinforce the myth that they do? How can we speak out against sexism as detrimental to the interests of women if the category is a fiction?"[148] "Nothing," it would seem, is the answer. Nevertheless, though I reject the social construction of gender for these two reasons, I neither

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a moral norm which states that sexual assault is wrong, and applied to the case of Pitcairn, would accurately condemn the men but not the girls. Theoretically, that would suffice. However, I worry that there are issues with implementing this in a practically feasible political way. This is because the norm must remain gender-neutral if it is to avoid begging the question; one cannot say that "it is wrong for men to sexually assault girls," only that "sexual assault is wrong" and these people have done it. History has shown, however, that many moral norms and the protections they entail are not distributed fairly; though the letter of the law might entitle everyone to certain rights and protections, actual practice has often favored those in power. There are several examples, but the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 makes this particularly clear. Americans always had a legal right to be protected from acts of violence, but the vast amount of violence done *to women* required additional legislation to be introduced. Thus, though a norm might in name extend to all people, in practice it is often the case that the vulnerable need to be explicitly named in order to benefit from things like protection. In cases pertinent to gender, especially to women, explicit naming of their gender is often necessary to remind citizens that these rights extend to them as well. In theory, there should be no need for an additional law to specify that women should not be the recipients of violence and to accord them specially named rights, like the right to sue their assailants; actual practice reveals that gender specificity is required in a number of our moral and legal norms if the vulnerable will be recognized as properly included within them. But this kind of specificity is exactly what cannot be had on the view that gender is a social construct.

[148] Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, 143.

think that the only alternative is biological essentialism nor that there is nothing within the view

which is worth affirming. Before I say what those things might be, let us consider one final

attempt to salvage the view: affirm that both gender and sex are socially constructed.

2.4 The Social Construction of Sex: Judith Butler

The work of Judith Butler stands tall amongst other gender theorists. Her books are found

in mall bookstores and theological syllabi, indicating just how influential her views have been.[149]

Part of their remarkable influence is drawn from the bold assertion she is willing to make,

namely, that both *sex* and *gender* are social constructs, taking her beyond any of the theorists we

have considered so far. For Butler, maleness and femaleness, categories often taken to be

biological facts, are themselves components of a broad constructionist understanding of reality.

Acknowledging them as such, she claims, is the proper response to the fact that "the notion of a

generally shared conception of 'women'…has been…difficult to displace."[150] For Butler, one

should not defend oneself against the arguments I have put forward in the previous section,

recognizing that the cultural diversity amongst women is sufficient to show that if gender is a

social construction, then there are multiple disparate kinds rightly labeled "women." Where she

diverges, of course, is that she is willing to bite the bullet on the matter. Instead of attempting to

rehabilitate the concept, she looks to show that feminism flourishes best "only when the subject

of 'women' is nowhere presumed."[151] Feminism succeeds, she maintains, when it allows for a

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[149] Butler has been influential on many theologians. For two notable examples, witness Mary McClintock-Fulkerson, "Gender—Being It or Doing It? The Church, Homosexuality, and the Politics of Identity," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 47, no. 1–2 (January 1, 1993): 29–46 and Mary McClintock-Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject: Women's Discourses and Feminist Theology*, Reprint (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2000). For a view supporting the social construction of sex though not necessarily with recourse to Butler, see Adrian Thatcher, *Redeeming Gender* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[150] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 5.

[151] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 8.

greater diversity and openness of gendered terms in an effort to lift the cover of the complex power relations which constitute them.

If there is a heuristically-helpful starting point to Butler's views, it must be what she terms the "heterosexual matrix," which is a "hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality."[152] In other words, the heterosexual matrix is the dominant, if not ubiquitous, grid in which concepts of sex and gender are produced and rendered intelligible. The concepts produced then go on to regulate how many genders there are, how many sexes there are, what the conditions are for inclusion within each and which relations are appropriate between them (in the heterosexual matrix, of course, only heterosexual relations between exactly two corresponding sexes and genders are possible). It is itself not only a cultural product but the grid through which culture is interpreted, and anything produced by it is appropriately considered to be socially constructed. The heterosexual matrix, therefore, supplies concepts necessary for sex and gender: "The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire…the categories of female and male, woman and man, are similarly *produced* within the binary frame."[153] It is precisely this heterosexual matrix which Butler's theory of gender is meant to debunk.

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[152] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 208 n. 6.

[153] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 31. Emphasis added. To clarify, I take the "binary frame" to be the same as the "heterosexual matrix" in Butler's thought.

Butler goes to claim that it is only *within* the heterosexual matrix that sex appears to be a natural and pre-conceptual given, something that is what it is apart from our discursive practices. In point of fact, that is far from accurate. Just as in a soccer game it only *seems* natural that there are only four positions (goalkeeper, defender, midfielder and forward), so also within the heterosexual frame it only *seems* natural that there are only two sexes and that they are pre-cultural realities. But this is all part of the game and would not make sense without it. Moreover, just as it would make no sense to ask where the shortstop plays in a soccer match, so also do certain configurations of gender (such as drag) and of sex (such as intersex/DSD individuals) fail to make sense within this matrix.[154] Yet, when one begins to inquire about the particular conditions required to be of one sex or another, one finds that such conditions are no less the product of a history than the cultural conditions for gender. Thus, Butler regularly queries *why* it is *these* genotypical and phenotypical traits that make a male while it is *those* traits that make a female, for these decisions are no less a conceptual product within the heterosexual matrix than the cultural concepts of gender.[155] It is no less socially constructed to make the possession of certain genitalia constitutive of one sex than it is to make the possession of certain social cues constitutive of a certain gender. She takes considerable trouble, especially in *Bodies That Matter*, to show that these decisions themselves have a history and could have been otherwise. "Sexual difference," then, "is never *simply* a function of material differences which are not in some way both marked and formed by discursive practices…the category of 'sex' is, from the start,

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[154] Cf. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 23–24: "The notion that there might be a 'truth' of sex, as Foucault ironically terms it, is produced precisely through the regulatory practices that generate coherent identities through the matrix of coherent gender norms…The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of 'identities' cannot 'exist'—that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desires do not 'follow' from either sex or gender."

[155] See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 156 and Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), xii, for examples of such queries.

normative; it is what Foucault has called a 'regulatory ideal.'"[156] Or again, "If the immutable

character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as

gender."[157] In short, both sex and gender are concepts derived from the heterosexual matrix, a

derivation which reveals that both are social constructs.

Butler, towards the end of *Gender Trouble* and in her subsequent volume *Bodies That*

Matter,[158] seeks to make the metaphysical underpinnings of her view clear. Against critics who

allege that she denigrates the materiality of the body, she insists that she is happy to affirm it.

"Materiality" and "body," however, will have to be revised heavily. For Butler, "matter" is "*a*

process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effects of boundary, fixity, and

surface we call matter."[159] Thus, to say something falls under the category "matter" is not to say

that it is a physical substance or something adjectival of that sort; rather, she takes the term as a

verb. Things are not matter, they *matter*, where the first is taken descriptively and the second

verbally. The concept of matter is no less a component of the heterosexual matrix than sex and

gender; for something to have materialized is for it to obtain the semblance of fixed and stable

boundaries over its history within the matrix. Only then, by definition, has it "mattered." By

extension, bodies also matter: "the body is not a 'being,' but a variable boundary, a surface

whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender

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[156] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xi.

[157] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 9.

[158] One might also look to *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004) for further specifications.

[159] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xviii. Cf. also xxiii: "The process of that sedimentation or what we might call *materialization* will be a kind of citationality, the acquisition of being through the citing of power, citing that establishes an originary complicity with power in the formation of the 'I.'"

hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality."[160] For bodies to matter, then, is not what we typically mean by that combination of words. Bodies matter when they have been adequately described as having a stable and fixed boundary through its history. The primary mechanism by which this occurs, according to Butler, is through reference, but even here the concept must be understood differently:

> …the linguistic capacity to refer to sexed bodies is not denied, but the very meaning of 'referentiality' is altered…to 'refer' naively or directly to such an extra-discursive object will always require the prior delimitation of the extra-discursive. And insofar as the extra-discursive is delimited, it is formed by the very discourse from which it seeks to free itself. This delimitation, which often is enacted as an untheorized presupposition in any act of description, marks a boundary that includes and excludes, that *decides as it were, what will and will not be the stuff of the object to which we then refer*…What will and will not be included within the boundaries of 'sex' will be set by a more or less tacit operation of exclusion.[161]

There are significantly ambiguous wrinkles in the above statement and they will be ironed out shortly. For the time being, consider it sufficient to say that the process of materialization is one in which the boundaries of an entity are recognized or made stable, and the process by which those boundaries are fixed is our ability to refer, particularly to perform speech acts which bring about the stuff and the boundaries of the entities to which they refer, analogous to God's declaration, "Let there be light."[162]

These considerations, if true, are sufficient to prove that sex, along with bodies, natures and anything that is material, is socially constructed. Though there are further twists and turns to her admirably complex view, the sketch above exposits the main points she aims to make. Butler's view, to conclude, is that "'the body' is itself a construction, as are the myriad 'bodies'

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[160] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 189. More simply: "materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect" (Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xii).

[161] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xix–xx. Emphasis added.

[162] Butler's own example. See *Bodies That Matter*, xxi.

that constitute the domain of gendered subjection."[163] Or again, "language constructs the categories of sex."[164] Yet, there are significant ambiguities inherent to Butler's presentation. In fact, I will now suggest that there are *two* ways to interpret her main claim that "sex is socially constructed." Both, I will show, are untenable and irremediably problematic. The first is a more modest reading, yet it fails to support the proposals she actually forwards; the second is more radical, yet it fails on metaphysical, ethical and theological grounds.

The first reading of Butler's views is that she is putting forward an *epistemic* thesis regarding the *concepts* we use to describe criteria for membership in a gender, sex and so on. This is a permissible reading of Butler, for she often makes reference to the epistemic importance of her views and seems to be describing categories and concepts.[165] On this reading, it is the *concepts* and *categories* of sex and gender that are socially constructed, not sex and gender themselves. This is a comparatively modest view. Since concepts and categories are not identical to the things of which they are concepts and categorizations, to say that the former are socially constructed is not the same as saying that the latter are. My concept of my wife is not the same thing as my wife, and my concept was formed by social processes and is itself a social product resultant from years of interaction with my wife. In the same way, our concepts of sex and gender have a long and diverse history, and they have been revised whenever we have seen them to be inadequate, giving us the impression that they are remarkably fluid. If this is Butler's view, and it sometimes sounds like it is, then it does not prove the thesis she set out to prove, namely, that sex is a social construct. The social construction of *concepts* is perfectly compossible with

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[163] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 12.

[164] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxxii.

[165] Cf. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxiv: "*what are the categories through which one sees?*" This is the reading that Mikkola takes of Butler. See *The Wrong of Injustice*, 39–40.

an essentialist account of sex and gender which she so ardently criticizes. My concept of my wife has also undergone revision; I have been mistaken about things which I thought were true about her, causing me constantly to revise the concept. But this does not disprove that my wife has no mind-independent features. This is simply how concepts work: if we have any notion of our epistemic limitations, we recognize that our concepts are always corrigible and revisable according to the adequacy of their representation of the conceptualized object. Our revisions, though, do nothing to alter the objects themselves. If Butler is claiming that the *concepts* of sex and gender are socially constructed, then, she will have no objectors, for it is a fairly obvious view.[166] Concepts are perfectly suitable means of acquiring knowledge about the world, just as glasses help me to see out of my window and cell phones allow me to hear the voice of someone far from me.

Perhaps this is not what she means. Other interpreters have taken a *metaphysical* reading of Butler, according to which it is not the *concepts* of sex and gender that are socially constructed but sex and gender *themselves*. On this reading, our concepts of such things do not *bring to light* their basic features, they *bring about* those basic features.[167] This interpretation, then, sees Butler as a kind of creative anti-realist. Butler's "picture is not that our thought and practices conform to how the world is, but that, at least sometimes, the world conforms to our thought practices."[168] Of course, several of the quotes above suggest a view in which there are no features of the world

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[166] For a further development of this line of thought, along with a contextualization of its history going back to Kant, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Does the Role of Concepts Make Experiential Access to Ready-Made Reality Impossible?" in *Practices of Belief: Selected Essays, Volume 2*, ed. Terence Cuneo (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 41–61.

[167] This phrasing is taken from Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Living within a Text," in *Faith and Narrative*, ed. Keith E. Yandell (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 207.

[168] Ásta, *Categories We Live By*, 67.

independent of human thought and reference. Rather, things are what they are, have the boundaries they have and relate in the ways that they do because of human practices, linguistic, mental or otherwise. Sex and gender will then be situated within a broader metaphysical anti-realist picture in which cultural practices not only construct concepts and cultural artifacts, but all material objects (which, for Butler, exhausts all that exists). To say that sex is a social construct, on this reading, is to say that humans have the capacity, through their referential practices, to make their world, of which sex is a part.

Creative anti-realism, one type of metaphysical anti-realism, is a recognizable philosophical view. It has representatives in Hilary Putnam[169] and Nelson Goodman,[170] and Butler's views have remarkable similarities to the former. It maintains that "for any kind of thing, a condition of the existence of that kind of thing and of things belonging to that kind is that some human being have formed the concept of that kind."[171] Typically, arguments put forward in its favor look to point out how two inconsistent propositions both truthfully describe some aspect of the world, and though it has some notable representatives, metaphysical anti-realism has also suffered from some severe criticisms.[172] On the erstwhile strategy, apparently conflicting propositions are easily harmonized when clarified or set in proper context. Butler, however, does not put forward this kind of argument. Alluded to above, the only detectable argument for creative anti-realism in her work is her observation that the criteria for sex, gender, bodies,

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[169] See, for one example, his *Representation and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

[170] Again, for an example, see *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1978).

[171] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The World Ready-Made," in *Practices of Belief: Selected Essays, Volume 2* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 24.

[172] For some of the most exacting criticisms, see Wolterstorff, "The World Ready-Made," and Alvin Plantinga's classic "How to Be an Anti-Realist," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 56, no. 1 (September 1982): 47–70.

materiality and so forth seem to have a history which show they have always shifted. But creative anti-realism does not follow from these premises, for a realist can easily affirm the observation if by it we mean that our concepts have a history, epistemically understood. Were she to insist that it is not the concepts that have a fluid history but bodies themselves, this would amount to arguing for creative anti-realism about bodies by assuming its truth in one of the argument's premises, tantamount to question-begging. One might inquire further into Butler's views. Do humans really have the ability to produce entities *ex nihilo* like that, in a way analogous to God? Christians have particularly good reason to think not, but so would anyone who does not believe in a God who created all things (if there is no God with this capacity, why think there are humans who have it?). Even more basically, what reason do we have for thinking that something like the heterosexual matrix is true and can sovereignly produce reality?

It is far more intuitive, apart from a strong argument to the contrary, to maintain a realist stance on the world, even if it is a version of critical realism.[173] For instance, for a long time, scientists and museum curators had a concept of a dinosaur as something similar to that which we see in the *Jurassic Park* films. Since then, they have discovered that, in all likelihood, dinosaurs had feathers. What changed in this scenario? Did our concept of a dinosaur change in order better to fit what they are in reality, or did those very beings that lived seventy million years ago sprout feathers upon the revision of our concept? The critical realist will side with the former, all while sustaining the corrigibility of her use of language. So it is with bodies and their fundamental features. The concept of a male is now, at least in scientific terms, very different

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[173] For more on critical realism, see Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), chapter 7.

than what it was 1,500 years ago. But male bodies have not changed: our concepts of them have. Wolterstorff summarizes this stance well:

> To saw a board is to alter it. To count some segment of reality as a rabbit is not to alter it. It is to give it a certain role in our lives. It is to make it possible for us to think and talk about it in a certain way. Counting a segment of reality as a rabbit is not like counting the hitting of a ball over a fence as a home run. In the latter case, the ball's being hit over the fence is not sufficient for its *being* what we call "a home run": there must also be in effect a certain social arrangement which brings it about that *by* performing one action, a person performs the other. In the former case, everything necessary and sufficient for being what we call "a rabbit" is provided by external reality, wholly apart from social arrangements.[174]

So it is with bodies, sexes and matter. Our conceptualization of them does not constitute what they are, for our linguistic and conceptual capacities are categorically different from God's declaration of "Let there be light." Rather, we conceptualize sex and gender so as to understand better the role they play in our lives. The second reading of Butler, then, is untenable.

There are further worries. If bodies are socially constructed, and if there are no normative ways in which sex and gender ought to be constructed,[175] then what prevents a wicked society from constructing the female body as something fit to be violated by men bent on assaulting them? A wicked society may very well bring it about that female bodies are those which are fitting recipients of abuse and rape, and there is nothing normative within Butler's view to preclude that. On that view, discursive practices have simply constructed these bodies to be treated in this way. This is problematic for any view which hopes to facilitate feminist goals and ambitions, as Butler's does. Additionally, Christians have specific reasons for rejecting Butler's proposals. One outcome of her views is that there is no such thing as a human nature, for these

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[174] Wolterstorff, "The World Ready-Made," 35.

[175] Something Butler maintains; see *Gender Trouble*, viii. She does have a concept of gender normativity, but it is only used to describe the norms which prescribe the performances pertaining to a gender within the heterosexual matrix. See *Gender Trouble*, xxi–xxii. This is not *moral* normativity.

too are socially constructed within the heterosexual matrix. The distinction between cultural and natural is itself produced by ambits for power, as is the notion of a human nature. The conditions for being human are as much "historically revisable criteria of intelligibility" as those for sex and gender which can easily "vanquish."[176] Yet, as I have argued in the first chapter, the particular vision for theological anthropology which I am advancing *requires* a notion of human nature that is independent of our cultural practices, for it implies that human beings have an objective end for which we were made, an end which brings us to God. Apart from my views, however, it seems to me that Butler's position makes the incarnation impossible. If nothing else, the doctrine of the incarnation affirms that the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, took on a *human nature* in addition to the divine nature already possessed. Such language is meant to capture Scriptural affirmations like, "Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect" (Heb. 2:17) and that the Son "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness" (Phil. 2:7). Even if one considers "nature" language to be ill-suited to express what these passages are saying, *some* concept is needed to specify what the Word assumed in order to be like us in every respect, excepting sin. Butler's view, it seems to me, precludes this very possibility. Any attempt to specify just what is human and what is not is a grab for power, looking to exclude those who do not fit into the category, "human." This is not a problem with our inadequate attempts of defining humanity, but with the very task of defining itself. Thus, if one adopts Judith Butler's views, one will have considerable difficulty in affirming one of the central confessions of Christianity. If we have no resources for saying that the Son became one of us, in what would Christian hope lie?

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[176] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xxii. She also says that the gendered matrix is "prior to the emergence of the 'human'" (xvii). See further xiv as well as *Gender Trouble*, xxxi, 51 and 151 for further substantiation.

Butler's views, for all their sophistication and wide acceptance, are riddled with insuperable problems. It is not obvious whether one should read her epistemically or metaphysically, but on either read, she fails to accomplish what she sets out to do. Apart from a highly problematic account of creative anti-realism, her claim that sex is a social construct is metaphysically unsustainable. Moreover, if one is committed to the core Christian doctrine of the incarnation, then one is forced either to reject Butler's project or face significant challenges to their Christian confession. As an attempt to rescue the view that gender is socially constructed by maintaining that sex is socially constructed, then, Butler's view does not succeed.

2.5 Conclusion

I have attempted to outline and criticize the view that gender is a social construct in this chapter. I have done so because the view is, by all accounts, the most popularly represented in the philosophical and theological literature. It has an admirable history stretching at least as far back as the seventeenth century and it has brilliant representatives in both philosophical and theological guilds. All the same, it is liable to significant objections. It cannot account for the diversity within gender of differing times and cultures in a theoretically satisfying way, and it cannot consistently morally evaluate those genders. One might attempt to rehabilitate the view, along with Judith Butler, by claiming that sex is also socially constructed. This view faces even more unconquerable challenges, requiring a highly dubious metaphysical anti-realism to succeed as an argument. Social construction, I conclude, is an inadequate way to describe the fundamental features of gender.

All the same, I should not be taken to say that there is nothing to commend the view. Certain features of the social construction of gender, particularly in its earlier, more epistemic guise, are highly suggestive. For instance, the emphasis on our epistemic limitations in saying

just what gender is explains very well why so many have difficulty in laying out the conditions for being a man or a woman. Additionally, the *purpose* of the view, to empower conceptions of gender relations which are conducive to human flourishing and justice, should be maintained. Finally, the resistance to saying that social identities are reducible to biological facts is well-motivated, and the recognition of the need to build a conceptual bridge between having a certain kind of body to acting in certain gendered ways uncovers the central issue in question. In the next chapter, I shall attempt to craft a broad metaphysical and theological account of gender which, though not a social construction view, attempts to retain all of these favorable elements of the social construction view.

CHAPTER 3
WHAT GOD HAS JOINED TOGETHER, LET NO ONE SEPARATE: BODIES AND
CULTURE IN THE METAPHYSICS OF GENDER

In the first chapter, I introduced two bifurcations encountered in the literature on gender. The ontological bifurcation observes a division between gender as a social construct and gender as a (biological) essence. In the second chapter, I argued against the view that gender is a social construct, the most prominent view held amongst feminist theorists and theologians. Yet, it must be remembered that I am rejecting the aforementioned bifurcation as a whole; so, while I have rejected one side of it, I should not be understood to have accepted its other side. Better concepts are needed to make headway on the ontology of gender. This chapter takes a first step in providing a constructive view by putting forward four theses for a metaphysics of gender. These theses will be drawn from two theorists of gender, and they will be shown to be theologically salutary.

3.1 Expanding What We Mean by Culture and Nature

Is gender a social construct or is it an essence? What is meant by these terms in the first place? In the previous chapter, the view that gender is a social construct was shown to be, in point of fact, a plurality of views diverse in their commitments, even if they share some fundamental features. Judith Butler's views are not the same as Simone de Beauvoir's views, even if they have some structural similarities. Even so, it was claimed that it was precisely in those similarities, specifically the context-boundedness of social constructs, that the position revealed its flaws. If one investigates a little more, one finds that there are other latent

commitments in the debate that shape the way its key terms are understood, specifically a

common deflation of the terms "culture" and "nature/biology." Often, there is a fairly

reductionist picture of bodies implicit in social constructionist views, a picture that maintains that

no norms can be derived from bodies and their sexes since they are nothing more than mere

biological entities. On this understanding of the body, it makes complete sense as to why

biological essentialism is hopeless as a view. Robin Dembroff, on a rare occasion where this

assumption is made explicit, says,

> For all the huffing about how gender is just body parts, no one in practice holds the
> identity [biological essentialist] view of gender. If gender is just reproductive features
> and nothing more, it makes no more sense to insist that people must look, love or act in
> particular ways on the basis of gender than it would to demand that people modify their
> behaviour on the basis of eye colour or height. Even if reproductive traits are correlated
> to personality, physical capabilities or social interests, such correlations don't equate to
> norms. As David Hume has taught us, is doesn't make ought. Having feet is correlated
> with walking, but I can walk on my hands if I want to. Having a tongue is correlated with
> experiencing taste, but who cares if I decide to drink Soylent every day? Once we
> recognise that gender categories mark how one ought to be, and not only how one's body
> is, the identity view unravels. *To build in the 'oughts' is to admit that gender is more
> than just body parts.*[1]

According to Dembroff, no gender-relevant "oughts" can be derived from biological facts alone.

One's view of gender cannot account for all of the different cultural expressions typically

associated with gender if one identifies gender with biology. For Dembroff, and likely for many

others who hold to a social construction view of some sort, biology is inadequate simply because

of its perceived inability to build an explanatory bridge to social behavior.

Others, however, have risen to defend the side of biology. On their view gender terms

like "man" and "woman" are biological terms meaning "adult human male" and "adult human

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[1] Robin Dembroff, "Why Be Nonbinary?," *Aeon*, October 30, 2018, https://aeon.co/essays/nonbinary-identity-is-a-radical-stance-against-gender-segregation. Emphasis added. See further, Louise Antony, "Natures and Norms," *Ethics* 111 no. 1 (2000): 15: conceptions of human nature cannot "generate reasons for accepting ethical propositions about what human beings should or should not do."

female," respectively.[2] In response to a charge like Dembroff's, Bogardus rightly observes that

most people do not have such a normatively impoverished account of the biology of adult

humans and their sexes:

> if all you know of a thing is that he is an adult human male, you are in a position to know various normative facts about him; those normative facts are knowable solely by reflection upon one's concepts. You're not left wondering, for example, whether this adult human male ought to be enslaved; you're in a position to know he shouldn't be, given only the information that he's an adult male human. And likewise with females. This shows that there *are* a priori entailment relations between our concepts of adult human females and males, on the one hand, and our moral concepts, on the other, presumably because there are entailment relations between the relevant mind-independent properties, and we're tracking these with our concepts.[3]

Bogardus and others rightly resist the normative deflation of natural or biological concepts. Here

he relies on common intuition, but there are even stronger cases to be made. For instance, if one

favors natural law ethics, one maintains that, in some sense, the proper function of human

organisms informs moral norms. Or, in response to Dembroff, we might say with St. Paul:

"Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body

itself. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you

have from God, and that you are not your own?" (1 Cor. 6:18-19). There are certain things, Paul

maintains, that the body cannot do *qua* body and that should not be done to the body *qua* body.

This latter question was, of course, directly phrased in response to sexual immorality in the

Corinthian church. Bodies, so it seems, are not so conceptually deflated as social constructionists

seem to think.

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[2] See, for instance, Tomás Bogardus, "Evaluating Arguments for the Sex/Gender Distinction," *Philosophia* 48, no. 3 (2020): 873–92; Tomás Bogardus, "Some Internal Problems with Revisionary Gender Concepts," *Philosophia* 48, no. 4 (2020): 45–75; Alex Byrne, "Are Women Adult Human Females?," *Philosophical Studies* 177, no. 12 (2020): 3783–3803.

[3] Bogardus, "Examining Arguments for the Sex/Gender Distinction," 885.

All the same, there is a significant cost to accepting the responses offered by these latter thinkers. Whereas social constructionists like Dembroff deflate notions of nature and biology to the point where they can bear no normative weight, those interested in recovering traditional biological definitions of manhood and womanhood must deflate notions of cultural gender expression to the point where they are irrelevant to manhood and womanhood. Cultural goods like the clothes one wears and whether one shaves one's legs (for instance), which in the mind of ordinary individuals have much to do with gender, are in fact irrelevant stereotypes arbitrarily associated with but not in any sense definitive of gender.[4] If to be a woman is identical with being an adult human female, then it does not matter whether or not she shaves her legs, wears certain kinds of clothes over others or performs any other kind of social activity. This, it seems to me, is a steep price to pay on account of the high import virtually all humans place on some kind of cultural activity for their genders. On the traditional view espoused by Bogardus and others, therefore, culture is deflated and made irrelevant to gender.

In the debates orbiting around the bifurcation of culture and essence, then, there is a common tendency to reduce the concepts of the other side to the point where they have no explanatory weight. On one side of the debate are those who rightly see the relevance and importance of cultural expressions of gender while deflating the importance of the body; on the other side are those who rightly see the pertinence of the body and of sex while denying any role to cultural expression. But why should one accept the terms of the debate as they have been laid out? What persuasive reason do we have to continue insisting on this bifurcation where each side

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[4] This is made clear in an interview Bogardus did with the podcast *The London Lyceum.* See Jordan Steffaniak and Brandon Ayscue, "The Philosophy of Gender with Tomás Bogardus," The London Lyceum, accessed June 9, 2020, https://londonlyceum.buzzsprout.com/412714/2800738-the-philosophy-of-gender-with-tomas-bogardus?play=true. Especially relevant is the discussion at 34:43.

is eager to let the air out of its competing opposite? Is there a view consistently maintaining the importance of both? It is the task of the remainder of this project to answer such questions. This chapter takes the first step by offering a theological ontology of gender that resists the simplification just illustrated. This will be accomplished by positing four theses for an ontology of gender which will be extracted from a survey of two thinkers attempting to craft a better way forward, namely, the feminist philosophers Charlotte Witt and Mari Mikkola. From an amalgamation of their views, these four characteristics of my proposed ontology of gender will emerge:

1. Gender is an essence, though this is not reducible to or identical with biological determinism or biological essentialism.
2. The complexity of gender, the noetic effects of sin and the current conditions of oppression complicate our epistemic access to gender's essence. All the same, we can be assured that gender will be fully known in the eschaton.
3. Any theory or theology of gender must be consistent with and supportive of the cultivation of justice.
4. Gender is concerned with selves or identity and the way selves organize social goods pertaining to their sexed bodies.

This chapter will consist of arguments for these theses. The warrant I offer on their behalf will begin philosophically (insofar as I derive these desiderata from feminist philosophers) but they will receive support from theology (insofar as I plan to engage in theological exegesis and argumentation). I highlight this to say that I am not content to treat gender *merely* philosophically, as so much of the debate so far has done. But since I am beginning with a philosophical discussion and introducing theology as I attempt to argue for a view of gender, one might notice an admixture of genres. If that is the case, I take that to be a sign of progress, for as a scholar of no small repute as Martha Nussbaum has noted, in talking about the fundamental properties of gender and the body, "religion *and* metaphysics enter the picture in a nontrivial

way."[5] My metaphysics of gender should be taken as a *Christian theological* metaphysics of gender, and I remain convinced that no Christian theology of gender can avoid the metaphysical legwork. Given the layout of the road ahead, then, let us turn to two figures whose views will generate the five desiderata which will serve as the spine of the chapter.

3.2 Witt and Mikkola on the Ontology of Gender

My aim in highlighting the views of these two feminist philosophers is not to evaluate them in the way that I did the thinkers in the previous chapter. Rather, I find in Witt and Mikkola salutary, original and refreshing approaches to gender that seek to accomplish the expansion of terms necessary for a successful ontology of gender. Witt, for instance, rejects the "distinction between biological criteria and social criteria, or between nature and culture" because they are "too sharp and simplistic…to be useful."[6] Gender cannot be reduced to biology, neither can one maintain that gender is "purely cultural," for there is no "plausible way of thinking about gender that is entirely detached from bodily, biological existence even if…those biological processes, or sexual and reproductive functions, are complex and culturally mediated."[7] For her part, Mikkola resists the temptation to "understand the term 'woman' as a purely social gender term," because the term includes many types of traits: "one's appearance (clothing, hairstyles, makeup); behavioral patterns; social roles; self-ascription; anatomical and bodily features (body type, shape, size, amount of body hair, how one 'carries' one's body)."[8] Both Witt and Mikkola see

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[5] Martha C. Nussbaum, "Human Functioning and Social Justice: In Defense of Aristotelian Essentialism," *Political Theory* 20, no. 2 (May 1992): 217. The emphasis is my own and is intended to show the necessary partnership of both metaphysics *and* theology.

[6] Charlotte Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 34.

[7] Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, 36. The notion of cultural *mediation* will be important for my proposal.

[8] Mari Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice: Dehumanization and Its Role in Feminist Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 128.

the benefit of expanding understandings of culture and biology to the point where gendered terms are defined by both, an act that joins what the terms social construction and essentialism intend to separate. Attending to their views, then, is a vital step in accomplishing the intent of this chapter.

3.2.1 Charlotte Witt

Charlotte Witt, in her innovative book *The Metaphysics of Gender*, argues that gender essentialism is true, though the ways in which the terms "gender" and "essentialism" are understood make all the difference. Witt's work has, for a long time, been committed to disabusing feminist theory from intellectual biases against certain catchwords like "essence."[9] Her motivation for retaining the language of essence derives from what she perceives as "the centrality of gender in our individual lived experiences," something she believes is missed by simple social constructionist views.[10] Gender, for Witt, is a central component (indeed, *the* chief, organizing component) of our social self-understanding, and her view is meant to be an articulation of something she takes most people already believe to be true of themselves.

The particular kind of essentialism for which she advocates, derived from her prior work on Aristotle, is called "unification essentialism" or "uniessentialism."[11] Uniessentialism, claims Witt, is not about kinds or Kripkean identity conditions, but rather about "the unity and

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[9] See, for example, Charlotte Witt, "Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Theory," *Philosophical Topics* 23, no. 2 (1995): 321–44; Charlotte Witt, "Gender Essentialism: Aristotle or Locke?" in Ruth Groff and John Greco (ed.), *Powers and Capacities in Philosophy: The New Aristotelianism* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 308–318; Charlotte Witt, "What Is Gender Essentialism?" in *Feminist Metaphysics: Explorations in the Ontology of Sex, Gender and the Self*, ed. Charlotte Witt (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 11–25.

[10] Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, xiii.

[11] Cf. Charlotte Witt, *Ways of Being: Potentiality and Actuality in Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

organization of material parts into a new individual."[12] What makes bits of wood, glass, roofing and so on a house? For Witt and Aristotle, what makes these material parts a house is their particular organization around a function. The ability to provide shelter is the function of a house, and the successful organization of material parts for the effective performance of that function makes that individual a house rather than some other entity. This function, claims Witt, is essential to the individual because it would not be a house without it; that is, for these material parts to be a house, it is necessary that its parts are organized in such a way as to perform this function. A "functional essence," then, is "an essential property that explains what the individual is for, what its purpose is, and that organizes the parts toward that end."[13] This function is not simply what the individual object *does*, but what the object "*ought* to do" if it is going to be that kind of object.[14] An entity's having a function of this kind is the same as saying it bears a *functional property*, and it bears this property essentially. Another way to understand Witt's uniessentialism is to see it as an essentialist mereology: to bear a functional property essentially is "explanatory; it explains the existence of the new individual as a unity and not just a sum of material parts."[15] Without this function there would be no house at all, just a heap of material parts. The function makes this individual *what* it is.[16]

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[12] Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, 6.

[13] Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, 14.

[14] Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, 17.

[15] Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, 30. Cf. 75: "uniessentialism…is the view that [an object's] essence unifies a heap of parts into a new individual."

[16] Witt is careful to distinguish uniessentialism from other forms of essentialism, but I am not sure that the lines are so clearly distinct. For instance, one way to understand uniessentialism might be as a way of spelling out individual kind membership. That is, for an individual to be of this kind, it must perform this function, and its kind membership would be essential to it. Witt suggests as much when she observes that uniessentialism "does not…secure its particular identity. As far as the function goes, it is just like the house next door" (*The Metaphysics*

Witt's argument is that gender is uniessential to social individuals, where this latter concept is technically defined. First, however, it is important to see how gender is anything like a functional essence. For Witt, though there is no "bright line distinction to be drawn between what is natural/biological and what is cultural in relation to the distinction between sex and gender," there is nevertheless a conceptually and heuristically helpful gap to be observed between natural phenomena and their socially-mediated counterparts. Important for her view are the phenomena of reproduction and engendering. Reproduction is a natural phenomenon and "engendering" is the socially mediated counterpart to reproduction. The difference between the former and the latter has to do with which goods are organized according to the function. Witt provides a very helpful illustration to make the difference clear.[17] She invites us to consider the difference between feeding and dining. Feeding is, on her terms, a strictly biological function, only requiring organs like mouths, stomachs, digestive systems and so on. Dining, by contrast, is like feeding and even dependent upon it to some extent, but as a cultural practice, it has different norms to which diners are responsive and under which they are evaluable. The conditions for feeding are strictly biological, but it is "elaborated" into dining when new norms are introduced. In certain cultures, dining is governed by norms like strictures for which hand is fit for eating, bans against the consumption of certain foods, required practices for hygiene and so on. Not observing these norms in their operative cultures disqualifies one from dining, but not from feeding. Both of these, however, are functions. Feeding organizes bodily elements and food for a biological purpose (say, maintaining life in an organism), while dining organizes these *along*

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of Gender, 16). Bearing a functional property, then, might be a necessary condition for membership in the kind "house."

[17] The illustration is found in Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, 37.

with additional cultural goods for a cultural purpose (say, bringing friends together for a celebration).

Witt, as a means of upholding the relevance of biology while maintaining its space from cultural expression, claims, "Engendering is to reproduction as dining is to feeding."[18] Reproduction is explained by strictly biological processes. Engendering, by contrast, operates according to different material conditions, conditions which will be specific to different cultures.[19] It is impossible to generalize, but such conditions will include the norms pertaining to the perceived roles associated with conceiving, bearing, begetting and parenting children, along with the vast social organization that accompanies them.[20] The reproductive function organizes the biological conditions required for bearing children, while the engendering function will include in its organization the roles and structures pertaining to and stemming from reproduction. This allows Witt to proffer a definition of gender:

> My definition of gender—being a woman and being a man—ties these social positions to engendering; to be a woman is to be recognized to have a particular function in engendering, to be a man is to be recognized to have a different function in engendering…To be a woman is to be recognized as having a body that plays one role in the engendering function; women conceive and bear. To be a man is to be recognized as having a body that plays another role in the engendering function; men beget.[21]

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[18] Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, 37.

[19] This element of Witt's view, for which I am not advocating, leads me to believe that it is still liable to the objections made in chapter two, specifically regarding the number of genders created by cultural diversity.

[20] Witt's position is somewhat vague on this point, but she insists that this is necessarily so: "The social norms include, but are not limited to, those attaching to different gestational roles and to different parenting roles. Because gestational roles and parenting roles themselves are manifested in very different ways in different cultures, and in different historical periods, there is no useful way to fill in the blank….The actual content of the social roles is variable, just as what counts as a good meal varies widely from culture to culture" (*The Metaphysics of Gender*, 40).

[21] Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, 39–40.

It is important to clarify that Witt's position is *not* that gender is identical to playing a certain role in *reproduction*, biologically understood. Rather, her view is that gender is defined according to certain *perceived* roles in the cultural expression of reproduction known as *engendering*. This means that one can be a man or a woman without ever having reproduced, so long as one is perceived as having some relation to the cultural norms of engendering (and it may be something as simple as having the perceived capacity of playing a role in engendering but never actually doing so in the duration of one's life).[22] The relevant function for defining gender is the engendering function, which is about the organization of biological and cultural goods having some relation to reproduction.

Gender, on Witt's proposal, is uniessential to *social individuals*, and social individuals are comprised of social positions, which are themselves defined by social roles. Clarifying definitions are in order here. A *social position* is something an individual occupies created by a social function she or he performs. Someone might occupy the social position of being a doctor in virtue of the social function of treating patients or a parent in virtue of the social function of raising a child, for these are functions one must perform in order to be that kind of thing (a doctor who does not treat patients would be hard to imagine). *Social roles* are the "norms associated with a social position," to which the individual in a social position is responsive and under which the individual is evaluable.[23] If someone is in the social position of being a doctor,

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[22] Yet, Witt makes an important concession: "If human offspring were cloned, and gestated in laboratories, and there was no binary division of engendering function and associated gender norms, then no individuals would satisfy my definition. In that society there would be no women and no men (according to my definition of these social positions), although there would be female and male human beings" (*The Metaphysics of Gender*, 39).

[23] Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, 29. For this nomenclature, see 33: "The term 'responsive to' is intended to cover the full range of possible reactions to a norm on the part of those individuals to whom that norm pertains: from compliance to critique. To say that an individual is 'evaluable under' a social norm is to say that the individual is a candidate for evaluation by others in relation to that norm." For Witt, this normativity need not be recognized by the one under the norms, making her view *ascriptivist*, not *voluntarist*.

say, then there will be certain social norms which govern the actions of that individual (even if she does not necessarily comply with them) and evaluate whether or not she is a good doctor. Once again, these will be tied to the function definitive of the position—if the function of a doctor is to treat patients, then she will operate according to the norms required for the successful performance of that function and her quality as a doctor will derive from those norms. On Witt's uniessentialist picture, everything just mentioned will be essential to the individual insofar as she occupies that social position. It is essential for the individual who is a doctor that she has the function of treating patients, and accompanying this function is a social position and a set of norms.

A *social individual*, finally, is comprised of one's various social positions along with their attendant social roles: "by social individuals I mean those individuals who occupy social positions such as a parent, a professor, a contractor, or a refugee. Most (perhaps all) social individuals occupy multiple positions simultaneously; we are all multitaskers! The norms that pertain to a social individual are determined by that individuals' social position occupancies."[24] An individual is a *social* individual, then, because she occupies various social positions. Not only that, but she acts in and through that position as an agent: "Agents are individuals who are capable of entertaining goals (singly and in groups) and figuring out how to achieve them, and are capable of acting from a standpoint or perspective."[25] Occupying certain social positions as a social individual allows one to act from the unique point of view of that position and will have goals specific to that point of view, as well the ability to find appropriate means to achieve it.

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[24] Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, 54.

[25] Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, 60. This is not an uncontroversial definition of "agent," but it is permissible for the sake of Witt's argument.

They have causal potential not simply in opening up new avenues for action but also in coloring the particular ways in which acts are undertaken. A social individual who is a doctor will thereby have the opportunity to treat patients, something not available to someone who does not occupy that social position, and the doctor will come to see her function in a way familiar only to other doctors. Social individuals, then, are those agents who occupy and act through various social positions.[26]

With these pieces in place, we may now arrive at Witt's conclusion that gender is uniessential to social individuals. She summarizes it as follows: "A social individual (or agent) occupies many social positions simultaneously (and many more diachronically) but its gender unifies the sum of social position occupancies into a new social individual. Its gender (being a man, being a woman) is uniessential to the social individual."[27] Recall the following: (1) uniessentialism is a form of essentialism according to which certain goods are organized and unified around a function making a new individual; (2) gender is defined according to the engendering function, which organizes the goods of reproduction as they are culturally manifested; (3) a social individual is someone who occupies social positions governed by social roles. Witt's point, then, is that gender is that which unifies and organizes all of the other social positions constituting the individual, thereby grounding the existence of a single social individual. This is because gender is a social individual's *mega social role* which goes on to

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[26] Important for Witt's view are the differences between social individuals, persons and human organisms. For the purposes of this chapter, it is not important to enter into the debate as to whether she is correct to differentiate these aspects of a self. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that it is at this point that her view has come under concentrated criticism. See Ásta, "Review: Charlotte Witt, The Metaphysics of Gender," *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, May 7, 2012, https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/the-metaphysics-of-gender/ and Natalie Stoljar, "Review: Witt, Charlotte. The Metaphysics of Gender," *Ethics* 122, no. 4 (2012): 829–33.

[27] Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, 18.

serve as "a principle of normative unity for social individuals or agents."[28] And if it does this, then it is uniessential to the social individual; it is what makes the individual cohesive rather than a random assortment of social positions. But what reason do we have to think that gender is really this supremely organizing social position that brings together all others into a social individual? Witt argues that gender either directly implicates all of the positions one occupies (in cases where the positions are gender-specific, like husband, mother, sister, midwife) or indirectly creates norms within social positions that reflect perceived roles in engendering (for instance, a masculine doctor is defined as one who is competent while a feminine doctor is defined as one who is compassionate).[29] Gender, a social position one usually maintains for one's entire life, a social position almost universally seen as necessary for the propagation of a civilization, a social position most people claim make them the very individuals that they are, is the one position to rule and organize all others.

For social positions that have an obvious gender index, gender organizes them by making them available or not available according to the individual's gender. Gender creates normative restraints on whether an individual can become, say, a mother or a midwife. These are social positions available only to those already occupying the social position of "woman." However, for social positions with no obvious gender indexing, Witt maintains that gender nevertheless exercises considerable influence. Thus, certain jobs are said to be gendered, like the predominance of feminine teachers of young children, or when men and women hold identical positions with different normative forces. As mentioned above, both men and women can become doctors, but studies cited by Witt show that their experience of being a doctor will be

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[28] Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, 85. Emphasis in original.

[29] Cf. Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender*, 95.

different insofar as they are expected to be characterized by different virtues, like compassion or competency. Witt introduces concepts and distinctions to make this point with greater precision,[30] but the basic idea is clear enough. Gender, as an arch social position, colors and organizes all of the other positions we occupy. The roles one plays with respect to engendering, in other words, go on to inform all of the other roles to which one responds and under which one is evaluable. This view, she believes, gives due attention to the testimony of many who say that gender is central to their identities and yet it resists any notion that gender is fixed or timeless.

Is Witt's view a social constructionist view or an essentialist view? This question no longer applies. Witt has provided a view which does not fit into any of the poorly defined sides of the bifurcation between construct and essence. Yes, it takes into full account the various social roles one plays, but it is still essential to our social selves. Before seeing how Witt's view lends itself to the desiderata for a metaphysics of gender mentioned in the introduction, let us turn to another thinker whose proposals are equally stimulating.

3.2.2 Mari Mikkola

Mikkola structures her inventive book around the two objections I leveled against the social constructionist position in the previous chapter. To summarize my previous objections, I argued that the social construction of gender is untenable because it results in the view that there are no women and men *as such*, but only women and men constricted to the particular cultures which establish the necessary conditions for membership in their constructs. This is unintuitive and renders feminist theory and theology inoperable since both presume that there is such a category as "woman." Following from this, a social constructionist position makes gender morally unevaluable insofar as we cannot say of a particular culture that it has good or bad men

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[30] See the discussion beginning at *The Metaphysics of Gender*, 94.

or women. This is because just as the necessary conditions for gender are culturally specific, so are the moral norms attached to those genders. There are no "bad men" or "virtuous women," only men and women specific to those cultures. Part one of Mikkola's book provides a way to use gender terms and account for their ontology, while part two shows how her view is morally and politically useful.

In parallel fashion, Mikkola identifies two puzzles within feminist theory:

- *Semantic puzzle*: Given that ordinary language users tend not to distinguish sex and gender (treating "woman" largely as a sex term, or a mixture of social and biological features), what precisely are feminists talking about when they talk about women? What are the necessary and sufficient conditions that the concept *woman* encodes, if any such conditions exist to begin with?
- *Ontological puzzle*: How should we understand the category of women that is meant to undergird feminist political solidarity, if there are no necessary and sufficient conceptual conditions underlying our gender talk? Do women make up a genuine kind, or simply a gerrymandered and random collection of individuals? What kinds of entities are gender and sex anyway? Are there *really* women and men, if gender is (in some substantial sense) socially constructed?[31]

These puzzles parse out, in ontological and semantic terms, the two objections in their substantial and moral dimensions. According to Mikkola, they have also set the agenda for feminist theory for at least the past fifty years. On her reading, feminist theory has largely been a project consisting of proposals about gender that seek to provide satisfactory answers to these two puzzles. Whether looking for the aptness conditions for when to refer to someone as a man or a woman, or inquiring about just which conditions classify individuals as members of such categories, feminists have attempted to avoid (or justify accepting) the diffusion of gender terms to their cultures and how doing so is consistent with feminist political aims. Mikkola capably recognizes the real-life import of these ambitions: "if our metaphysics is too radically constructivist in the service of those with social power, feminist politics will be undermined"

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[31] Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 3–4.

because nothing said about women as a category will be true.[32] This state of affairs and broad research project Mikkola labels "the gender controversy."

Realizing what is at stake, Mikkola's overall claim is that we should give up the gender controversy.[33] Feminist theory needs a new charter and should no longer find itself beholden to these puzzles. Accomplishing this would require showing how and why the feminist theorist can be relieved of the duty to solve the semantic and ontological puzzles by positing new ontological categories and conditions for applying gender terms like "men" and "women." This is precisely what Mikkola sets out to do. One of the basic tenets of feminism is that "feminist politics should be organized around women, understood as a gendered social kind," but Mikkola thinks this was feminism's earliest mistake.[34] Though the sex/gender distinction, the social construction of gender and their accompanying commitments served the initial purposes of feminism, they have proven theoretically insufficient and require reworking. Mikkola suggests that the more fitting metaethical base for feminist political ambitions is not the concept "woman" but the concept "human" and the legitimate interests held by human beings.[35] Nevertheless, her view is a type of humanist *feminism*, because though the necessary moral norms are grounded in humanity, it is specifically *women* who have not been treated as human beings.

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[32] Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 127.

[33] Cf. Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 6: "I argue for giving up the gender controversy."

[34] Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 104.

[35] Unpacking this claim is the burden of part two, particularly what "dehumanization" amounts to and how women are subject to dehumanizing forces. To be clear: her view is not that women are not the subject of moral consideration; rather, it is that what *grounds* those moral considerations (like discussion of rights) is the notion of humanity. Another way to say this is that gender does not ground ethics, humanity does. See Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 151: "The damage done by patriarchy is not to women qua gendered beings, but to women qua human beings." Cf. also 164, 197, 237–240 for more on this.

Mikkola begins with some helpful terminology. A *gender realist*, she states, is not a biological essentialist. Rather, gender realism maintains that "women as a group are assumed to share some characteristic feature, experience, common condition, or criterion that defines their gender and makes them women (as opposed to, say, men)."[36] This feature or set of features thereby serve as necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for being a member of the kind woman (and, *mutatis mutandis*, any other gender). A gender realist can, on the face of it, be a feminist as well as a social constructionist on her view, because nothing in the definition precludes that condition from being a social property, and the property can be one conducive to the liberative interests of women. Indeed, it is fair to assume that most feminists *are* gender realists, for another way of being a gender realist with respect to women is simply to commit oneself to the view that there *are* women. That is, there is some property which renders the category "women" stable and which serves as a condition for inclusion within it. This is a modest form of essentialism, which Mikkola calls "classificatory essentialism," and it does not commit one to any views about biology.[37] All it commits one to is the view that there is such a category as "women" (and "men," and any other genders one might wish to include).

The alternative to gender realism, as Mikkola and others note, is *gender skepticism*. This is the view that denies "the existence of a single unified social kind of women," committing the holder to the notion that women make up "a merely unbound and gerrymandered collection of individuals."[38] A gender skeptic is *not* someone who questions the epistemic access humans have

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[36] Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 28. I should add that it does not have to be *one* feature, such as experience, but it may be a *set* of features.

[37] In the terminology that I will use below, a gender realist is committed to *kind essentialism* about gender. Kind essentialism is simply the more familiar term for Mikkola's classificatory essentialism.

[38] Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 32–33. For more on gender skepticism see Mari Mikkola, "Gender Sceptics and Feminist Politics," *Res Publica* 13 (2007): 361–80. See also the earlier work of Susan Bordo,

to gender's nature (in the sense that Poulain, Mill and Beauvoir did). Rather, a gender skeptic is someone who denies that gender exists (or that a specific gender exists) by denying that there are sufficient conditions relative to the kind, or someone who maintains that the conditions which make up the genders with which we are familiar are groundless, arbitrary or a mere expression of power. Elizabeth Spelman and those persuaded by her arguments are an example of the first kind of skeptic, especially if no generalizations about women (even within unique contexts) are possible.[39] An example of the second is Judith Butler, who claims:

> I would argue that any effort to give universal or specific content to the category of women, presuming that that guarantee of solidarity is required in advance, will necessarily produce factionalization, and that "identity" as a point of departure can never hold as the solidifying ground of a feminist political movement. Identity categories are never merely descriptive, but always normative, and as such, exclusionary…the very term becomes a site of permanent openness and resignifiability.[40]

For Butler, there are no conditions which *rightly* identify women because such conditions will always bear with them normative commitments, and those normative commitments will always be exertions of power. "Women," at this point, becomes a fluid and undefinable category. Mikkola summarizes the posture of gender skeptics: "So the mistake is not that feminists provided the incorrect elucidation of *woman*. Rather, their mistake was to attempt to define womanhood at all."[41] A gender skeptic like Butler, then, maintains that "the term 'woman' has no definite meaning, and given the normativity of identity categories, it would be politically

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Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 216–217.

[39] For this, see Uma Narayan, "Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: A Feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism," *Hypatia* 13 no. 2 (1998): 86–106.

[40] Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism,'" in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 15–16.

[41] Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 35.

dangerous to try to define the term in a way that picks out the class of women for feminist and political representation."[42]

Mikkola is not a gender skeptic, but she brings up the view to show how an unnecessary captivity to the gender controversy results in deeply counterintuitive and politically ineffective conclusions. If gender skepticism is the view that gender terms like "woman" have no stable meanings, and feminist theory has been organized around the term "woman," then it would follow that feminist theorists have based their projects (theoretical and political) on a concept whose grounding is at best shaky and at worst already morally problematic. In order to avoid this problematic result, Mikkola must provide an account which shows that the semantic and ontological puzzles do not need answering. This forms the bulk of her constructive proposal, where she "deflates" the semantic and ontological puzzles. First, she tackles the semantic puzzle, which revolves around, recall, requirements for the right reference of gender terms. Mikkola asserts:

> I contend that we need not know "what it is to be a woman" or to define *woman* in order to identify and explain gendered social inequalities or in order to say why patriarchy damages women. Let me clarify: feminists must be able to refer to women, and our language use must pick out women's social kind. If we genuinely cannot distinguish women from other ordinary objects, feminism has lost its viability. But holding that unless we solve the semantic puzzle, we will simply be *unable* to talk about women does not follow. Feminism need not give up gender talk tout court in the absence of a thick conception of *woman*—a minimal conception will do.[43]

Mikkola's basic point is that the bar set by the semantic puzzle is too high. To use a term well, she claims, one does not need to know the content or definition of the object of the term. If so, then referring to women does not require defining women or having ready to hand the necessary

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[42] Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 37.

[43] Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 105–6.

and sufficient conditions for being a woman. Moreover, if she is correct that a gender term like "woman" is "easy to apply…but hard to account for its application," then an account of how gender terms refer that does not require specification of gender's definition will usefully resonate with everyday usage.[44]

In what way does Mikkola suggest this deflated understanding helps with the right use of gender terms? She begins with a distinction between two ways these concepts function, an *extensional* function and a *semantic* function. A gender concept's extensional function guides its right deployment, while its semantic function provides insight into the concept's content.[45] As an illustration, Mikkola considers the concept "water." In order to deploy the term correctly, we can refer to a colorless, odorless and clear liquid in a glass, but we do not need to know, say, its chemical composition, which would be a requirement for its semantic function.[46] The difference between extension and semantics reveals how the conditions for *applicability* and *reference-fixing* are not the same. To correctly fix a reference, an extensional function is all that needs to be exercised, while applicability requires justification from the concept's content. Once again: I can refer to the water as "water," but if asked what makes that term a right fit for that entity, conditions beyond mere referencing are required. Appropriately appreciating this difference makes sense of why parents celebrate a child's first use of a word like "water," while the child almost certainly does not know that the thing to which she is referring is composed of two molecules of hydrogen and one of oxygen. She can fix the reference, but not account for its applicability. The point to these distinctions is to say that gender terms are perfectly employable

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[44] Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 106.

[45] Cf. Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 106.

[46] Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 106.

in an *extensional*, *reference-fixing* way: "we need not precisely specify what it takes for someone to count as a woman…in order to make good our reference fixing. Thus, my proposal is that in order to retain gender talk for politically relevant social explanations, we can merely rely on the reference-fixing extensional intuitions."[47] In other words, to use the term "woman," one does not need to specify all of the conditions necessary for being a woman.

What *does* one need for the extensional reference-fixing of gender terms? Here Mikkola is happy to resort to the intuitions of ordinary speakers; in everyday life, when one leaves the feminist theory classroom, one simply does not have trouble using terms like "man" and "woman" coherently. Taking a "predoxastic" view of intuitions,[48] Mikkola suggests that extensional reference-fixing, since it does not purport to express the *content* of the term being used, can rely on intuitions, "which enables us to make sense of the common phenomenon that ordinary language users find it easy to apply gender terms, but they struggle to elucidate the grounds for their applications."[49] In the course of a day, we encounter many people, and usually (though not always) we can reliably refer to them by means of the gender terms on offer. These intuitions are little more than pre-reflective notions, which means that though they can guide the extensional application of a concept, they cannot tell us the content of the concept employed (i.e., they cannot answer the question, "What is a woman?") and they allow for a great deal of corrigibility. Nevertheless, they are sufficient for reference-fixing. Keeping this in mind, Mikkola concludes:

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[47] Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 106.

[48] Cf. Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 107–108: "intuitions are predoxastic experiences…Roughly, intuitions are like immediate 'gut feelings'…when I have an intuition that Jill is a woman, I judge or have the inclination to judge *that* Jill is a woman."

[49] Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 109.

[F]ocusing on ordinary language users' willingness to apply "woman" is enough to pick out women's type, and this is sufficient to answer the representation problem (how to fix feminism's subject matter)…But, unlike other descriptive analyses, my project goes no further: it does not take the step to examining what our extensional intuitions disclose about the content of the concept *woman*. Rather than trying to get at conceptual content via use, my proposal simply attends to the use of "woman" without drawing (or aiming to draw) any conclusions about conceptual content. My view is that this suffices for fixing women's social kind.[50]

To summarize: Mikkola's solution to the problem of how gender terms appropriately refer to individuals is to lower the requirement to extensional, reference-fixing usage, not semantic, applicability usage. To say someone is a woman (and is thereby included in certain political ambitions) one does not need to know *what* a woman is. Instead, all one needs are predoxastic intuitions that guide the reference but say nothing about the content of the term.

Having deflated the semantic puzzle, Mikkola proceeds to the ontological puzzle, whose pieces consist of gender's fundamental properties: are there women and men? What makes them what they are? Once again, Mikkola suggests redrafting the terms doing the explanatory work. She argues that "we should give up the underlying sex/gender distinction" in feminist debates, opting instead for a framework that employs *traits* and *norms*. Descriptive traits are "traits of which there are 'facts of the matter'" while evaluative norms are "normative reactions to descriptive traits."[51] Notice, however, that the distinction is *not* between the social and the biological. Descriptive traits may include physical/anatomical traits (like chromosomes), appearance (like clothing and amount of body hair) and roles (like caretaking in the home).[52] Evaluative norms, likewise, have more to do with "stereotypical reactions and judgments:

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[50] Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 110–111.

[51] Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 117.

[52] Cf. Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 129. Here Mikkola includes "self–conceptions" as a descriptive trait, but it seems to me that making a judgement about one's membership in a gender kind is an evaluation, not a description.

whether one is viewed or judged to be, to appear, and/or to act in feminine, masculine, or neutral ways. The attributed evaluations include explicit judgments, but they also capture implicit social values and cultural norms that form the basis of further explicit cognitive attitudes."[53] On the basis of a descriptive norm, then, one forms an evaluative judgment: "having ovaries" or "wearing makeup" count as "feminine."[54] Mikkola's point is that these traits "covary" with norms, where the covariance relation amount to us taking "certain traits to be of a certain kind."[55] When a culture views certain traits evaluatively so as to count certain individuals within a certain gender, then covariance has occurred.

Mikkola calls this view "quasi-essentialist," for while the evaluative norms create conditions for gender membership, "they merely *purport* to capture some facts about the world…when they do not."[56] Rather, the ones making the evaluative judgments on the basis of the descriptive norms "congeal" them into a pair without capturing "any genuinely essential definitional relation."[57] At this juncture, it seems to me that Mikkola's project fails. What "facts about the world" do the evaluative gender norms fail to capture? What genuinely essential definitional relation do these norms *aim* to identify but do so *mistakenly*? For that to be the case, there would have to be a genuine kind, with constitutive necessary conditions, which these norms have failed to capture. But this is not *quasi*-essentialism, it *is* essentialism! It is in principle possible for a culture's norms to identify these conditions correctly, but something about the

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[53] Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 129.

[54] Mikkola's own example in *The Wrong of Injustice*, 130.

[55] Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 130.

[56] Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 132.

[57] Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 133.

process of forming these norms hindered them from doing so (the conditions of gendered

oppression, the complexity of gender, etc.). Additionally, if classificatory essentialism genuinely

allows for both biological and cultural necessary and sufficient conditions, there is no reason not

to take a culture's evaluative norms as a genuine definitional essence in the classificatory sense

(unless, of course, there is a real essence to gender which they have failed to define). Mikkola's

proposal is highly suggestive insofar as it allows for a creative blend of cultural and biological

categories, yet it does not seem to me to be different than essentialism or gender realism.

Mikkola's earlier article, "Elizabeth Spelman, Gender Realism, and Women,"[58] has in

fact defended just this kind of gender realism, and I want to propose it as a more satisfactory

solution to the ontological puzzle. Mikkola, in her later book, does not reject the views of the

article (in fact, she takes great pains to defend them),[59] but she considers it still too committed to

the gender controversy. Its arguments, however, serve as a clearer and more sophisticated

account of the view to which Mikkola seems committed in her book. In the article, Mikkola

defends gender realism against the exclusion arguments offered by Elizabeth Spelman (whose

main contention is, recall, that definitions of gender are always specific to cultural variabilities,

such as race and economic standing, to the point where generalizations about women are

impossible). While appreciating Spelman's contributions, Mikkola maintains:

> I agree that the assumed definition of womanness that women supposedly have in
> common is clearly wrong and that it is not something women possess qua women.
> Nevertheless, the recognition that feminist theorists hold a false conception of what
> women qua women have in common does not give any reason to accept Spelman's
> conclusion—that there isn't a way to understand womanness such that all women qua
> women possess this feature. *Rather, Spelman's claim invites us to modify our conception*

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[58] Mari Mikkola, "Elizabeth Spelman, Gender Realism, and Women," *Hypatia* 21, no. 4 (2006): 77–96.

[59] Cf. Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 61–65.

of womanness and to rethink what women by virtue of their gender have (or might have) in common.[60]

Mikkola's basic point is that the widespread errancy surrounding conceptions of womanhood are not a reason to reject that there is something which all women share *qua* women. In a manner, Mikkola is returning to the older social constructionist view that the problem we have encountered in understanding gender is not with our *metaphysics* but with our *epistemology*. The errors feminists and others have made in defining gender is to be expected for human beings whose epistemic faculties are far from perfect, especially when it comes to understanding highly complex essences like gender. Thus,

> although the widespread feminist conception of what women (qua women) share is false, this does not give us any reason to think that there is nothing women by virtue of their gender share. It merely illustrates the need to modify feminist conceptions of womanness and to rethink this notion such that this feature is truly shared by all women (qua women).[61]

Mikkola maintains that gender realism, which maintains that there are necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for membership in the kind "woman" which all women have in common, is perfectly consistent with just how wrong and exclusionist we have been in defining women. In fact, it is *required* if we are to know that, in point of fact, we have been *wrong*, for it provides the standard against which we measure our definitions.

Mikkola makes a stronger claim: not only are gender realism and corrigibility compatible, the following two claims are *also* compatible: "The two claims—that women share the same feature of womanness and that they experience this feature differently from one

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[60] Mikkola, "Elizabeth Spelman, Gender Realism, and Women," 83.

[61] Mikkola, "Elizabeth Spelman, Gender Realism, and Women," 84.

another—are perfectly compatible."[62] To establish this compatibility, she invites us to consider

other universals, like justice. Realists about virtues like justice recognize that along with the

conditions that define its essence are non-necessary accompaniments like where, when and why

justice is exercised within particular contexts.[63] What it takes an act to be just will be the same

wherever it is exercised, but just acts admit of variability of experience precisely because of the

various ways they are exercised. In fact, the specificity of ordinary life is *necessary* for the

universal of justice actually to characterize an action, for there are no such things as universal

and context-free actions. Taking a stand against racial injustice and practicing equitable

economic practices are both acts of justice, but they are different in the exercise and will be

experienced differently by the agent. Mikkola's point is simply that this unity and variability has

always been appreciated and recognized by realists about justice. Her idea is to expand it to

social entities like gender.

Mikkola captures gender's universal yet particular quality by calling it a "multiply

realizable" social entity.[64] She makes a parallel with being an artist.[65] There are certain traits that

make an artist (traits which unify Leonardo da Vinci and Vincent Van Gogh *as* artists), yet it is

conceivable that different artists can experience their artisthood differently on account of their

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[62] Mikkola, "Elizabeth Spelman, Gender Realism, and Women," 86. The focus on experience derives from Spelman's own argument, who derives the diversity of definitions of womanhood from the diverse *experiences* of womanhood.

[63] Mikkola cites Bertrand Russell ("Elizabeth Spelman, Gender Realism, and Women," 87), who says: "If we ask ourselves what justice is, it is natural to proceed by considering this, that, and the other just act, with a view to discovering what they have in common…This common nature, in virtue of which they are all just, will be justice itself, the pure essence the admixture of which with facts of ordinary life produces the multiplicity of just acts" (Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 52). This "admixture" is precisely what allows for the diversity of feminine experiences.

[64] Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 62.

[65] Cf. Mikkola, "Elizabeth Spelman, Gender Realism, and Women," 89. She also defends a parallel with being a wife, but it seems to me less contentious and more persuasive to focus on the artist example.

contexts (da Vinci enjoyed considerable success and fame in his lifetime; Van Gogh did not). All

the same, an artist cannot be an artist apart from the particularly cultural ways she expresses her

artisthood, even if what it means to be an artist is not defined by those cultural conditions. In the

same way, to be a woman may still be a universal even if it is experienced in different ways.

Mikkola contends:

> Intersectionality makes a difference to which social positions we in fact end up
> occupying (and what material resources, say, are subsequently available to us), but it does
> not change the underlying constitutive condition (social position occupancy). Individual
> experiences alter the constitutive conditions of being a woman or an artist only if
> experiential considerations are part and parcel of those conditions. Insofar as some
> gender realist positions do not turn on experiential considerations, *these* gender realist
> positions are not undermined by Spelman's particularity argument.[66]

As long as the gender realist maintains that there is a way in which particular experiences and

social manifestations are *necessary* for being gender identity but not *definitive* of gender identity,

much like being artist, she can still maintain her gender realism.

Mikkola concludes by making recourse to a particular theory of universals she considers

has great compatibility with her gender realism, namely that of David Armstrong.[67] One of

Armstrong's unique contributions was to challenge the assumption that if something is

unanalyzable (that is, it cannot be broken down into its constituent parts like necessary and

sufficient conditions) then it must be primitive or simple and therefore *unable* to be broken down

into such parts. By contrast, Armstrong insists that some universals are "epistemologically

simple" in the sense that they "act…upon our sense-organs in an all-or-nothing way."[68] But this

epistemological simplicity need not correlate with an ontological simplicity; rather, some

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[66] Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice*, 65.

[67] See D.M. Armstrong, *A Theory of Universals: Universals and Scientific Realism*, vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

[68] Armstrong, *A Theory of Universals*, 53–54.

universals are so *complex* that they cannot but strike us homogenously. Mikkola suggests that "human being" is one such universal (listing the necessary and sufficient conditions for being human has, of course, been a white whale to much philosophy); gender terms like "man" and "woman" are another. The complexity and inscrutability of the universal, however, does not disprove its existence. As Armstrong wryly comments, "In philosophy or elsewhere, if it proves difficult to give an account of some phenomenon, somebody is sure to suggest that the phenomenon does not exist"—so it is with gender skepticism![69] Yet, Armstrong shows that unanalyzability may be a characteristic feature of many complex universals, making it rather difficult, under our current epistemic conditions, to name their necessary and sufficient conditions. If gender realism is understood in an Armstrongian sense, then the "gender realist view would also not require that any necessary and sufficient conditions of womanness be pointed out...Being complex, womanness would be extremely difficult to analyze and the kinds of problems Spelman pointed out would be encountered precisely with such complex features Armstrong discussed."[70] This would not disprove the existence of the universal "woman," only the significant epistemic difficulties in specifying the conditions for membership within it.

All the same, Mikkola's theory of reference does not require such specification in order to make reference to the kind or its members. All that is needed are the right kinds of intuitions that most speakers seem to have most of the time. To summarize my modified presentation of Mikkola's views: Mikkola is a gender realist who affirms that there is a highly complex set of conditions which are necessary and jointly sufficient for being a member of the kind, "woman." Mikkola refrains from saying just what these conditions are because we are epistemically

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[69] Armstrong, *A Theory of Universals*, 113–114.

[70] Mikkola, "Elizabeth Spelman, Gender Realism, and Women," 92.

disadvantaged from doing so. In this sense, her view is remarkably similar to John Stuart Mill's, but where Mill attributed our epistemic limitations to women's currently suppressed state, Mikkola adds on the ontological complexity of the kind. This, however, does not block off feminists from the reliable employment of the term. There is a way to fix a reference which avoids its semantic or content-specifying function, namely, by confining one's use to extensional functions. Extensional functions of reference guide the deployment of a term but say nothing about its content or definition. Yet, intuitions guide the user in fairly reliable ways and facilitate feminist political ambitions. In the end, we arrive at a non-biological, fairly apophatic gender essentialism intended to facilitate feminist aims and ambitions.

3.2.3 Four Desiderata for an Ontology of Gender from Witt and Mikkola

To conclude this section on Witt and Mikkola, I want to distill four desiderata from their views that I propose chart the most promising way forward. Witt and Mikkola offer accounts of gender which break away from the chief problems afflicting a debate which has reduced to two simplistic options. Like any conversation with only two sides, the chief problems arise on account of the limited options available to its participants. Witt and Mikkola complexify and expand the number of choices, so much so that the debate cannot exist only between those who think gender is a social entity and those who think it is a biological entity. These four theses identify the most salient elements of their approaches.

Thesis 1: Gender is an essence, though this is not reducible to or identical with biological determinism or biological essentialism. More will be said about what it means for gender to be an essence below, but for now it is important to note that Witt and Mikkola have both greatly diversified how the term "essence" is understood. Both are gender essentialists. Witt maintains that gender is uniessential to the social individual and Mikkola's gender realism commits her to a

minimal classificatory essentialism, with the only alternative being gender skepticism. But neither views require that one reduce gender to *mere* biological categories, nor do they say that gendered behavior is wholly explained by biological factors. The difference between their views and that of a biological essentialist should be clear.

Thesis 2: The complexity of gender, the noetic effects of sin and the current conditions of oppression complicate our epistemic access to gender's essence. All the same, we can be assured that gender will be fully known in the eschaton. Mikkola's work gives us reason to believe that the views of the early social constructionists have some merit. There is good reason to believe that gender is an essence, but a serious investigation must be had about the reliability of our epistemic access to this essence. More on that will be said below, but this does not mean that all talk of gender must be abandoned. Mikkola provides us with a model for referring to women and men without requiring speakers to be able to specify gender's essence. Both Witt's and Mikkola's views are remarkably consistent with the Christian confession that "now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12). If our knowledge of gender is still partial, our task is to grasp toward a better understanding by God's help and in anticipation of a kingdom where the beatific vision will enlighten all other objects of sight.

Thesis 3: Any theory or theology of gender must be consistent with and supportive of the cultivation of justice. Witt and Mikkola are both feminist theorists and they consider the promotion of gendered justice to be a crucial component of their work. Mikkola devotes a large amount of her proposal to metaethics, where categories are provided to address injustice with precision and clarity. Both Witt and Mikkola realize that the purpose of giving clear accounts of the ontology of gender is to equip those most concerned with justice with the necessary tools for

successful work. They are also careful to avoid a kind of skepticism whereby moral evaluation of gender is made impossible. By contrast, they realize that excessively constructionist proposals undermine these pursuits, for if the outcome of one's views is that there is no category "woman," then it is impossible to address how women are oppressed.

Thesis 4: Gender is concerned with selves or identity and the way selves organize social goods pertaining to their sexed bodies. Witt's view is that our social positions are organized according to the engendering function which defines gender. This, she maintains, is how we socially *manifest* our genders, much like dining manifests feeding. In proposing such a view, Witt enriches our vocabulary for social expression. Not all social identities need to be socially *constructed*—there are other ways of being social. In addition, greater versatility in how one describes the relationship between biological features and their social counterparts is necessary for resisting the false dichotomy.[71] One way to do so, as Witt highlights, is to pay attention to the various roles one plays and the goods associated therein. Gendered goods, along with the other goods we use to facilitate and make sense of them, will have a major role in my proposal. It is sufficient for now to note that Witt's view provides an important insight into the organization of our social lives and the complex ways biology is *manifested* in our social worlds.

These are the four theses which will lay the foundation for my proposal on the metaphysics and theology of gender. So far, however, there has been much metaphysics but little theology. Do Christians have reason to believe that these desiderata are actually reliable guides to their thought on gender? I shall now argue for a positive answer.

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[71] For an attempt to parse the various ways biology can "influence," but not "determine," gender, see Sarah Borden Sharkey, *An Aristotelian Feminism* (Switzerland: Springer, 2016), especially 65–66.

3.3 Four Theses on the Metaphysics of Gender and Their Theological Grounding

3.3.1 Thesis 1: Gender is an essence, though this is not reducible to or identical with biological determinism or biological essentialism.

I begin with what, on the face of it, is the most controversial of my four theses. Essentialism has faced almost universal rejection within feminist theory and if someone claims to espouse it, it is regularly seen as sufficient reason to dismiss their view. Often, this is justified, for many attempts to define "the nature of women" have in fact only served to prop up harmful stereotypes. Yet, if one moves beyond surface appearances, one sees that while gender essentialism *can* mean that, there are in fact at least *four* varieties of essentialism, some having the unsavory features just mentioned, others proving themselves to be of immediate aid in theologies of gender. The one I propose here is a modest essentialism, the alternative to gender skepticism. First, however, let us disambiguate what has turned out to be a highly contested concept.

The first type of gender essentialism can be termed *biological essentialism*. This is usually the essentialism to which feminist literature objects and is the counterpoint to the social constructionist position. Typically, biological essentialists about gender either conflate sex and gender (such that gender is nothing other than the properties which differentiate biological males from biological females), or they partner sex with a theory of human action according to which social behavior is entirely or mainly derived from biological facts. On this view, characteristic gender traits are reducible to the biological features that distinguish males from females (like genes and gonads), and the theory of action proffered is meant to bridge biology with social activity. One proponent of such a view is the Harvard evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker, who maintains that the "single difference between the sexes" is a man's "greater desire for multiple partners" derived from his evolutionary impulse to propagate his genes as widely as

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possible.[72] By contrast, women desire to secure resources from their mates such as time and

wealth, for their opportunities to reproduce is restricted.[73] The gendered behavior we witness in

our world is derived from these evolutionary desires, such that the reason men cheat and women

act in materialistic ways (so says Pinker) are nothing more than contemporary expressions of the

traits they have developed in the process of evolutionary adaptation.[74] In short, a biological

essentialist holds that sex, the biological features differentiating males from females, are what

account for gender.

There are many reasons to think that this is a highly problematic view. First, it is difficult

to see in what sense human beings are relevantly free agents if what they do is determined by

non-volitional biological facts. It espouses what has often been called *biological determinism*,

and though many Christians hold that determinism and the freedom of the will are compatible, it

is not *this* kind of determinism they have in mind. Second, if gendered behavior is determined in

this way, how can we be held responsible for the gendered actions we perform? If a man's

promiscuous behavior is reducible to an evolutionary impulse over which he has no control, it is

hard to say what makes him blameworthy when that impulse drives him to sexually assault a

woman. Finally, as many feminist writers have noted, what seems to be happening is that

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[72] Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (New York: Norton, 1997), 479.

[73] Pinker, *How the Mind Works*, 479.

[74] This position is admittedly rare in the academic literature, but it is readily found in popular writings. See, for a notable example, Anne and Bill Moir, *Why Men Don't Iron: The Fascinating and Unalterable Differences Between Men and Women* (New York: Citadel Press, 1999), 255, 252 and 265: "[A man's] lower serotonin level also makes it difficult for him to persevere with a boring chore, because his reward circuitry is not switched on by this sort of tedious activity"; "Men have a lower sensitivity to detail, which means he simply does not notice the dust as she does…the stale socks and sweaty shirt don't bother him because they are among the pheromone-related smells that women are acutely aware of, but men do not detect"; "Some high t level males do marry, but they are 43% more likely to be divorced and 38% more likely to engage in extramarital sex…The conclusion seems obvious. You can have a man, but you cannot have a man who feels, touches, cares and empathizes like a woman, not if you want him to stay a man."

harmful stereotypes from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are given a scientific veneer when, in fact, they ought to be challenged. Ostensible facts about the biology of human beings should be true of anyone with the biology in question. So, anyone with a male body would exhibit the masculine behavior to which biological essentialists point. Yet, these behaviors are remarkably culturally specific (for instance, picking up gym socks), making it impossible for someone with an identical biological make-up from a different culture or time period to be a man or woman in just those ways. At its worst, this view has been implemented to fix women's behavior in sexist and oppressive ways, claiming that it is a consequence of women's biology that they remain at home, for instance.

That is the biological essentialist view and it is rightly rejected in most circles. But this is not the only way gender essentialism is understood. The second kind of gender essentialism encountered in theologies of gender employs "essentialist" as a pejorative term. Here, the label "essentialist" is ascribed to views one perceives to be wrongheaded, and the negative connotations associated with the term are meant to persuade one away from supporting the view to which it is being ascribed.[75] In this parlance, "essentialist" is a word like "fundamentalist": remarkably difficult to define but with such negative overtones that surely one would not want to be one.[76] I also want to distance myself from this employment of the term, for almost always it serves only to increase heat, not light.

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[75] This use of "essentialist" is widespread in the literature on gender and theology such that with any amount of exposure one will encounter it. It is also a distinctive feature of queer theology. See Patrick Cheng, "Contributions from Queer Theory," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 156: "Queerness…resists and challenges this essentialist way of thinking about sexual and gender identities." In context, essentialist means "immutable," something Cheng perceives to be a deleterious feature of a view.

[76] On the charge of fundamentalism, with which this use of "essentialism" shares structural parity, see Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 244–45.

If these first two ways of understanding gender essentialism are unfit for Christian theology, how else might one understand the concept, perhaps more beneficially? There are two remaining gender essentialisms that I believe are defensible and entirely consistent with active interests in justice, equality, debunking oppression and the like. The third in the list is gender *kind essentialism*. Kind essentialism is a recognized term in philosophy and theology and it maintains that "there is a property or properties definitive of membership in that kind."[77] A kind is a category, and in order to be included within the kind, an entity must exhibit a set of properties definitive of the kind. So, in order to a member of the kind *pine tree*, something must be coniferous, must be green all year round, must have needles, must have a particular smell, as well as all of the other traits which make it a pine tree. Applied to gender, kind essentialism maintains that "women (and men) are kinds whose members share a defining property," or properties.[78] This is identical with what Mikkola calls "classificatory essentialism" or "gender realism" and it is minimally required of anyone who denies gender skepticism.

It is important to offer some clarifications. Gender kind essentialism is a metaphysically modest view. All it claims is that there is *something* necessary for membership in gender kinds. That *something* does not need to be biological, as the theorists above have shown. One might be a social constructionist and maintain that the processes of social construction are what provided the conditions necessary for gender kind membership. If one thinks a man is someone characterized by certain social features (such as wearing these clothes and not those or drinking this kind of beverage and not that one), one is a kind essentialist about gender. Those things define what it is to be a man. This shows that kind essentialism *is not* biological essentialism, for

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[77] Witt, "What is Gender Essentialism?" 12.

[78] Witt, "What is Gender Essentialism?" 13.

the latter adds to the view that the conditions for gender membership are biological ones (as well as a certain theory about human action connecting these biological traits with social behavior). But the kind essentialist should not be confused with the biological essentialist.

Moreover, the *something* necessary for gender kind membership may not be specifiable by the person holding this view. The affirmation that there is something that women share in common *qua* women constitutive of the kind does not require one to say with certainty what it is. Perhaps it is just beyond a human's ability to know what it is (see thesis 2). This is Mikkola's view: there is something which makes men *men* and women *women*, but for various reasons, we cannot say what it is. Like the early social constructionists who pointed to social oppression as a cloud masking the nature of women, Mikkola maintains that there *are* women and men, but denoting with clarity their necessary and sufficient conditions is something beyond human epistemic capacities to say. But we can say what it is *not*, because we can be guided by certain intuitions and moral concerns, but it would be too ambitious to say with precision the necessary and jointly conditions for such a complex kind as gender.

Serene Jones, in her book *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*, has defended a position remarkably similar to this, yet from a distinctly Christian theological position. Following thinkers like Nicole Brossard,[79] Jones calls the position "eschatological essentialism."[80] It begins with an affirmation of a modest kind essentialism insofar as it "finds positive value in making essentialist claims about human nature in general and women's nature in particular," believing claims like this to be important for collective action in support of human

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[79] See Lynne Huffer and David Dean, "An Interview with Nicole Brossard Montreal, October 1993," *Yale French Studies* 87 (1995): 115–121.

[80] It is worthwhile to note that Jones fits neatly with the theorists above in that she believes "that the divide between essentialists and constructivists fails to capture the complexity of daily experience" (*Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 44).

and women's rights.[81] Yet, these claims are situated within a particular picture of human epistemic capacities, believing them always to be corrigible and in need to constant revision and improvement: eschatological essentialism "stays open to critique and hence continually revises its 'universals.'"[82] Revision occurs not because the universals do not exist, but because the human capacity to know them is compromised. This is because "feminist theology affirms that sin—a fundamental fault line running through humanity—twists thought and distorts the vision of humanity."[83] For this reason, eschatological essentialism affirms that it is only when these epistemic deficiencies are cured that we will have unproblematic and complete access to gender's essence. Because of sin, eschatological essentialism, this side of the consummation of all things, "recognizes the need for constant revision and critique of the vision it proclaims."[84] Jones' move is elegant in its simplicity. It recognizes the need for a modest essentialism in order to avoid gender skepticism and the moral sterility in which it results, yet it remains sensitive to the epistemic implications of the divine economy described in chapter one.

Christians realize that statements about human beings and their genders are always indexed to the particular time they occupy in the economy. Jones' view recognizes that we do not yet enjoy the full benefits of the resurrection and that creation, at present, still creaks and groans under the reign of death in anticipation of the return of its King (Rom. 8:22). Yet, she is willing to emphasize the importance of God's creation of humankind in God's image, for "male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). Gendered creation is not something to be shrugged off

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[81] Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*, 45.

[82] Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*, 46.

[83] Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*, 52.

[84] Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*, 54.

or eradicated, as the theological implications of gender skepticism suggest, but it would be overly ambitious to say that we can return to the garden as though sin had never entered the picture. Christians confess a redemption ultimately fulfilled in the eschaton, where what it means to be women and men will be seen and experienced in the way it ought to be. As Carla Swafford Works testifies: "The male-female dichotomy—which was created by God—will not be erased, but *redeemed*. Gender is not removed; the relationship between the genders is rectified. God is not a creator of uniformity, but diversity."[85] Jones' eschatological essentialism—which maintains that there are properties the bearing of which are sufficient for kind membership, but that those properties must be constantly revised as we recognize our errors in identifying them—is a fitting way of maintaining the balance between the stability needed to avoid gender skepticism and the corrigibility demanded of the age between Christ's advent and Parousia. In chapter five I will defend an attenuated version of this view.

There is, finally, a fourth type of gender essentialism commonly called *individual essentialism*. On this view, "there is a property or properties that make that individual the individual that it is."[86] Here the concern is not about kinds but what picks out an individual, that is, what makes you the very individual that you are rather than someone else. There are certain things that could have been different about a person without changing the fact that it is still that same person. I could have been born blonde, for instance. However, certain other properties are not like that; they are such that if I lacked them, I would not be the very same individual that I am, numerically speaking. According to one defender of the view, Saul Kripke, an individual

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[85] Carla Swafford Works, *The Least of These: Paul and the Marginalized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 85.

[86] Witt, "What is Gender Essentialism?," 12. For more on its metaphysics, see Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974) and Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1981).

cannot have different DNA and be that same individual.[87] Applied to gender, being a woman or being a man is individually essential to a person in that they would be a different person if they were a different gender.[88] A test case for individual essentialist intuitions can be drawn from Doctor Who. The first through the twelfth Doctors were men, but the much-anticipated thirteenth Doctor regenerated as a woman. Are Doctors one through twelve the same individual as the thirteenth Doctor? An individual essentialist would say no.[89] Of course, the decision one comes to regarding individual gender essentialism will have implications for questions about issues like transgender identity and I do not intend to settle such matters here. I simply highlight this as a fourth fully defensible version of gender essentialism.

Gender essentialism, understood as eschatological kind essentialism, is, I conclude, a position worthy of assent. By it one avoids gender skepticism and it leaves appropriately open the question of whether the conditions for kind membership are social, biological or both (and whether we have the correct ones). It allows one to resist the bifurcations persisting in theological gender debates while still affirming a robust, if modest, metaphysical position. All the same, this position requires a broader epistemic picture in which to understand why we are limited and just how much access one might have to gender's essence. Let us turn to that now.

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[87] There is a pedantic way to parse this out a bit more clearly in terms of possible worlds, for those so inclined. Individually essential properties are those that I bear in every possible world in which I exist and that if I lacked them, I would not be "I" in that possible world. There is no possible world where I exist with different DNA (for that would then be a different individual), but there is a possible world where I am blonde.

[88] For an example of this view, see Anthony Appiah, "'But Would That Still Be Me?' Notes on Gender, 'Race,' Ethnicity as Sources of 'Identity,'" *Journal of Philosophy* 87 (1990): 493–9. For Appiah, gender is not individually essential to a person but to what he calls an "ethical self," such that being a different gender entails being a different ethical self.

[89] To be precise, the question over Doctor Who has to do with persistence over time, not with modality. What changes can a thing undergo while remaining the very same thing? This is a similar, though not identical question metaphysicians puzzle over. The illustration, with the appropriate allowances, still demonstrates the point under investigation so long as we do not think of the Doctors as changing but alongside one another.

3.3.2 Thesis 2: The complexity of gender, the noetic effects of sin and the current conditions of oppression complicate our epistemic access to gender's essence. All the same, we can be assured that gender will be fully known in the eschaton.

Mikkola's presentation has shown us that certain universals (or, in the nomenclature of the last section, kind essence terms), like "human being," might be so complex that they cannot help but strike us in an all-or-nothing way. It is difficult for minds like ours to break down such universals into their constituent parts because of their remarkable intricacy. She went on to claim that gender terms like "man" and "woman" are universals of this sort, and for this reason it is hard to specify just which conditions are necessary and jointly sufficient for membership in gender kinds. Moreover, in the last chapter we learned from John Stuart Mill that the unnatural conditions of subjection obscure the nature of women, for such an unnatural state cannot help but complicate our discernment of what is natural and what is ubiquitously common. Natural traits define a kind, whereas common traits are simply ubiquitously true without defining those they characterize.[90] Some gender traits, he maintained, might just be *ubiquitously* true without defining the *nature* of gender. I wish to uphold these affirmations, for they strike me as giving specificity to an all-too-common phenomenon, namely, that we seem to think we know what gender is and use its related terms virtually every day, but when we stop to ask ourselves what gender is, the answer is far from clear.

Though the complexity of essences and current states of oppression are two powerful reasons to show epistemic restraint, I want now to suggest that Christians have unique reasons to deny that we have unproblematic or complete access to gender's definition. In discussing Serene Jones' eschatological essentialism we have already seen that our position in the divine economy

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[90] To borrow an example from Thomas Morris, it is universally true that no humans are born on space stations, but it is not true of human nature that this is the case. See *The Logic of God Incarnate*, reprint edition (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 63.

leads us to allocate certain epistemic capacities and incapacities to different moments in the economy.[91] In creation, humanity knew God and one another and it was good (Gen. 2:20-24). Upon the occurrence of the fall, "they knew that they were naked" (Gen. 3:7), yet here knowledge is acquired in direct disobedience of God, introducing into all creation the reign of sin and death, a reality implicating the proper function and harmony of all things, noetic faculties included. As a result, Paul describes fallen humanity as "futile in their thinking" (Rom. 1:21) and "darkened in their understanding" (Eph. 4:18).[92] Even when redeemed, saints are considered epistemically *immature* (Eph. 4:11-13) and vulnerable to sway in this direction or that. This is because, to cite a familiar verse once again, "now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12). It is only when the beatific vision is bestowed upon Christians that the world will be seen in its clearest light (cf. 1 John 3:2).

One passage that makes this point in a powerful way is Hebrews 2:5-9. Craig Koester has identified this text as the "principle theme" and "the thesis" of the book, for there the author "affirms that in Jesus' death and exaltation listeners can see how God's designs for human beings are accomplished through the suffering and exaltation of Christ."[93] In these four verses, the author expands upon the *exordium* of the book wherein the divine Son is the one through whom worlds were created (1:2), who is "the exact imprint of God's very being" (1:3) and who

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[91] For a clear exposition of these different epistemic capacities along the biblical storyline, see Dru Johnson, *Biblical Knowing: A Scriptural Epistemology of Error* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013).

[92] I cannot here argue for the Pauline authorship of the dispute epistles, but I do not think anything of theological importance hangs on the issue, so long as I am allowed a canonical cohesiveness to the claims made in Scripture.

[93] Craig R. Koester, "Hebrews, Rhetoric, and the Future of Humanity," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (January 2002): 110, 105.

far surpasses even the angels (1:5-14). Then, after calling his readers' attention to the sacrificial

work of this divine Son (2:1-4), the author affirms the complete subjection of "the coming

world" to the Son, not to the angels (2:5). He interprets Psalm 8:4-6 Christologically by

identifying the divine Son with the "human being" of whom God is mindful, who, after being

made lower than the angels for "a little while," now possesses all things subject under his feet

(2:6-8). Nothing is left outside of the control of this divine human. Yet: "we do not yet see

everything in subjection to him, but we do see Jesus" (2:8b-9).

This somewhat ambiguous passage has been interpreted in at least two ways. First, one

might take the clause that "we do not yet see everything in subjection to him" as affirming that

not everything is under the control of Christ just yet. This, for example, is how Thomas Aquinas

read this passage, maintaining that Christ's universal Lordship "has not yet been fulfilled,

because unbelievers, sinners, and devils are not yet subject to him."[94] Thus, though Christ reigns

over all *in authority*, he does not reign over all *in obedience*. Some modern commentators have

followed Aquinas in affirming that Christ's universal rule has not yet come about in point of

fact.[95] As a result, they read the affirmation of universal rule as something yet to come, taking as

their cue verse five's reference to a future world. Alternatively, others read Christ's rule as

having already been established, but maintain that humans are unable to see its extent clearly.

The issue is with our epistemic abilities to comprehend the rule, in other words, not with the rule

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[94] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Hebrews*, ed. The Aquinas Institute, trans. Fabian R. Larcher (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), chapter 2, lecture 2, paragraph 120.

[95] See, for instance, Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary,* New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 91: "Jesus' lordship is actual, but it has not yet been extended to all reality." Also, Harold Attridge, *Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 72: "the subjection of all to the Son is an eschatological reality."

itself.[96] The reference to the "coming world," on this reading, is about the trials experienced by those striving to see the reign of Christ in a world still characterized by sin. When Christ's rule is made plain, we will see clearly what was always already the case. It seems to me that we ought to favor the second reading, affirming that Christ's rule (though it looks different when exercised over the redeemed versus those in active rebellion to Christ) is actual now, for it is now that Jesus is "crowned" (*estephanōmenon*, participle in the perfect tense, indicating completed action) with glory and honor (2:9). That period during which he was made lower than the angels has now come to end on account of his resurrection and ascension. If the authority and rule of Christ are not complete, then there is also serious reason to doubt that his atoning work has been completed.[97] But we have indications that Christ, the one who is the true fulfillment of Psalm 8, is no longer made lower than angels and that the subjection of all things to him has in fact happened (cf. Matt. 28:18 where authority has been given to Christ upon the resurrection, not the Parousia).

That means that the reference to the coming world in verse 5 speaks to the benefits Christ's return will bestow upon our epistemic faculties, not to an extension of Christ's rule.[98] In other words, this passage is speaking about the economic indexing of our epistemic faculties, about just how much we can expect to know given that we live in the time after Jesus'

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[96] See D. Stephen Long, *Hebrews*, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 60: "Not everything is now subject 'to them.' We do not yet see it. The violent continue to bear it away. Evil still triumphs over good. Nonetheless, Hebrews encourages its readers that we do see the triumph in part." See also, Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews*, Anchor Yale Bible 36 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 221: "Experience does not conform to what is stated in the psalm."

[97] The assumed rule of Christ is crucial to David Moffitt's read of the atonement in Hebrews, such that if it has not happened, the atonement is in question. See Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews* Novum Testamentum Supplements 141 (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

[98] It may be objected that there are significant sinful portions of creation where Christ could not possibly be said to rule. This misses the nuance that the nature of his rule is not specified in this text and that judgment, now or in the future, is *also* a form of rule.

resurrection but before our own. This is a strikingly similar epistemic situation expected by

Mikkola, Mill and Jones, providing for this burgeoning view of gender the epistemic context it

requires. Gender is a kind essence, but because we do not yet see our genders under the rule of

Christ, we cannot specify its necessary and sufficient conditions with perfection. Christ is Lord

over our genders, undoubtedly, but our access to God's purposes for gender is far from

uncomplicated. As Beth Felker Jones reminds us, "we must name the dangers lurking behind any

assumption that we have straightforward access to redeemed bodies. Gender serves as a striking

test case for this warning precisely because we have shaped such dreadfully distorted sinful

caricatures of 'male' and 'female' and then called them God's intention."[99] Sin has clouded our

ability to see reality and redeemed humanity is in desperate need of epistemic reparation. There

is therefore a parallel between the way structures of oppression hinder our epistemic access to

gender's essence and the way our current placement in the narrative of redemption does the

same, knowing that our epistemic faculties too must be resurrected.

But "we do see Jesus" (2:9)! With our redemption and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit,

we can be assured that the reparative work has begun. The bodily resurrection of Jesus means

that creation has not been discarded or done away with and that encountering this Risen One

enables us rightly to see the creation over which he reigns.[100] In her work on the Gospel of John,

Marianne Meye Thompson has argued that "John most explicitly articulates the necessity of the

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[99] Beth Felker Jones, *Marks of His Wounds: Gender Politics and Bodily Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 96.

[100] This is a powerful aspect of the argument of Oliver O'Donovan in *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 81: "Order is not known by accumulation of particulars, but immediately—without, that is, a process of discursive inference—through the historical sequence of particulars. Such knowledge is not exhaustive knowledge. It is 'universal' knowledge in the sense that it is the knowledge of things as a whole, in their cosmic relations to one another, but not in the sense that it has seen every particular there is to see, nor even every *relevant* particular there is to see. It is, by its very nature and not by accident, *provisional* knowledge…"

postresurrection perspective for understanding Jesus, interpreting Jesus' life retrospectively," with the implication that our understanding of the entire biblical narrative is transformed by the benefits bestowed by Christ's resurrection.[101] Consider John 2:22 where it is stated: "After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken." Something about the resurrection unlocked the ability of the disciples to understand the words of Christ and the initial guarantee of Christ's resurrection gives Christians a taste of the healing that will be complete when they are themselves raised.[102] All the same, mistake and error are still features of the redeemed mind, for while we reap the benefits of the resurrection of Christ we will not know perfectly "until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). This maturity will come, of course, when *we* are raised.

All of this means, of course, that we will understand humanity and gender only from the perspective of our resurrection. Alan Torrance reminds us of as much: we must

> conceive of human nature *eschatologically*…and thus neither naturalistically nor in some transcendentalist manner that fails to center its thinking on God's promise of new creation for all things…Properly functional human nature, therefore, requires to be conceived first and foremost eschatologically. Only "retrospectively," therefore, in the light of the promised consummation of God's creative purposes, can we perceive the telos that defines our "natures."[103]

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[101] Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 9. See also 15: "The Gospel of John thus comprises itself in the whole biblical story from creation (1:1–3) to the second coming of Christ (21:22–23), implicitly identifying Jesus of Nazareth as the one who was, is, and is to come: what can be predicated of the eternal God can also be predicated of him (cf. Rev. 1:4)."

[102] Cf. also John 12:16: "His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him."

[103] Alan J. Torrance, "Is There a Distinctive Human Nature? Approaching the Question from a Christian Epistemic Base," *Zygon* 47, no. 4 (December 2012): 912.

The sheer complexity of gender, the oppressive conditions which prevent us from seeing it clearly and the epistemic effects of sin will be overcome when we are raised again and only then will we see gender clearly. But does this mean that we can say nothing about gender here and now? Not at all. First, a commitment to corrigibility does not require a commitment to silence or relativity. It *does* require a dedication to epistemic humility among other epistemic virtues, but one can still venture claims about gender and evaluate their truth or falsehood. It is precisely *because* one knows that there is a standard against which we measure our claims that we have the confidence to make them; accountability increases confidence in our theological work, it does not diminish it. Second, the epistemic ground I am attempting to secure for the theologian of gender is no different than the ground available to the theologian who works on any other topic. *All* theologians should be aware both of the dignity of being given the opportunity to reflect upon God and of their limitations in doing so. That is why, when discussing a doctrine like divine simplicity, Oliver Crisp suggests that what theologians do is offer "models," where a model is a "theoretical construction that only approximates to verisimilitude, offering a simplified account of a particular data set or (in this case) cluster of theological doctrines."[104] A model of an airplane is not the same as the airplane itself, but it reliably represents features of the airplane it aims to depict. This does not mean that models are not true; they are certainly truth-apt and guide the theologian in proper reasoning about lofty matters. Crisp maintains that this posture "comports with an intellectual humility on the part of the theologian: it may be that we are unable to capture the truth of divine simplicity because we are incapable of understanding it as finite creatures or do not have the epistemic access to comprehend the doctrine, which is part

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[104] Oliver D. Crisp, *Analyzing Doctrine: Toward a Systematic Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 54. See further William Wood, "Modeling Mystery," *Scientia et Fides* 4, no. 1 (2016): 39–59.

of the divine nature."[105] If gender is a complex subject that pushes us to the edges of noetic

abilities, so much more so for the complexity of divine simplicity! Nevertheless, the theologian

is able to proffer models which aim to capture some truth of the matter, and such models can be

evaluated. Third, we have already in place a means by which gender references can be fixed

without fully, completely or incorrigibly knowing their definitions (or necessary and sufficient

conditions). By drawing on Mikkola's views, we can carry on the task of model building,

knowing that fixing the reference of gender terms does not require specifying their applicability.

By what standard, however, can one measure such models? Though one ought to show

appropriate reservation in making claims about gender, there are certain parameters available

that will guide theological reflection. God's canonical self-disclosure in Holy Scripture is surely

one such means (indeed, the *chief* means, on my view), but one must also develop the ability to

read well. Additionally, it seems to me that the theologian of gender, given other facts she knows

about God and God's activity, can be guided by certain *moral* facts. Chiefly, as will be stated in

the third thesis, no theologically viable account of gender will be unable to support the

cultivation of justice.

3.3.3 Thesis 3: Any theory or theology of gender must be consistent with and supportive of the cultivation of justice.

"But let justice roll down like waters," Amos 5:24 famously states, "and righteousness

like an ever-flowing stream." Micah 6:8 likewise affirms in superlative terms: "He has told you,

O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love

kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" God's *mishpat*, or justice, is mentioned at least

421 times in the Hebrew Bible, and verses such as these have undergirded the crucial importance

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[105] Crisp, *Analyzing Doctrine*, 55.

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of justice for Christian moral theology.[106] Justice has meant many different things in the writings of those interested in gender and a fuller discussion of its properties must await chapter 6. Nevertheless, it is uncontroversial to state that a *perfectly just state of affairs* is not one where harm, wrong, oppression, malice, wickedness and all other kinds of evil persist. Besides, it is equally uncontentious to claim that God's purposes for creation fulfilled in the eschaton will be distinctly characterized by justice (cf. Isa. 32:16; Rev. 19:2; 21:4, 8). Taken together, these claims are sufficient to prove that God has not intended gender to be characterized by injustice and that proposals about gender which fail to support the cultivation of justice fall outside of the possibilities for theological consideration.

This is another way to state the second charge made against social constructionist views of gender in the previous chapter. Because gender, on that position, becomes morally unevaluable, it cannot sustain the moral weight required to pursue justice. This is precisely why Mikkola looks to shift the metaethical grounding for identifying injustice to conceptions of *humanity*, not *women* or *men*. Gender skepticism, because it denies that there are stable meanings to gender terms, is not a robust enough view to sustain the requisite pursuits of justice in which Christians ought to be engaged. If we cannot say with clarity that there are women, then it becomes impossible to say that women are the disproportionate recipients of certain injustices and that it is they (and not some other category of people) who have been denied certain rights. Thus, though I advocated for epistemic restraint in the previous thesis, this restraint cannot result in a position where certain moral truths about gender are no longer advanceable. Our accounts of

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[106] This is not the place to provide a theological account of justice, though I will have some things to say about it here and in subsequent chapters. The work of Nicholas Wolterstorff is instructive on this point. See *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008) and *Justice in Love*, Emory University Studies in Law and Religion (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). See also Bethany Hanke Hoang and Kristen Deede Johnson, *The Justice Calling: Where Passion Meets Perseverance* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016).

gender must be definite enough to support the pursuit of justice and we can be assured, by other

things we know about divine action, that no account which fails to be so is false.

There is another error to be corrected. At times, when reading social constructionist

literature,[107] one gets the impression that all we need for justice are *better social constructs*.

Once the necessary and important debunking project is complete and putatively natural structures

are identified as being the product of human social arrangement, the remaining task amounts to

replacing the old, problematic social constructs with new, better ones. Then, it is assumed, we

have sufficiently arrived at justice. At work is a view that has structural parity with the political

philosophy advanced by thinkers like Aristotle often called "the politics of perfection." The idea

here is that virtuous people are cultivated only when they are citizens of a governing body where

the right laws and social structures have been put into place.[108] As Robert Markus summarizes,

"For the *polis*-centered tradition of Greek thought the political framework of human life was the

chief means of achieving human perfection. Life in a city-state was an education for virtue, a

fully human life, the good life."[109] There are ways to understand this claim that are less

problematic,[110] but the central idea that our hopes for virtue are secured by the right political

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[107] This is not to say that this would not be true for biological essentialists. It is just that notions of justice and goodness are far less obvious in their books.

[108] See, for example, Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, trans. W.D. Ross and J.O. Urmson, Bollingen Series, LXXI/2 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1866, X.9.1180^{b}25–26. Aristotle appears to think that just as one looks to the doctor to master medicine, one looks to the legislator to guide in the cultivation of virtue.

[109] R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine*, 2nd Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 73.

[110] See, for example, the defense of perfectionist politics in Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). Even here, however, it is not a bare-faced politics of perfection that is being defended, but an attenuated version more sensitive to theological considerations. Cf. 9: "I argue that an Augustinian ethics of citizenship can be *perfectionist* without trading in sentimentalism, Pelagian notions of achieved *perfectibility*, or elitist conceptions of undemocratic politics."

arrangement has proven to be the windmill chased by citizens of a variety of political inclinations.[111] If vouchsafing that the right president is in place, the Senate filled with the right members of a political party, the right set of laws are enacted and so on are seen as not merely necessary but *sufficient* for establishing the virtue of citizens and their experience of justice in a polity, then something like a politics of perfection has been adopted. Such thinking is incompatible with the central Christian conviction that we look "forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God," and that we "desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them" (Heb. 11:11, 16). While it is true that certain political structures facilitate virtue and others hinder it, they are hardly *sufficient* for the acquisition of character. Christians confess, *minimally*, that faith and the indwelling of the Spirit is also necessary for a life pleasing to God and that such a life is a significant component of virtue, considered as a whole (Heb. 11:6).[112] This neither precludes the ability of Christians to "seek the welfare of the city" during their exile (Jer. 27:7), nor commits one to thinking that only Christians are capable of virtue, but it does mean that our expectations for justice are not confined to what the world can offer before the return of Christ. Christians ought to pursue justice vigorously in the present, understanding that the kingdom of God is a proleptic reality the beginnings of which are already here; yet, they

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[111] For how this has developed in evangelical America, see Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). For many evangelicals in the 1970s and '80s, for instance, securing the right presidential candidates was the antidote to the sexual revolution.

[112] I do not mean to venture into a discussion of "pagan virtues" here, but the qualifications just made allow for that debate to remain unsettled. Both those who affirm and those who deny the existence of pagan virtues will say that, *considered as a whole*, a virtuous life will include a life lived in obedience to God. Whether specific virtues exist or not is not impacted by this claim. For further discussion, see Jennifer A. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

realize that even this is an adumbrated justice, stretching forward to its fulfillment in a better city (cf. Phil. 3:20).

One way, then, to adjudicate theological proposals about gender from within an appropriate epistemic context is to ask whether they are able to sustain and promote the cultivation of justice. If one's theology of gender is unable to pick out instances of gendered oppression with consistency and provide the appropriate categories to make sense of them, then there is a serious flaw with it. We know that God is a God of justice and is redeeming a people that they might live justly. That much is not up for negotiation. With that firm truth in hand, we are then able to evaluate that about which we are less firm. The upshot is, then, that no theology of gender that cannot challenge male dominance, misogyny, sexual assault, violence against women or any other kind of gendered injustice is fit for Christian assent.[113]

Christian theology, when it addresses gender with concerns for justice in mind, must remain good news for "the least of these" (Matt. 25:40, 45). In particular, its conceptions of justice must be defined by a gospel in which criteria of worth accrued by the gaining of social capital are denied, for grace is a gift given without regard to the worth of the recipient. As John Barclay has powerfully argued, "God's action in Christ is no calibrated reward for the godly, or merciful protection of the faithful few, but a gift of utter incongruity, showing no correspondence with the worth of its recipients."[114] Because the gift which has constituted the church did not come with a requirement of meritorious worth, the resultant community no longer abides by the standards of worth established by a fallen world. This, ultimately, is the meaning of that vexed

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[113] In her illuminating book, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), Kate Manne attempts to clarify the nature of injustice, specifically directed at women. It is a helpful point of entry for understanding the issues in question.

[114] John M.G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 474.

verse, Galatians 3:28: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." The point is not that gender and the other categories mentioned are eradicated—Paul still refers to himself as a Jew (Gal. 2:15) and was still masculine. The point is rather that the attribution of value (or a lack thereof) often attached to these labels is erased and replaced with a better standard, that of union with Christ. As Barclay concludes: "What is altered…is the *evaluative freight* carried by these labels, the encoded distinctions of superiority and inferiority…What now counts for worth is only one's status in Christ, and the consistency of one's allegiance to him."[115] The root of so much injustice is the accretion of worth with respect to a person's sex, gender or sexuality, and the gospel is concerned with challenging exactly this.

A fuller discussion of the relationship of grace, justice and gender will be undertaken in chapter 6, but the above suffices to demonstrate a better hope than the mere replacement of social constructs with newer ones. Yes, the social world needs to be challenged and improved, but Christians know that the standard of challenge and the hope for improvement come from the free gift of salvation offered by the life, death, resurrection, ascent and return of Christ. Our genders, as Gal. 3:28 shows, are not exempt from this, and for this reason, any theology of gender must be consistent with and support the cultivation of justice.

3.3.4 Thesis 4: Gender is concerned with selves or identity and the way selves organize social goods pertaining to their sexed bodies.

I began this chapter by noting that those who uphold the bifurcation between social construction and essence have a tendency to deflate the component opposite to their view; that is, social constructionists treat the body as a mere object unable to generate moral norms, while

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[115] *Paul and the Gift*, 397.

more "traditional" views disregard social expressions of gender as mere stereotypes. By contrast, Witt and Mikkola have shown that resisting the bifurcation allows one to see the importance of the body *and* its social manifestations. Witt, by producing the concept of a "social self" and by noting the ways in which biological processes take on social significance when they are situated in a context that adds to them further social conditions, helps us to see how certain roles and positions are socially *manifested*, even if they are not socially constructed. Mikkola's point that social properties and biological properties are both *descriptive* and not *evaluative* also helps to see how both can play a role in a theory of gender. The claim I would like to make now and unpack in greater detail in the next two chapters is that gender cannot be neatly distinguished into social *or* biological. Rather, gender is about the appropriation of social goods that pertain to our biologically sexed bodies, thereby enabling sexed bodies to acquire social meaning. This is basically the same claim as the one made by Witt where gender is a social position defined by the engendering function, except that my particular way of phrasing it will prove important in later chapters. There, I will argue for *how* cultural goods are appropriated in the next two chapters; for now, I wish merely to claim *that* this is the case.

That human beings are sexed is, it seems to me, an obvious biblical conclusion.[116] That is, that there are biological differences between males and females (and possibly also intersex/DSD individuals, though for now that will be left as an open question) seems to be a straightforward entailment of biblical teaching, especially the creation narrative (cf. Gen. 1:27, 2:4-24 and its reverberations in places like Matt. 19:4 and Eph. 5:31). The more complicated claim is that when Scripture appears to discuss gender as something more than the biological

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[116] Though *how many* sexes there are is a question shown to be rather more complicated by theologians who have prioritized the experience of intersexed/DSD individuals. This topic will be treated in chapter 6.

differences in question, it does so by giving prescriptions on wise negotiation of social goods that are relevant to those sexed bodies. This, in fact, is one of the overarching claims of Cynthia Westfall's major work *Paul and Gender*. Westfall argues that when Paul makes statements about gender, he is attempting to keep in balance two motivations. First, he is describing ways in which the gospel challenges and subverts regnant first-century cultural paradigms about women and men, paradigms which run against the things for which the church ought to be known. Second, he is remaining sensitive to the Greco-Roman culture in which his churches are located and providing for them norms which will allow the mission to the Gentiles to go on without significant obstacles from the outside. Thus Westfall: "In order for Paul's gentile mission to succeed, the behavior of Christian women would need to be consistent with what was practiced by women in the broader first-century Greco-Roman world. Therefore, Paul's gender concerns were often missional when he addressed gender roles in the church and the home, and his intention was for believers to fit into the culture while remaining ethically pure."[117] Simultaneously, "Paul in fact subverted the Greco-Roman household codes by reframing the basis, purpose, and motivation for the behavior of social inferiors, and by adjusting and restricting the privileges of those who have power."[118] Overall, both with regard to the broader society and to the distinctly counter-cultural norms of Christianity, Paul was concerned that "the word of God may not be discredited" (Tit. 2:5). Or, as Westfall puts it, Paul's missional goal was "to make the gospel attractive" noticeably as a countercultural gospel *and* as something which does not come across as cultish.[119]

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[117] Cynthia Long Westfall, *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 13.

[118] Westfall, *Paul and Gender*, 163.

[119] Westfall, *Paul and Gender*, 163.

This means that, for Paul, gender was about the wise organization of social goods, where that wisdom consisted in recognizing the nuances of the culture in which one lives and finding ways to be missionally successful. This is perhaps clearest in his discussion of veiling in 1 Cor. 11:4-16, an admittedly knotty passage.[120] My primary concern is with Paul's exhortation for a woman to veil. What is he doing there? Is he advocating for a public symbol that kept a woman in her place, that is, lower than the unveiled men in the house church gathering? Understanding the veiling practices of the first-century Greco-Roman world suggests, in fact, that this was not at all the case. Veils, by and large, were worn by women with the greatest privilege to demonstrate their wealth, modesty, sexual cleanliness, respect and piety.[121] That the discussion over the Eucharist which immediately follows has distinct overtones of power imbalance[122] suggests that wearing a veil was part of a culture where signs of privilege were maintained within the walls of the Corinthian church. Veils were indicators of social capital, and when this is partnered with the common assumption of the day that a woman's hair was seen to be erotic and sexually attractive, we can conclude that the most dignified and powerful women in the ancient world "were those who had *the right* to wear a veil in public."[123] By contrast, those who lacked social capital were prevented from wearing a veil. If someone was deprived of the status of a Roman wife, was accused of adultery or was a prostitute (who, very often, were also slaves forced into such

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[120] For the ensuing treatment of this passage I rely on Westfall's discussion along with that of Carla Swafford Works' in *The Least of These*, chapter 3. There are other approaches, however, which present themselves as highly plausible. See, in particular, Lucy Peppiatt, *Women and Worship at Corinth: Paul's Rhetorical Arguments in 1 Corinthians* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015). Even Peppiatt's reading is consistent with the broader thesis that I am advancing—namely, that gender is about the right organization of social goods—even if in a different way.

[121] See, for example, Sarah Ruden, *Paul Among the People: The Apostle Reinterpreted and Reimagined in His Own Time* (New York: Pantheon, 2010), 86–7.

[122] For this claim, see Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, ed. and trans. John J. Schütz (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982).

[123] Works, *The Least of These*, 61. Emphasis added.

occupation), then they were seen as lacking the requisite dignity to wear a symbol depicting lofty

status. What's more, because hair was perceived as arousing, women who did not veil were

perceived to be sexually available and readily accessible by any man who desired them. Westfall

summarizes this sordid state of affairs:

> Keeping certain classes of women unveiled was considered to be in the interests of men as a group, and laws were made and enforced that prevented women who were deemed without honor from veiling, which included prostitutes, slaves, freedwomen, and women in the lowest classes. This not only signaled that such women were sexually available, but also maintained the social order and a distinction between classes.[124]

To summarize: a veil was indeed a part of a sexist cultural practice that disadvantaged women,

but not because it was a sign of dishonor. It was a sign of privilege and sexual purity and being

deprived of the right to wear one placed a woman in a position lacking worth and that made her

vulnerable to sexual attack.

Consider, then, going up to pray in a church service as a Corinthian woman with an

uncovered head: it would be parallel to advertising sexual availability in the context where the

sacrifice of Christ is being remembered. Richard Hays compares it with a woman going to

receive the Eucharist while topless,[125] and we might add that she was not even given the option

to be fully clothed while doing so on account of her position in society. In this light, Paul's

exhortation for *all* women to veil takes on a far more liberative and equalizing tone. It no longer

mattered that one was divorced or a slave-prostitute; such symbols of worth are rendered

obsolete in Christ. Even divorcees and prostitutes can receive sexual protection in a Pauline

church by wearing a veil. Westfall powerfully concludes: "Paul's support of *all* women veiling

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[124] Westfall, *Paul and Gender*, 33. See also 97: "an uncovered head told them whom they could solicit for sex without consequences."

[125] Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 186.

equalized the social relationships in the community; inasmuch as such veiling was in his control, he secured respect, honor, and sexual purity for women in the church who were denied that status in the culture."[126] Works agrees: "Paul's advice here—for *all* women to pray and prophesy with a covering—would be countercultural. It would grant status to women who, outside the church, could never hope to be treated with the respect grant a Roman wife…Donning the veil treated all women with human dignity and respect."[127] Finally, Ruden calls us to imagine looking at the assembled congregation and noting how, with all women veiled, one could not tell who had power and prestige and who were looked at lasciviously on account of their low social status.[128] Paul's command, while sensitive to the regnant cultural practices, flew in the face of the sinful, oppressive and sexist world in which the churches found themselves.

What does this show about a Pauline approach to gender? It shows that Paul would not have been content to dismiss veil-wearing as mere cultural stereotypes that made no difference to gender. It mattered deeply for those women whose inability to wear a veil made them appear mere items for sexual consumption and therefore it mattered deeply for Paul. Social expressions of our created givenness as males and females needed to be interpreted and taken up into right Christian practice, for the sake of the gospel. In other words, Paul is concerned about the right organization of goods pertaining to our sexed bodies. The allusions to Genesis 1 and 2 (1 Cor. 11:8-9, 12) reveal that Paul considers created sexual embodiment as relevant, but relevant *because* of the social goods attached to those bodies when they are socially mediated. Created females were those who, in Corinth, needed to consider how best to use the cultural symbol of a

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[126] *Paul and Gender*, 33–4.

[127] *The Least of These*, 62.

[128] *Paul Among the People*, 88.

veil. It was not created males who needed to be concerned about this, for their maleness afforded them the privilege of not worrying about *this* social good (even the systemic injustice of being able to use it as an opportunity for assault). It was femaleness, expressed in distinct right or wrong social manifestations, that was the object of Paul's concern along with how males responded to those manifestations in a Christ-like manner.[129] Discerning the right expression of social goods that pertained to the sexed body, ultimately, was Paul's approach to gender.

There is more that needs to be said about how this occurs. The thesis I hope to have advanced is merely *that* gender is about the way we attach ourselves to certain social goods as a means of socially mediating our sexed bodies. *How* this happens—that is, how these social goods become attached to us in such a way that they form *who* we are—will be explored next and it will have everything to do with the nature of love. For now, though, I conclude that for Paul, and for many of the theorists considered in this chapter, gender is neither *merely* social (as though the body was just an inert object on which social meanings are constructed) nor *merely* biological (as though the social goods we encounter daily had nothing to do with it). Our having been made female and male is a matter for social manifestation insofar as we organize social goods relevant to them.

3.4 Conclusion

By way of conclusion, allow me to summarize the central claims of this chapter. In an effort to move beyond the bifurcation in the literature on gender between essence and social construction, I have examined the views of Charlotte Witt and Mari Mikkola, two cutting-edge

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[129] One might raise the objection that, because of my emphasis on sex, I am building into my definition of gender conditions that preclude transgender and trans* considerations at the outset. Though I have a position on this matter, I cannot see why, with small modifications, my position is compatible with such concerns. To accommodate trans* concerns, one would only have to add that it was *perceived* biological femaleness, where an individual would only need to be perceived as having a certain sexed body to be of a certain gender (without actually possessing such a body).

feminist theorists who are attempting to provide fresh accounts of gender. Both are essentialists

and both include social aspects into their essentialism. For Witt, gender is a social position that

organizes all of the other social positions that a social individual occupies, and it is a position

constituted by the engendering function, which is what reproduction looks like when it is taken

up into the social realm and attached to other social responsibilities. For Mikkola, a minimal kind

of essentialism is necessary in order to avoid gender skepticism, a position many feminists worry

is politically inutile. Nevertheless, she argued that we do not need to be able to specify the

necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for a gender kind in order to refer to it or to know that

it is an essence.

From their positions, I extracted four desiderata for a theory of gender. They were:

1. Gender is an essence, though this is not reducible to or identical with biological determinism or biological essentialism.
2. The complexity of gender, the noetic effects of sin and the current conditions of oppression complicate our epistemic access to gender's essence. All the same, we can be assured that gender will be fully known in the eschaton.
3. Any theory or theology of gender must be consistent with and supportive of the cultivation of justice.
4. Gender is concerned with selves or identity and the way selves organize social goods pertaining to their sexed bodies.

I posited that genders must be essences, of the kind essence variety, if we are to avoid gender

skepticism. Nevertheless, if genders are essences, it does not follow that we have clear,

uncomplicated or complete access to what the conditions are that comprise them. In fact, the

complexity of the essence, the current conditions of oppression and the noetic effects of sin make

that rather difficult indeed. This ought to commend to us epistemic humility in defining gender,

but it does not mean that we must be entirely silent. Mikkola's reference theory and the general

posture a theologian ought to have with respect to her work are sufficient to encourage models of

gender which approximate the truth. Furthermore, she may be guided by certain moral norms of

whose truth she is assured—no model of gender is theologically viable if it cannot sustain the cultivation of justice. This is precisely what the social constructionist model fails to do, and Christians have a hope that the fruition of justice in this world does not come merely from better social constructs, but from an invasive gospel that disrupts all categories of worth. All the same, Christians must be keenly aware, as the apostle Paul was, of the importance of the right organization of social goods. Gender is tied to our created sexed embodiment, but discipleship consists in knowing how to make use and attach ourselves to cultural goods in ways consistent with the gospel.

This overview surely leaves questions unanswered. In particular, this final thesis raises the importance of the relationship between the body and its social manifestation. How is it that we become who we are through the social lives we live? In particular, how does one acquire a gender identity by means of cultural goods to which one attaches oneself? Very often, gender discussions orbit around the notion of *identifying* as a member of a particular gender kind. This is made obvious when one hears, "I identify as man" or "Some people don't identify with any gender." Unfortunately, little to no theological attention has been given to the notion of identification. (It is often assumed that gender identification, something meant to be a life-defining action, is relatively uncomplicated and obvious, something clearly defined by psychology.) This is particularly disappointing when one realizes how richly the Christian tradition has spoken about human identity. The view for which I argue in the remainder of this work will take seriously such comments. Already mentioned is a shorthand definition of gender that I find acceptable; it is the appropriation of cultural goods pertaining to the sexed body by means of which the sexed body is socially manifested. "Appropriation," however, will be a theologically important term, for the way goods are appropriated will go on to shape gender

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identity. Specifically, in the next two chapters I shall argue that gender identity has primarily to do with what one *loves*, for loving is the shaping force in making us who we are. In the next chapter, I shall develop an Augustinian theology of human love and in the fifth chapter I shall put the pieces together to argue that gender is a species of human love. That is, the means by which we appropriate social goods and manifest our sexed bodies is by our love, something *both* created and social. What will emerge is a picture of gender identity that, drawing on the four foundational theses established above, has deep roots in our identity as creatures and has a clear connection to our social lives. To that we now turn.

CHAPTER 4
AN AUGUSTINIAN THEOLOGY OF HUMAN LOVE

Chapter three contended for four principles that constitute the foundations for my

proposal. The fourth of these claimed that gender is concerned with the way selves organize

social goods pertaining to their sexed bodies. In this chapter, I go into further detail about how

individuals appropriate social goods to themselves, thereby forming their identities or selves.

Human beings, I claim, are what they love in the sense that the objects of their love shape their

identity. This is because they were created by a God who is love and who wove love right into

creation. Human beings are created to love God above all else and love created goods in God,

all the while becoming conformed to all of these objects of love. Love requires an order and is

easily disfigured into a lust for selfish power and domination. Love also has the capacity to form

humans into social communities, wherein identities are shared, and goods held in common. All

of these claims were advanced by Augustine, the retrieval of whose theology of human love will

guide the chapter's enquiry. By the end, a framework for how social goods are identity forming

will have been provided, in order to set up the following chapter's claim that gendered social

goods are formative for gender identity, while neglecting neither created nor social dimensions.

4.1 Introduction: Love, Identity and an Apologia for Augustine

Within conversations about gender, it is common to hear language about "identity." As

an example, the DSM-5 defines "gender identity" as "a category of social identity and refers to

an individual's *identification* as male, female, or, occasionally, some category other than male or

female."[1] I do not cite the DSM as a particularly apt or adequate definition for what I take gender to be, but rather as a representative index for how identity and identification language is fairly standard in current approaches to gender. Theologians, by contrast, have been critical of identity language, often because of the particularly "modernist" overtones contemporary articulations connote.[2] Senses of identity after the sexual revolution, it is alleged, are far too individualistic, internalistic and voluntaristic. Christians should, therefore, reject such attempts to characterize gender in such terms.

My point here is not to wade through such fraught waters; rather, it is simply to show that while modern identification language is widely accepted, it tends to be rejected within theology, even when no better alternative is proffered. Perhaps the conflict in question arises from the all-or-nothing approach of those disparaging the claims of individuals to identify as a member of a certain gender, failing to see that perhaps there is "precious clue"[3] woven into such claims. After all, the Christian tradition has had a great deal to say about the nature of identity and what is fundamentally true about human beings, even if such approaches are markedly different from identity language used today. The theological motivation to think about identity has come from texts like 1 Samuel 16:7, where it is asserted: "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on

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[1] *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fifth Edition (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013), 451. Emphasis added.

[2] For instance, see Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020). Much of the inspiration for such laments come from Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), though Taylor is more nuanced than my simple assertion suggests and than those inspired by his thought.

[3] In the words of Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay "On the Trinity"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 309.

the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Our identities are, so it seems, our

hearts, or that place from which our love proceeds.[4] The full rejection of articulations of "gender

identities," then, may not be sufficiently nuanced to craft a salutary way forward.

In the previous chapter, I argued that gender has a great deal to do with personal

identities, particularly the way social goods are attached to selves. I claimed, from Paul's

treatment of veiling, that gender is defined by the social goods we appropriate to ourselves as

sexed beings. Gender, therefore, is greatly related to our identities and the way social goods are

appropriated to them according to the standards established by Christ.[5] This attenuated sense of

identity, I want to suggest, is a helpful clue provided by contemporary discussions about gender.

If gender is something like an identity, how do we identify as women and men? Already we have

seen how a Scriptural argument can be made *that* gender is an identity concerned with social

goods and deep links with our creation. In this chapter, I will articulate a vision for *how* such

identities are formed, broadly speaking, by means of retrieving the theology of human love

expounded by St. Augustine of Hippo. This, I believe, will provide a broader framework for how

social goods and created categories interweave to form our identities, serving as a broader

framework in which to situate gender identity. In this sense, a very ancient figure will provide

help with a question pressing concern. In short, this chapter will furnish a broader theological

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[4] For a perceptive exploration of the heart as the center of the human person, a very fitting complement to the claims of this chapter, see Robert C. Roberts, "Situationism and the New Testament Psychology of the Heart," in *The Bible and the University*, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 139–160.

[5] By "identity," I should clarify, I mean something different than an "individual essence," those properties I could not lack and still be me. I would still be the same individual if I were not married, but my being married—and being married to this particular person—matters deeply to the kind of person I am. My use of "identity" will mean, somewhat loosely, those social goods, positions and relationships about which we care deeply, and which have great significance for how we understand our ambitions and goals. It is an answer to the question, "Who are you?" when it is answered in a non-metaphysical way. This has some overlap with how identities are understood in contemporary discourse, but it will differ in some ways, as we will see.

framework that makes sense of what it means to have an identity, broadly speaking. Once that is understood, the next chapter will situate gender within that broader framework, resulting in a theological account of gender. The result will be a constructive account of human identity, taking seriously the contemporary discussions about gender identity while appreciating the need for a radical theological reorientation.

What, then, is the rendering of human identity provided by Augustine? Augustine consistently maintained throughout the entirety of his life that we are what we *love*.[6] For instance, in one of his earliest works, he plainly asserts, "one becomes conformed to that which one loves."[7] Augustine speaks of the sum of a person's character, moral virtues, personality and social roles as defined by one's loves. What it means to be *you*—in a natural, moral *and* social sense—is a matter of what you love. Augustine's conception of the human love, as John Burnaby put it, forges in the lover "the unsatisfied longing of the homesick heart," for one's true home is with God.[8] Nevertheless, one's homesick love does not preclude one from loving creaturely goods and other people; what it does is *reframe* the fundamental relations of love that obtain between the lover and her beloved objects. This fundamentally relates the lover both to God and the world, and the crucial contribution this can make for our understanding of gender is that it makes human identity *both* shaped by categories supplied at creation *and* irreducibly social. For, as Augustine maintains without compromise, there is "nothing more *social* by virtue of its

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[6] Thus inspiring books like James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016).

[7] Augustine, *de Moribus ecclesiae Catholicae et de Moribus Manichaeorum*, I.21.39. Hereafter, *de Mor.* I.21.39. English translation taken from "The Catholic Way of Life and the Manichean Way of Life," in *The Manichean Debate*, trans. Roland Teske, vol. I/19, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2006), 17–106.

[8] John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine*, Reprint (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 96.

nature" than human beings.[9] In the Augustinian understanding of human identity, for which love

is the central point, there is no clear division between what is natural and what is social. As

lovers, our identities are accountable both to features with which we were equipped at creation

and those we acquire by loving social goods. Eric Gregory, another author who sees the potential

benefits of an Augustinian retrieval for contemporary social life, summarizes Augustine's picture

of human identity nicely:

> Here is the Augustinian story. In contrast to standard liberal anthropology, Augustinians
> think human beings are best understood as bundles of loves. Mortal creatures are lovers
> constituted by loving, and being loved by, others and God. These primordial relations are
> neither essentially conflictual nor simply aggregate, foreclosing any possibility of a
> peaceful intersubjective social ontology. They also do not immediately pit autonomous
> action or feeling over against publicly shared action or feeling…A self always stands in
> relation to the world, including the political world, in terms of her loves…Human loves
> are various and in conflict. In a fallen world, they are disordered, misdirected, and
> disproportionate. Their operations are diverse and often self-defeating. Love has multiple
> directions and is beset by many potentially pathological corruptions that disrupt an
> original justice…The life of charity is only progressively realized, always in danger of
> being corrupted by prideful self-possession.[10]

Unpacking this in all of its Augustinian complexity will be the burden of this chapter. Human

identity is a bundle of many loves and included in that bundle are the complex social identities

we bear, like gender. Therefore, having a grasp on human identity enables us to acquire a better

sense for what theology of gender identity requires. That is the claim, anyway, of this chapter

and the next. My main proposal for this chapter is that in order to understand gender, especially

if a major part of it is the way we appropriate social goods to form our identities, we need a

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[9] Augustine, *de Civitate Dei*, XII.28.27. Hereafter, *de civ.*, XII.28.27. English translation from Augustine, *The City of God*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. William Babcock, vol. I/7, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012). Emphasis added.

[10] Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 21–22.

theology of how human identities are formed in relation to created natures and to social goods. Augustine will be our guide in showing us how this happens primarily through our loves.

Before diving into Augustine's theology of human love, however, a few clarifications must be made, especially in an academic climate where the retrieval of historical figures for understanding contentious human identities is suspect. First, why retrieve Augustine's thought on love? An adequate answer to this question will have to await the end of chapter, for my rationale for selecting Augustine's theology of human love must be evaluated on the basis of what it contributes to our understanding of human identity and the adequacy of my presentation. But some preliminary reasons can be stated. I am persuaded that Augustine has the best account of human love in the Christian tradition and that this account is apposite for understanding the complexities of human identity, like gender. It does not exclusively prioritize the intellectual aspects of humanity but gives adequate explanatory weight to non-cognitive dimensions of human life. It does not make a harsh distinction between what is natural and what is social, a key desideratum for the accounts of gender promoted so far. It retains a mooring in creation, while also taking into account the corruption of sin and the work of Christ to redeem, indicating a sensitivity to the narratival-indexing of human nature mentioned in the first chapter.

But isn't Augustine a representative of the worst of Christianity, oppressing women and the marginalized, promoting violence and privilege? Doesn't he have a reprehensible account of gender, according to which women are not made in the image of God?[11] I cannot answer all of the objections posed to Augustine here, nor do I desire to defend Augustine on all points, especially what he has to say about gender. All figures in the Christian tradition have both their

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[11] Many of these objections can be found in Kim Power, *Veiled Desire: Augustine on Women* (New York: Continuum, 1996).

faults and their benefits, and Augustine *did* have a problematic account of gender, but it is usually not for the reasons his stronger critics avow.[12] It seems to me that Augustine's explicit reflections on gender, however, are conceptually separable from what he has to say about human love, for endorsement of the latter does not commit one to the former, nor does the latter *entail* the former. Thus, I intend to put forward a particular *aspect* of Augustine's reflections on humanity, namely what he has to say about love and its shaping force on human identity.[13]

This is not to diminish the importance or helpfulness of this aspect of Augustine's thought. As one author has claimed, Augustine's "theology…is anthropological," to the degree that what he has said about humanity is of immense importance for understanding the broader shape of his thought.[14] If a figure's theology is so deliberate about taking seriously human nature and human experience, there is at least a *prima facie* reason to consider it in a discussion such as this one. Not only that, many have found that the Augustinian insights unfolded in this chapter

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[12] For instance, it is simply not true that he thought women were not made in the divine image, as most Augustinian scholarship now recognizes. The issues with Augustine's theology of gender has to do with a complex account of mental symbolism he puts forward in places like *de Trinitate* XII.8.13, according to which different aspects of the mind symbolize maleness and femaleness. Both males and females have *both* mental aspects, leading them to have one biological sex while having both mental genders, a curious conclusion to say the least. For reliable expositions of Augustine on this question, see David Vincent Meconi, "Grata Sacris Angelis: Gender and the Imago Dei in Augustine's De Trinitate XII," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* LXXIV, no. 1 (2000): 47–62 and John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 115.

[13] A further point can be raised in defense of Augustinian retrieval. Influential readers of Augustine like Rowan Williams have noted how there has been a shift in Augustinian scholarship since the 1980s with respect to how he is interpreted, a shift that has been much more sympathetic to his contributions while still clearly acknowledging his shortcomings. While those unfamiliar with the most recent Augustinian scholarship still recycle some tired biases about the saint, the "extravagances of these charges is usually in inverse proportion to any writer's direct acquaintance with the detail of Augustine's texts" (Rowan Williams, "Foreword" in Luigi Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's De Trinitate*, Oxford Theology & Religion Monographs (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), vii). More careful attention to what Augustine has actually said, as well as a greater availability of the diversity of his writings in English, make it "harder to repeat clichés about Augustine's alleged responsibility for Western Christianity's supposed obsession with the evils of bodily existence or sexuality" (Rowan Williams, *On Augustine* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), vii). My intention is for this chapter to be seen as a contributor to this more sympathetic—yet still clear-eyed—reading of Augustine.

[14] Peter Burnell, *The Augustinian Person* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 2.

have been successful in clarifying many difficult human issues facing the church today, issues which Augustine may not have experienced himself or treated in directly in any of his works.[15] Thus, despite his shortcomings on the theology of gender, Augustine can still be of immense help in understanding human identity. Whether or not this is true cannot be adjudicated without considering the concrete claims made by Augustine himself. So perhaps it is best to treat Augustine's views in the same way as he treated Scripture in his conversion: *tolle lege*, take and read, in an effort to derive what benefit we can.

One final note of clarification must be made before the main exposition of Augustine's thought. Just as this is not a full treatment of Augustine's theology, it is also not a full a theology of love. A complete theology of love will be held accountable for providing an explanation for both *divine* love and *human* love, and how they might differ. It will also need to consider love in its *subjective* dimension (that is, what impact does love have on the lover, thereby shaping her?) and its *objective* dimension (that is, what are the proper objects for love, and in what order of importance?). Taken together, a full theology of love will at least need to say something about *subjective divine love* (love within in the triune life), *objective divine love* (God's love shown toward creatures), *subjective human love* (the role of love in the shaping of humans) and *objective human love* (the apt objects toward which humans can turn their love). Though these are certainly interdependent, they are not always sufficiently distinguished, and some accounts of love restrict it to only one such expression.[16] In this chapter, I will not be giving a full theology

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[15] For example, Joanna Leidenhag has recently argued that Augustine can illuminate some of intricacies involved with the psychology of eating disorders. See Joanna Leidenhag, "Forbidden Fruit: Saint Augustine and the Psychology of Eating Disorders," *New Blackfriars* 99, no. 1079 (January 2018): 47–65. J. Kameron Carter, additionally, found in Augustine's insistence on human development according to a narrative a powerful resource against Christianity's complicity in the development of whiteness. See J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 261–66.

[16] For instance, though I largely agree with Eleonore Stump's treatment of love in her book *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), it is restricted to

of love. My focus will be on *subjective human love*, the way love shapes human lovers. But I will have to say something about the other three aspects where they are necessary for understanding my main focus.

What follows, then, is a retrieval of Augustine's theology of human love. It will provide a broader framework for understanding human identity, of which gender will later be shown to be a component. Through this chapter, my aim is to show Augustine to be a much more nuanced and beneficial theologian than is often assumed and an example of "the generosity of a great mind putting itself at the service of real people in their intellectual perplexities"[17]—real people who are gendered and in need of a theological guide to understanding all aspects of human life.

4.2 Augustine on Human Love

Throughout various parts of his career, Augustine maintained that a person is fundamentally identified by what they love. "[A] person's love," he perorated in a homily on 1 John 2:16-17, "determines the person's quality."[18] Or again, in a sermon from 416 or 417, he states succinctly: "most people are somehow like the loves that drive them."[19] Forming our identities by our loves is nonnegotiable for Augustine, for there is "no one of course who doesn't love, but the question is, what do they love? So we are urged not to love, but to choose what we

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objective human love for other human beings. This is because she defines love according to two desires, one for the good of the beloved and another for union with the beloved (91), a kind of union that could not be shared, say, with inanimate objects. But it seems to me that we do love inanimate objects (like our favorite coat), making her definition far too restrictive.

[17] Margaret R. Miles, *Augustine on the Body*, Reprint (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 117.

[18] Augustine, *Tractatus in Epistolam Ioannis ad Parthos*, II.14. Hereafter, *Tr. in Ep. Io.*, II.14. English translation from Augustine, *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, vol. I/14, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2008).

[19] Augustine*, Sermones* 96.1. Hereafter, *Serm.* 96.1. English translation from Augustine, *Sermons 94A–150*, trans. Edmund Hill, vol. III/4, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1992).

love."[20] Identity-forming love is both universal and natural for human beings, so the real question he drives his congregation to ask is, "Do you want to discern the character of a person's love? Notice where it leads."[21] It is not controversial to say, then, that on Augustine's view, we are what we love, loving is an inescapable activity definitive of being human and the quality of the objects of our loves have a deep impact on *our* quality. How are we to understand such claims, and what are the mechanisms at work in our identity-forming love?

4.2.1 Love in the Triune Divine Life

All love, for Augustine, begins with God, who alone possesses all good things immutably. Central to Augustine's account of subjective divine love is the claim found in 1 John 4:8 that "God is love [*caritas*]." Though no one would deny that love describes the divine essence in some way, one of Augustine's unique contributions to trinitarian theology is his claim that love also picks out the subsistent relation of the Holy Spirit.[22] Augustine clarifies that "not everything that is said of God is said of God's substance…For something can be said of God in regard to relation, as the relation of the Father to the Son, and of the Son to the Father."[23] These relations identify not what is shared in common between the persons of the Trinity, but rather what gives them their particularity as persons. That is, a relation is (or is crucial component of) a Trinitarian procession. Thus, the Father and the Son relate through begetting, one being

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[20] *Serm.* 34.2. English translation from Augustine, *Sermons 20–50*, trans. Edmund Hill, vol. III/2, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991).

[21] Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 121.1. Hereafter, *En. in Ps.*, 121.1. English translation from Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms, 121–150*, trans. Maria Boulding, vol. III/20, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004).

[22] For a critical perspective on this claim from an Eastern Orthodox perspective, see Andrew Louth, "Love and the Trinity: Saint Augustine and the Greek Fathers," *Augustinian Studies* 33, no. 1 (2002): 1–16.

[23] Augustine, *de Trinitate*, V.5.6. Hereafter, *de Trin.*, V.5.6. English translation from Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Stephen McKenna, vol. 45, The Fathers of the Church (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1963). Here it is slightly modified for gender neutrality with respect to the divine name.

unbegotten and the other begotten, and it is this that makes one the Father and the other the Son.

Relations identify persons for Augustine because of their bearing upon the Trinitarian

processions, and each relation is only instantiated between exactly two persons of the Trinity

(otherwise, two persons would be the Son). So, though the term "person" was coined "not in

order to give a complete explanation by means of it, but in order that we might not be obliged to

remain silent," persons and relations are intimately united when it comes to Augustine's

Trinitarian theology.[24]

The relation of begetting obtains between Father and Son, but it cannot be denied that

love also characterizes a relation within the divine life, "the gift of God," as suggested by

passages like John 4:10 and Acts 8:20.[25] But since relations or processions are necessarily

unrepeatable, and the procession obtaining between Father and Son is that of begetting, the

relation of love must designate a further third procession, that of the Holy Spirit: "The Holy

Spirit is, therefore, something common, whatever it is, between the Father and the Son. But this

communion is itself consubstantial and coeternal…[and] it is more aptly called love."[26] Because

Scripture commits us to the view that there is a relation of love shared within the Triune life, and

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[24] *de Trin.*, V.9.10. For an investigation of "relation" language in Trinitarian theology when it comes to identifying the persons of the Trinity, see Wesley Hill, "Divine Persons and Their 'Reduction' to Relations: A Plea for Conceptual Clarity," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 14, no. 2 (2012): 148–60.

[25] For reflections on "Augustine's view that names taken from the temporal economy should be applied to the Holy Spirit in his eternal procession," see Matthew Levering, "The Holy Spirit in the Trinitarian Communion: 'Love' and 'Gift'?," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16, no. 2 (April 2014): 137.

[26] *de Trin.*, VI.5.7. For further detail on the Holy Spirit as the "gift" within the divine life, see Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), chapter 10 and Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's* De Trinitate, chapter 6.

because relations cannot be repeated, the relation of love must be something other than the begetting relation, thereby indicating a third person of the Trinity. This is the Holy Spirit.[27]

From where, however, does Augustine derive the claim that there is a *relation* of love within the Trinity, rather than asserting simply that love is the divine essence? Here we must pay careful attention to Augustine's Trinitarian exegesis.[28] In 1 John 4:7-8, two assertions are made about the Trinity: love is "of God [*ex Deo*]" and love "is God." Taken together, these must be speaking of a relation that is itself divine, for as Matthew Levering puts it, "The same love that is 'of God' *is* 'God.'"[29] If all that was stated in 1 John was that God *is* love, a commitment to the view that love is essential to God would have sufficed. But since this divine love is also *from* God, a further statement about the subsistent relation is needed. Anyone who is God from God must be either the Son or the Spirit,[30] for only those persons in the Trinity are on the "receiving end" of a divine procession, so to speak. But we have already seen that the Son is begotten, so to be love "from God" must indicate the particular procession identifying the Holy Spirit.

This is recognized, moreover, from the particular mission attributed to the Holy Spirit in the divine economy. Augustine is committed to the view, consistently held in the Christian tradition, that the trinitarian missions into time and space must correspond in some sense to the

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[27] It seems to me that this commits Augustine to a view similar to the *filioque*, for the relation obtains between the Father *and the Son* on the one hand and the Holy Spirit on the other. See, for instance, *de Trin.*, XV.17.27.

[28] For Augustine's exegetical convictions more generally, see Michael Cameron, *Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine's Early Figurative Exegesis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). For a defense of Trinitarian exegesis for contemporary biblical studies which is highly suggestive of Augustine's tactic here, see Madison N. Pierce, *Divine Discourse in the Epistle to the Hebrews: The Recontextualization of Spoken Quotations of Scripture*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 178 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[29] Levering, "The Holy Spirit in Trinitarian Communion," 129.

[30] Cf. *Tr. in Ep. Io.*, VII.6: "But when you hear *from God*, either the Son or the Holy Spirit is understood."

eternal processions, such that the missions are reliably informative of the nature of the processions. It is a particular feature of the mission of the Holy Spirit to be sent from the Father to indwell in our hearts, and Augustine frequently cites Romans 5:5 as evidence that the nature of this indwelling is by love.[31] Thus, late in life, he affirms: "Love, then, which is from God and is God, is properly the Holy Spirit, through whom the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, through which the whole Trinity dwells in us."[32] Or again, much earlier in life: "Once [love] has been breathed into us by the Holy Spirit, it leads us to the Son, that is, to the Wisdom of God, through whom the Father himself comes to be known."[33] Because "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5), and this is a singular feature of the mission of the Holy Spirit, we know that the procession of love must belong to the Spirit, and not the Son, because the mission of the Spirit is to forge divine love within us.[34] As a result, Augustine is able to preach, again on the basis of Rom. 5:5: "let us love God with God. Yes indeed, since the Holy Spirit is God, let us love God with God!"[35]

In order to understand Augustine's account of human love we must have a grasp on what he believes about divine love, for divine love in the person and work of the Holy Spirit makes human love possible. Love is essentially true of God and it designates the relation that identifies

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[31] Carol Harrison estimates that he references this passage more than 200 times to make this point. See *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 96.

[32] *de Trin.*, XV.18.32. The influence of 1 John 4:7–8 is strong here in the language of the Holy Spirit being *from* God while nonetheless *being* God.

[33] *de Mor.* I.17.31.

[34] Augustine's homilies on the gospel of John are particularly emphatic on this point. See, for instance, *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus*, XVII.6: "Where does love come from? From the grace of God, from the Holy Spirit. We should not, after all, get it from ourselves, as if we could make it ourselves. It is a gift of God, and a great gift too!" English translation from Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John 1–40*, trans. Edmund Hill, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2009). See also IX.8.

[35] *Serm.* 34.3.

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the procession of the Holy Spirit. We know this because love is "of God" (designating a relation) and "is God" (designating a consubstantial person of the Trinity), and because the Holy Spirit is the one poured into our hearts in the Spirit's divine mission, we can say that it is the Spirit who is aptly called "Love."

All of this is important because, when we turn to love in creatures, we must have a clear grasp of the trinitarian basis for God's motivation of love in creating them—divine love shed forth in the creation of all things is what enables creatures themselves to love. For Augustine, creation was a trinitarian act.[36] Thus, when it is said that the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters (Gen. 1:2), we should conclude that God created all things in love and "out of the abundance of his generosity" and that the Holy Spirit is the love behind such generosity.[37]. Moreover, because Augustine believes creation bears the marks of its Creator, love is woven into creation itself. Specifically, the ability to love was an aspect of the creation of human beings, something humans were able to do even before they entered into any social relationships. To that we now turn.

4.2.2 Love as a Component of Human Nature

Augustine maintains that humans are lovers by nature, and in order to understand this claim, we must turn to Augustine's central conviction, derived from Wisdom 11:21, that "all

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[36] Cf. *De diversis quastionibus octoginta tribus*, 67.1: "Now in accordance with Catholic teaching it is said that creation is whatever God the Father made and established through his only-begotten Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit." English translation from Augustine, *Responses to Miscellaneous Questions*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2008). For a full treatment of this theme in Augustine, see Scott A. Dunham, *The Trinity and Creation in Augustine: An Ecological Analysis* (New York: SUNY Press, 2009) and Jared Ortiz, *"You Made Us for Yourself": Creation in St. Augustine's Confessions* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 2–4 and 12–14.

[37] Augustine, *de Genesi ad litteram*, I.7.13. Hereafter, *de Gen. ad Litt.*, I.7.13. English translation for this and for his other commentaries on Genesis are from Augustine, *On Genesis*, trans. Edmund Hill, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002).

things were ordered in measure, number and weight."[38] As Harrison maintains, these categories "constitute the unity of existence under God and lie at the basis of Augustine's metaphysics," for without them, "nothing could be good, indeed nothing could *be*."[39] Measure, number and weight provide Augustine with the basic categories for analyzing the properties of all created entities, such that for anything that exists, it is what it is in virtue of its measure, number and weight. Measure "sets a limit to everything," number "gives everything its specific form" and weight "draws everything to rest and stability."[40] Put differently, an entity's measure specifies the features of that *particular* entity with respect to its size, shape, measurements and so forth. Its number are all those attributes individually necessary and jointly sufficient for making an entity the kind of thing that it is.[41] In this sense, measure marks out all of the unique attributes of an entity, while its number lists all those properties an entity shares in common with other entities of its kind. Finally, its weight establishes its teleology, what it tends toward when it does that for which it was designed and what it culminates in when it has done what it ought to according to its design. This is what Augustine means by its "rest"—a soccer ball "rests" when it has crossed a particular line on a soccer pitch to indicate a goal. That is what it does when it is performing its proper function in its suitable context. The number of the soccer ball includes those features that make it *a* ball: its roundness, inflation with air and so on. Its measure is what makes it *this* soccer ball: its particular size, color and design (for instance, that Premier League match ball used in the Liverpool vs. Manchester United match). These three properties can be analyzed in all things that

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[38] In Augustine's Latin version: "*Omnia in mensura, et numero, et pondere disposuisti.*"

[39] Carol Harrison, "Measure, Number and Weight in Saint Augustine's Aesthetics," *Augustinianum* 28 (1998): 592. See further, Ortiz, *"You Made Us for Yourself*"," 20–22.

[40] *de Gen. ad Litt.*, IV.3.7.

[41] Cf. *de Gen. ad Litt.*, V.5.14.

exist, for "measure and number and weight can be noticed and thought about in other things besides stones and planks and similar masses of material, and any other material object, whether on earth or in the sky."[42] Moreover, it is in virtue of the right proportion of their measures, numbers and weights that creatures are beautiful,[43] and evil is "nothing but the corruption of either a natural limit or form or order," where limit is measure, form is number and order is weight.[44]

Thus, Augustine maintains that God is love, is motivated to create by love, creates by love insofar as the Holy Spirit is involved, and makes all things what they are in virtue of their being disposed according to their measure, number and weight. We are now in a position to investigate love in human beings, for as Augustine makes clear, *the weight of human beings is their love*. Thus, in a famous passage from the *Confessions* he states, "My love is my weight [*pondus*]; wherever I am carried, it is love that carries me."[45] It is important to pause in order to appreciate the precise point Augustine is making here. He is not *merely* illustrating the importance of love with the metaphor of weight; he is making the precise metaphysical point that human beings have an objective telos established at their creation and that they arrive at this telos

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[42] *de Gen. ad Litt.*, IV.4.8.

[43] cf. *de Gen. ad Litt.*, III.16.25: "All things, you see, as long as they continue to be, have their own measures, numbers and orders [*ordines*]. So all things, properly considered, are worthy of acclaim; nor is it without some contribution in its own way to the temporal beauty of the world that they undergo change by passing from one thing into another." I have altered Hill's translation of *ordines* to the more standard "orders," for "order" and "weight" are interchangeable in Augustine's usage. Hill, I think, has over-translated it with his "destinies."

[44] Augustine, *de Natura Boni*, 4. Hereafter, *de Nat. Boni*, 4. English translation in "The Nature of the Good," in *The Manichean Debate*, 317–345.

[45] Augustine, *Confessiones*, XIII.9.10. Hereafter, *Conf.* XIII.9.10. English translation from Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Carolyn Hammond, vol. 2, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016). I have altered Hammond's "gravitational force" simply to "weight" for *pondus*, for while there is a gravity metaphor being employed, it obfuscates the technical terms Augustine is employing.

by means of loving. This is why it makes perfectly good sense that in that very same quote,

illustrations from creation are invoked:

> Under its own weight a body gravitates to its proper place; that weight is not always downward, but rather to that proper place. Fire's natural path is upward, that of stone is downward: they have their own weights, they make for their proper place. When oil is poured under water, it rises above the water's surface; when water is poured into oil, it sinks below the oil: they have their own weights, they make for their proper place. What is out of its proper place is restless; once in its proper place it finds rest.[46]

The love of a human being is its weight in just the same way that fire's natural trajectory is

upward, and a stone's is downward. This is what these entities do *by nature*, what they were

equipped to do at their creation and what provides their rest when they have acted according to

their natures. Human beings were created with the capacity to love, and it is by loving that

humans do what they were designed to do.[47] As Rowan Williams states, just as weight

"continually guarantees an overall balance, so that there is not, in the natural order, a chaos of

conflictual agencies," so also "it is love that draws us back to our proper place, that pulls us back

to stability and harmony."[48] Measure, number and weight shape all of creation, and the fact that

the weight of human beings is their love is a creational, metaphysical fact that enables them to

tend toward their true end and rest.[49]

There is a point of great consequence that is worth making here with respect to

discussions about gender. Recall from the previous chapter that there is reductionist tendency in

those who insist on the bifurcation of gender as either a social construct or a biological essence.

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[46] *conf.* XIII.9.10. I have altered Hammond's translation at each point where *pondus* is used, replacing her "gravitational force" for "weight." For a further statement of this, see *de de civ*, XI.28.

[47] See *de Gen. ad Litt.* IV.4.8: "there is a weighing for the will and for love."

[48] Williams, *On Augustine*, 65.

[49] See further Joseph Torchia, "'Pondus Meum Amor Meus': The Weight-Metaphor in St. Augustine's Early Philosophy," *Augustinian Studies* 21, no. 1 (1990): 163–76.

For both, the non-social side of the bifurcation is *biological*, in the sense of the word associated with the academic discipline. If something is not social, in other words, it is biological. Augustine's account of creation reveals that there is actually significant conceptual space available between these two sides. For instance, the human capacity to love is *natural* to human beings (even before any considerations about particular *instances* of loving relationships). But to say that this is biological because it is not necessarily a social category is to make an unsustainable claim. Biology has not been able to establish that human beings love, and it may be unable to do so. At best, evolutionary accounts of human beings maintain that human beings altruistically *cooperate* against a backdrop of evolutionary violence, but this is a far cry from a robust claim about our natural ability to love, especially if love is understood by the standards of Christian theology.[50] This should lead us to conclude that to say something is *natural* to human beings is not the same thing as saying as it is *biologically* human—the divine image, for instance, is the former but not the latter. Biological considerations are restricted by methodology, but Christian theology and metaphysics are under no such restrictions. This is a further reason to resist the biological/social bifurcation and to adopt a more variegated vocabulary. The claim here, though, is that Augustine maintains that a trinitarian doctrine of creation claims that human beings love by *nature*, even if that is not posit of biology.[51] A person who lives exactly one second is still naturally a lover, as is the person who lives one hundred years.

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[50] For explorations of this claim, see *Evolution, Games, and God: The Principle of Cooperation*, ed. Sarah Coakley and Martin Nowak (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). For an argument for the high bar set by a Christian account of love, see Kent Dunnington, "Is There a Christian Duty to Love?" in *Love: Divine and Human*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp, James M. Arcadi, and Jordan Wessling (New York: T&T Clark, 2020), 199–214.

[51] This is not to say that this claim can support and lend suggestive support to a biological investigation into matter. This would have to assume that biological methods can discover the presence of things like love, rather than mere cooperation or altruism. If love in a human being is the Holy Spirit, however, this is an obviously impossible task.

So, God created all things with measure, number and weight by nature, and the weight of human beings is their love. We are pulled to our place of rest by our love, our weight. But what is that place of rest? Anyone with a passing familiarity with Augustine's thought will know: "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."[52] Again, Augustine is not *just* making a poetically beautiful point; the poetry communicates something with profound metaphysical and theological significance. As Ortiz ventures, "This famous sentence, I would argue, sums up all the fruits of Augustine's exegesis, metaphysics, and ethics at this point in his life, and moreover, contains the whole of the *Confessions*."[53] Augustine is maintaining that by nature of our creatureliness, we are designed to love God and to be in union with God, and that when this obtains, we are at rest, which is to say that we have arrived at the perfection of what it means to be human, the only way human beings can find stability and integration.[54] Because our weight—what pulls us to our ultimate end or rest as human beings—is our love, and we were created to have God as our rest, we are created to love God above all.

Augustine actually makes even stronger claims than these, revealing his commitment to eudaimonism. Because we were created to love God above all, it is only in loving God that we are truly happy. Though some Platonic and Stoic influence may account for aspects of this opinion, Augustine's motivations are primarily Scriptural. He regularly cites Psalm 73:28's

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[52] *Conf.* I.1.1. English translation from Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Carolyn Hammond, vol. 1, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

[53] *"You Have Made Us for Yourself"*, 121. He goes on to say, "The idea of rest is inseparable from the idea of place and weight. All things have their proper place, toward which they tend by their weight, and when they are in their place they are at rest. For human beings, their weight is their love, that is, they move toward or away from God according to the disposition of their heart" (123).

[54] Augustine specifically maintains that this obtains in the beatific vision. See, among many other places, *de Trin.* II.17.28: "For it is this very sight, which everyone who endeavors to love God with his whole heart, his whole soul, and his whole mind years to contemplate."

contention that "For me, to cling to God is the good,"[55] along with Matthew 22:37's elaboration

of the greatest commandment as "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with

all your soul, and with all your mind." This supreme love for God is the only source of human

happiness: "The pursuit of God, therefore, is the desire for happiness, but the attainment of God

is happiness itself. We pursue him by loving."[56] Or again, in a very early work: "Without doubt,

this is the happy life, the life that is perfect. And we must presume that we who are hurrying to it

can be brought to it by a firm faith, a lively hope, and an ardent love."[57] Augustine confesses, "I

grieve for those who want more. What more can you want, brothers and sisters? When we see

God face to face there will be nothing whatever that can better for us than to hold fast to him."[58]

God's rest on the seventh day of creation, Augustine exposits, testifies to the fact we too must

rest in God: "What we are meant to rest in, surely, is a certain unchangeable good, which is what

the one who made us is for us," for God "swings everything whatever that comes from him back

to himself."[59] All of these assertions indicate that there is a fundamental wiring of human beings

to flourish, find beatitude and sustain genuine happiness only in God. Though all humans desire

happiness, and though they *appear* to have found happiness in various temporal goods, the claim

that we are only happy when we love God is not dependent on our phenomenological

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[55] In the Vulgate, it reads: "Mihi autem adhaerere Deo bonum est" (72:28). The original Latin lends itself to a Eudaimonistic reading more easily, with its absence of the definite article with *bonum* and a substantival reading of *adhaerere*. "To cling to God," on this reading, *is* (*est*) "the good."

[56] *de Mor.* I.11.18.

[57] Augustine, *de Beata Vita*, IV.35. English translation from *On the Happy Life: St. Augustine's Cassiciacum Diaologues,* vol. 2, trans. Michael Foley (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019). I have altered "charity" to "love" for *caritas*, for consistency of presentation.

[58] *En. in Ps.* 72.34. English translation from Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms, 51–72*, trans. Maria Boulding, vol. III/17, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2001).

[59] *de Gen. ad Litt.*, IV.17.29, IV.18.34.

experiences of happiness. It is *natural*, a posit of creation, that remains true even in the face of credible claims of happiness. Even so, Augustine maintains that there is experiential evidence available for our exclusive mirth in God, for even in our happy earthly experiences there are "bitter elements even with these innocent pleasures, so that even in them we experience distress."[60] No earthly good can provide an unqualified happiness; this is space occupied by God alone. Above all, however, the plausibility of this claim will stand or fall with one's convictions about teleology in general and Scriptural claims that at God's "right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11).[61] We are created to love God insofar as that is our weight, and since our weight pulls the only place of true rest, stability and mirth, such things can be found only in loving God.

4.2.3 The Human Love of Earthly Goods

Does all of this mean that Augustine's theology of objective human love is reducible to God alone? If we love the Lord with all of our hearts, does it follow that we have no more heart left with which to love creatures? As we will see, none of these conclusions follow, but Augustine sometimes is taken to be saying as much. The problem acquires a sharper edge in light of Augustine's tendentious claim that some things are to be enjoyed while others are to be used:

> Things that are to be enjoyed make us happy; things which are to be used to help us on our way to happiness, providing us, so to say, with crutches and props for reaching the things that will make us happy, and enabling us to keep them…Enjoyment, after all, consists in clinging to something lovingly for its own sake, while use consists in referring what has come your way to what your love aims at obtaining…The things therefore that

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[60] *En. in Ps.*, 40.5. English translation from Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms, 33–50*, trans. Maria Boulding, vol. III/16, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000).

[61] Oliver O'Donovan rightly asserts: "The 'quest for happiness' reflects (at least) the teleological thrust by which all creatures are oriented toward their supreme good. The quest is common to all humanity not by definitional fiat but by virtue of man's status as creature," recognizing an "uncompromisingly metaphysical understanding of eudaemonism" (*The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine*, Reprint (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 156).

are to be enjoyed are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, in fact the Trinity, one supreme being, and one which is shared in common by all who enjoy it.[62]

This set of claims has instigated a tremendous amount of literature. Some, like Hannah Arendt and Anders Nygren, find them entirely objectionable, largely because of their alleged failure to see anything worth loving except God.[63] As Gregory memorably phrases objections like these, the worry is that love on this account is "always looking over the neighbor's shoulder to God."[64] Other more sympathetic Augustinian interpreters have said that while this way of thinking is indeed objectionable, it was nevertheless abandoned by Augustine later in his career.[65] Oddly, however, this is not how the distinction between use and enjoyment has been interpreted in the reception history of Augustinian thought. Since at least Peter Lombard's immortalization of it in his *Sentences*, which became the standard textbook for medieval theological training, it was seen as a helpful aid to moral theological thought.[66] It was then upheld even by figures like John

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[62] Augustine, *de Doctrina Christiana*, I.3.3–I.4.4. Hereafter, *de Doct.*, I.3.3–I.4.4. English translation from Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, ed. Joseph E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, vol. I/11, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996).

[63] See Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, ed. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 4, where Augustine's theology of love is said to make "a desert out of this world." Nygren, by contrast, objected to the possibility of love as in any way self-interested, which Augustine's eudaimonism is, if nothing else. See Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros: The Christian Idea of Love*, trans. Philip S. Watson (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 453.

[64] Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 44.

[65] This was the basic thesis forwarded by Oliver O'Donovan in *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* and in "*Usus* and *Fruitio* in Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* I," *Journal of Theological Studies* 33 (1981): 361–97. This reading, however, has been challenged almost as early as it was proposed. See for instance, William Riordan O'Connor, "The *Uti/Frui* Distinction in Augustine's Ethics," *Augustinian Studies* 14 (1983): 45–62 and Helmut David Baer, "The Fruit of Charity: Using the Neighbor in 'De doctrina christiana,'" *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 24, no. 1 (1996): 47–64. I will not assume O'Donovan's reading here, taking it to be rather contentious. Instead, I follow what I take to be the best reading of the *uti/frui* distinction, that of Sarah Stewart-Kroeker in *Pilgrimage as Moral and Aesthetic Formation in Augustine's Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), who maintains that O'Donovan's division of ontological and eschatological elements in Augustine's theology of love is artificial and fabricates the results he intends to find in Augustine (223).

[66] On this see Severin Valentinov Kitanov, *Beatific Enjoyment in Medieval Scholastic Debates: The Complex Legacy of Saint Augustine and Peter Lombard* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014).

Calvin[67] and John Wesley.[68] While much of the tradition would not have had the luxurious access to Augustine's corpus enjoyed by readers in the twenty-first century, it would be surprising to see so many uncritically take on a concept so foundationally flawed or not actually held by Augustine. Perhaps there is a better way to understand the ideas at stake.

First, it must be remembered that Augustine is working with complex and technical Latin vocabulary, employing words that would not have had as negative connotations as they do in the English language. To repeat the claim of *de doct.* I.3.3, those things which must be enjoyed [*illae quibus fruendum est*] make us happy [*nos beatos faciunt*]. But to be "happy" here refers to Augustine's broader eudaemonistic framework, according to which happiness is qualitatively different than that feeling I get when my daughter hugs me or when Liverpool win a match (which are still good and pleasurable, on Augustine's view). It is an unchanging, irremovable and singular mirth obtained only at the rest achieved when creatures are pulled by their weight to their proper rest. Moreover, to "use" someone or something [*aliae quibus utendum*] is not to objectify them as a fungible receptacles for easy discarding. Rather, *uti* is a word more like the word "treat" in the Latin of the time, as in "You treated him well."[69] There are theological considerations to take into account as well. First, a detail that is almost always missed: *both use and enjoyment can be ways of loving something rightly*. On the one hand, some things that are used can be done so with love: "Not all things, however, which are to be used are *also* to be

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[67] See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), III.10.

[68] See John W. Wright, "'Use' and 'Enjoy' in John Wesley: John Wesley's Participation within the Augustinian Tradition," *Wesley and Methodist Studies*, vol. 6 (2014): 3–36.

[69] See Rist, *Augustine,* 163–4: "That is merely a standard Latin locution—found also in earlier English, e.g. 'He used him well'—indicating how people [and things] are to be 'treated'; the notion of 'exploitation' is not to be read into it."

loved, but only those which can be related to God."[70] That an act of use can *sometimes* also count as an act of love shows that it is not the act that is problematic, but a particular way of going about doing it. On the other hand, *some* instances of use *are* sinful, but only when loved to the exclusion of the love for God: "sin consists not in the things themselves, but in the unlawful *use* of them. Now the use of things is lawful when the soul remains within the bounds of God's law and subject to the one God in unqualified love and regulates other things that are subject to it without greed or lust."[71] The picture that emerges is *not* that enjoyment is love while use is not really love. Rather, both are forms of love, and their evaluation must come from external considerations about how one relates to the beloved and the divine intentions necessary for informing the proper relation. Sometimes, instances of use are rightly ordered and count as godly love; at other times, instances of use are sinful and do not count as godly love. So it goes, *mutatis mudandis*, for enjoyment, which can be turned toward creatures rather than God. Charles Mathewes, then, is right to conclude: "The contrast between 'enjoy' and 'use' does not divide what should be loved from what should not be loved; rather it is a guide to how one should love things. Augustine is not Kant's sap; his use of 'use' means to forbid us to expect things to be God, to forbid us from acting as if we deserved from them some sort of ultimate happiness."[72]

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[70] *de Doct.*, I.23.22. Emphasis added.

[71] Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus*, I.1.13. Hereafter, *De Gen. imp.*, I.1.13. English translation in *On Genesis*, 102–151. Emphasis added.

[72] Charles Mathewes, "A Worldly Augustiniansim: Augustine's Sacramental Vision of Creation," *Augustinian Studies* 41, no. 1 (2010): 341–42. Mathewes, and many others with him, have attempted to defend this view with a Christological reorientation, drawing chiefly from Raymond Canning, *The Unity of Love for God and Neighbour in St. Augustine* (Heverlee-Leuven, Belgium: Augustinian Historical Institute, 1993). See also Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003) and Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*. This is a promising and highly suggestive approach, but it must take into consideration the corrections issued by Martin Westerholm in "On the Christological Determination of Augustine's Theology of Love," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 29, no. 1 (2016): 84–98.

Ultimately, Augustine is not offering a means/ends calculus when putting forward the use/enjoyment distinction. He is rather prescribing wisdom for the best practices of love when it comes to God, neighbor, self and temporal goods.[73] What, then, *is* that practice? Augustine is clearly committed to the view that all substances are good and therefore are worthy of love. In a remarkable passage, Augustine even defends the beautiful creation of insects and bugs:

> Most of them, you see, are either bred from the sores of living bodies, or from garbage and effluents, or from the rotting of corpses; some also from rotten wood and grass, some from rotten fruit; and we cannot possibly say that there are any of them of which God is not the creator. All things, after all, have in them a certain worth or grace of nature, each of its own kind, so that that in these minute creatures there is even more for us to wonder at as we observe them, and so to praise the almighty craftsman for them more rapturously than ever.[74]

Such words could not be spoken, and such caring attention could not be given, by someone who thinks creatures are not to be loved. Augustine is famously committed to the view that evil is a *privation*, something lacking from what ought to be in a substance, never a substance in itself.[75] Instead, "God is the highest good, and the things that he made are all good, though they are not as good as he who made them is,"[76] thereby creating a hierarchy of valued goods, at the top of which is the source of all good, God. The bottom of the hierarchy (presumably where the bugs are located) are not to spurned, however. Everything has been created by God and by virtue of their creatureliness are valuable and lovable. Augustine is very careful and clear about this.

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[73] Thus Stewart-Kroeker claims that the use/enjoyment distinction "does not restrict [love's] scope, in principle, but it impacts its practice. Lovers must know where to place their ultimate hope, whom to follow and whom to lead, what limits to draw, and so on" (*Pilgrimage as Moral and Aesthetic Formation*, 208).

[74] *de Gen. ad Litt.*, III.14.22.

[75] cf. *de Mor.* II.2.2 and II.4.6: "Evil itself, then…is a falling away from being and a tending toward non-being…for it is most truly spoken of not as an essence but as a privation."

[76] *de Mor.* II.4.6. See also *de Nat. Boni* 1: "every nature insofar as it is a nature is something good, no nature can be made except by the highest and true God."

When 1 John 2:15 commands us, "Do not love the world or the things in the world," he does not take the opportunity to show why creatures are unfit objects of love. Rather, he qualifies: "What is the world? When it is understood in a bad sense, it is the lovers of the world [i.e., those who love to the exclusion of loving God]. When it is understood in a praiseworthy sense, it is heaven and earth and works of God that are in them."[77] The latter are fit objects of love, when recognized in the proper hierarchy of love.

As early as 395, Augustine was citing his edition of Song of Songs 2:4, "Order love in me," in his writing and preaching.[78] The ordering of beloved objects was crucial for Augustine, and preserving this order was precisely that for which the use/enjoyment distinction was intended. Thus, shortly after introducing the distinction, he says:

> But living a just and holy life requires one to be capable of an objective and impartial evaluation of things; to love things, that is to say, in the right order, so that you do not love what is not to be loved, or fail to love what is to be loved, or have a greater love for what should be loved less, or an equal love for things that should be loved less or more, or a lesser or greater love for things that should be loved equally.[79]

In fact, such a recognition is a remarkably sensible thing to suggest. If I buy a new car and love it more than my wife and daughter, I would be doing a wicked thing. If I love alcohol more than devotion to my work, I would be living irresponsibly. If I love anything at all above God, I am an idolater, trading a creature for the Creator (Rom. 1:25). Now, there might be epistemically

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[77] *Tr. ep. Io.* V.9. See also, II.12 and IV.4. It is worthwhile to note that some Augustinian scholars have claimed that Augustine's confidence in the incarnation and resurrection of Christ further affirms material goods and other embodied people as fitting objects of love. Thus Stewart-Kroeker, *Pilgrimage as Moral and Aesthetic Formation*, 28: "Augustine roots his affirmation of embodiment in Christ's incarnation." See also Rist, *Augustine*, 109: "It is clear that as soon as Augustine began to give serious consideration to the dogma of the Resurrection of the body, he found good reasons to conclude that…the Platonists…were wrong, and even begin to look 'Manicaean', when they wish to be rid of the body so far as possible."

[78] The earliest occurrence, in 395, is in *Serm.* 100.2.

[79] *de doct.* I.27.28.

complicated instances where ordering one's beloved objects is not altogether clear. This is

perfectly compatible with the broader principle being advanced. Augustine provides a very

memorable and epistemically uncomplicated example of disordered love:

> Brothers, if a bridegroom made a ring for his bride, and she loved the ring that she had received more than her bridegroom, who made the ring, in the same way wouldn't an adulterous soul be detected in the bridegroom's very gift, even though she loved what the bridegroom gave her? To be sure, she loved what the bridegroom gave her. Yet, if she said, "This ring is enough for me; now I don't want to see his face again," what sort of person would she be? Who wouldn't detest this crazy woman? Who wouldn't convict her of an adulterous mind? You love gold instead of the man, you love a ring instead of your bridegroom.[80]

Augustine then summarizes the point succinctly: "*God doesn't forbid you to love these things*,

but you mustn't love them in the expectation of blessedness. Rather, you must favor and praise

them in such a way that you love the creator."[81] So we are called to love, and love abundantly,

but never forgetting that our objects of love are gifts of a much greater Lover, the source of all

that is good, God.

The engagement ring analogy reminds us that all of our objects of love are gifts from

God, for "[w]hat do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7). And with all gifts, it is the

liberty of the giver to specify the conditions under which the gift is to be used as well as the

value and worth of the gift itself. Suppose I find an old, broken watch on the sidewalk. I would

be entirely within my rights simply to discard it. But if my father, on his deathbed, gives me the

old, broken watch he wore all his life, and tells me to wear it only on the most special of

occasions as a means of remembering him, suddenly the gift receives an entirely new use and

worth, even if the two watches are physically identical. It is these dynamics that Augustine is

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[80] *Tr. in Ep. Io.,* II.11.

[81] *Tr. in Ep. Io.*, II.11. Emphasis added.

attempting to preserve, all with an eye on our tendency to turn the objects of our loves into

sources of eternal bliss. The real problem is that such objects of love can never support such

intense and unqualified adoration. Thus, expressions of love that use things in their right order

prevent us from idolizing them to the point at which they are loved beyond what they can bear.

Because our "temptation is constantly to project on to the things and persons around expectations

they are unable to fulfil, and so to shrink both them and ourselves," Rowan Williams claims:

> The language of *uti* is designed to warn against an attitude towards any finite person or object that terminates their meaning in their capacity to satisfy my desire, that treats them as the end of desire, conceiving my meaning in terms of them and theirs in terms of me…Loving humanly it seems, must be a love that refuses to ignore the mortality and limitedness of what or whom we love. Forget this, and we are left with an intensity or felt intimacy that ultimately and subtly refuses to 'release' the person loved from the bonds of that intimacy.[82]

The order of love, and its recommendation to use some things, is for the mutual benefit of lover

and beloved. As Augustine found out too painfully in *Conf.* IV.7-8 at the death of one of his

friends, and as every parent learns as children grow older, to place the hopes of ultimate

satisfaction in something or someone who cannot bear it is to harm them, to act in a rapacious

manner and to prioritize one's appetites above the honor and dignity of the creature whose

presence in one's life is a gift, not a right. Gerald Schlabach summarizes this Augustinian

motivation beautifully:

> To love other creatures rightly, a human being must relativize that love—devaluing its object in one way, yet rediscovering its true and stable value in another way. When we love friends or neighbors rightly, the value they lose is their value as a tool of our own egocentric self-interest; the value we recognize in them is their value insofar as God, the source of all things, creates and secures them. To love one's neighbor rightly, in other words, Augustine's abiding conviction was that we must not first love the creature but must first love God.[83]

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[82] Williams, *On Augustine*, 200, 44, 194.

[83] Gerald W. Schlabach, *For the Joy Set Before Us: Augustine and Self-Denying Love* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 37.

The use/enjoyment distinction, the ordering of love and all other aspects of Augustine's theology of human love are not *deterrents* to love; rather, they are powerful encouragements to love, to love boldly, to love rightly, to love with integrity and to love with respect.

There is one final consideration about the common misinterpretation of the use/enjoyment distinction that must briefly be considered. Though Augustine maintains that only humans are made in the image of God, there is an attenuated sense in which all creatures are images of God.[84] Thus, we can detect something of God in all beloved objects, for all have the essential property of being made by this very God.[85] So, when seen rightly, God is present in all of the good and beautiful things loved throughout one's life. God is present when we love good friends (and enemies, even); God is present when we love our favorite meals; God is present when we lace up running shoes to exercise so that we love our own bodies (or skip the run to allow ourselves needed rest). Love, in short, is not a zero-sum game unless we are committed to loving improperly, with an aim to excluding God. Furthermore, Augustinian eschatology allows for a great deal of continuity with respect to earthly goods into the new heaven and earth. Whatever is not a fault, even our genders, will be present in the eschaton, for it is "not by its utter destruction…but rather by its transmutation that this world will pass away."[86] As Burnaby rightly observes, "Love—this is what Augustine means—is the confounder of all antitheses. It breaks

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[84] In the seventy-fourth of his *Miscellany of 83 Questions*, Augustine makes distinctions between different ways something may image God, either with or without the likeness and so forth. See *De diversis quastionibus octoginta tribus*, 74.

[85] See, for instance, *de Gen. imp.* XVI.59 for a claim about the ubiquity of the divine image. See also *de civ.* XI.4 for how all creatures testify that they were created by God by virtue of their beauty and order.

[86] *de civ.*, XX.14. Augustine defends the view that women and men will be raised with their genders in XXII.17. For an Augustinian case for why we will retain our genders in the resurrection against a more Cappadocian denial, see Fellipe do Vale, "Cappadocian or Augustinian? Adjudicating Debates on Gender in the Resurrection," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 21, no. 2 (2019): 182–98.

the line between the here and the hereafter, between change and the changeless, time and eternity."[87] Thus, loving in the everyday means recognizing the divine semblance in all things and recognizing that these are the very neighbors and goods who will be present with us when we are raised. An anti-worldly, misanthropic attitude is simply incompatible with Augustinian thought.

4.2.4 You are What You Love: Internalizing the Beloved

The considerations about human love thus far have largely been objective insofar as we have been inquiring about what are the proper objects for human love and in what order they are to be loved. We can now transition into Augustine's treatment of subjective human love: how do these various objects of love shape our identities or selves? How is it, after all, that we are what we love? For Augustine, love operates as a kind of glue, uniting the lover to the objects of their love and effectively "sticking" them to her. The idea is biblical—just as his version of Ps. 62:9 states, "My soul has been glued to you,"[88] so also Augustine regularly perceives love as a means by which love is joined to beloved: "What else is love, therefore, except a kind of life which binds or seeks to bind some two together, namely, the lover and the beloved? And this is so even in external and carnal love."[89] Thus, one of the basic features of love is that it is a special kind of union, bringing together lover and beloved in such a way that the lover is shaped by the beloved.[90] There is a basic Pauline thought-pattern at play here, for Paul also noticed that acts of

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[87] Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 82.

[88] "Agglutinata est anima mea post te." See further Joseph T. Lienhard, S.J., "'The Glue Itself Is Charity': Ps 62:9 in Augustine's Thought," in *Augustine: Presbyter Factus Sum*, ed. Joseph T. Lienhard, S.J., Earl C. Muller, S.J. and Roland J. Teske, S.J. (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 375–384.

[89] *de Trin.*, VIII.10.14.

[90] It is here that there are significant points of commonality between my Augustinian account and Eleonore Stump's Thomistic account in *Wandering in Darkness*. Recall that two desires constitute love on her account, desires for the good of the beloved and for union with the beloved. Union is a matter of personal presence and

love, sexual or otherwise, were essentially unitive (cf. 1 Cor. 6:16). To move beyond the

metaphor, and to explain how this shaping union occurs, we must explore what Augustine has to

say about the nature of human memory. Memory is relevant here because it has the unique

capacity both to internalize objects encountered in the everyday and to store those

internalizations in the soul:

> [T]he force of love is so great that the mind draws in with itself those things upon which it has long reflected with love, and to which it has become attached by its devoted care…And because they are bodies which it has loved outside of itself through the senses of the body, and with which it has become entangled by a kind of daily familiarity, it cannot bring them into itself as though into a country of incorporeal nature, and, therefore, it fastens together their images, which it has made out of itself, and forces them into itself….And thus it is made like them to some extent.[91]

Through love, humans devote attention to some things, and in such devotion the human

memory[92] creates images of those things and stores them up inside itself. As these images linger,

they "leave their footprints, as it were, in our mind because we have thought of them so often."

He goes on: "These footprints are, so to speak, impressed on the memory when the corporeal

things which are without are so perceived that, even when they are absent, their images are

present to those who think of them."[93] Augustine should not be taken to be making an overly

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mutual closeness (109), where the former involves second-personal experience and shared attention (112–116). Lovers share their thoughts and appropriate the mental states of the other, she maintains, and through them they are united. However, I objected that this could not account for loving non-personal creatures, like clothes (which are very relevant for gender identity). So I do not think her account is false, but that it is rather narrow—I intend a much broader account of union here. In this sense, her view provides much greater depth than mine.

[91] *de Trin.*, X.5.7–X.6.8. For greater detail on this point, see Paige E. Hochschild, *Memory in Augustine's Theological Anthropology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[92] Though Augustine narrows in on the faculty of memory, he should not be taken to mean that human beings can be compartmentalized into discrete faculties that can be independently analyzed. Memory and love, as the quote indicates, work inseparably, as do all other aspects of human psychology. For a detailed account of the complex and heterogenous nature of the human mind, see the prologue to the *Enchiridion* along with Burnell, *The Augustinian Person*, chapter 2. For a thorough study of Augustinian psychology, see Jesse Couenhoven, "Augustine's Moral Psychology," *Augustinian Studies* 48, no. 1 (2017): 23–44.

[93] *de Trin.*, X.8.11.

psychologized point here. Our memories work concurrently with our bodies, our activities and our other faculties to bring in the most significant objects of our care so that their presence in the deepest recesses of our hearts grants to them an opportunity to "leave their footprints," making us like them.

This point is not so abstract once it is applied to some concrete examples. For instance, the power of memory to shape us is familiar to anyone who has watched a horror film on a cold, dark October night and has been subsequently afraid to walk down the stairs of their home. Or, in a more serious vein, this claim should be familiar to anyone who has walked alongside someone suffering from dementia or other memory-related illness; as their memories begin to go, it is often the greatest temptation to conclude that the person her or himself is slipping away, a remarkably painful experience.[94] Or again, victims of great trauma often struggle with how best to remember the atrocities done to them. They do not have an option as to whether the incident that caused the trauma will shape them as people; because it lives on in their memories, they must find ways to cope within, grasping for ways by which to heal their memories.[95] This insight into the nature of memory also informs Augustine's eucharistic theology, as some have noted— the presence of Christ in our memories enables us to be formed in his image.[96] Augustine's basic point is this: as we love temporal goods and people, we bring them into ourselves by means of our memories and they form who we are. This is how they are glued to us, how they leave their

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[94] For a powerful reflection on this phenomenon, see John Swinton, *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

[95] On this point, see Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

[96] See John Cavadini, "Eucharistic Exegesis in Augustine's *Confessions*" in *Visioning Augustine* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2019), 184–210. For a broader reflection on memory in the Eucharist, see Grant Macaskill, *Living in Union with Christ: Paul's Gospel and Christian Moral Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), chapter 4.

footprints upon our souls. It is also why the disappearance of those footprints or the dissolving of the glue is such a painful experience for the person experiencing it.

We might extend Augustine's picture of mental appropriation with recourse to a more recent Augustinian thinker, namely Eleonore Stump. Stump has defended a rich and multi-layered account of love in her book *Wandering in Darkness*, elements of which illuminate and expand Augustine's point nicely. Stump makes a distinction between what she calls "Franciscan" and "Dominican" knowledge, or more familiarly, personal and propositional knowledge.[97] Propositional knowledge is knowledge *that* something is the case, while personal knowledge is something closer to personal acquaintance. It is a difference between a full description I might give someone of my wife and them actually *meeting* my wife. It is a second-personal kind of knowledge, and the best means to communicate personal knowledge is to tell a story.[98] This is because there is an intimate relation between knowing the identity of persons and the narrative of that person's life, such that if we really wanted to know the person, we delve deeply into the stories that disclose who they are. For Stump, moreover, we are identified by our loves, for "a human being's true self is to be identified with her higher-order desires, because they reflect the all-things-considered judgments of her rational faculties."[99] Who we are consists of these desires, knowledge of which can only be of a Franciscan or personal sort. Personal knowledge, moreover, is inseparable from a narrative construal. That means that our identities are shaped by the narratives with which we identify by means of our loves. By loving, we appropriate certain stories to ourselves, making who we are irreducibly personal and narratival. So, in addition to the

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[97] *Wandering in Darkness*, 41.

[98] Cf. Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 78–9.

[99] Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 134.

memories of the objects of love, we may say that our loves place us in a story the telling of which discloses our true selves.

Because our objects of love shape us, it follows that if we love good things, we become good, but if we love bad things, we become wicked. By loving God with God, we become *like* God, a crucial insight into sanctification.[100] Loving the beautiful God, Augustine insists, makes us beautifully godly. Yet, this is not automatic. Many have noted the narrative shape of Augustine's theological anthropology, whether from the structure of the second half of the *City of God*, the anti-Pelagian works or the broad sweep of the biblical story in his instructions for catechumens *de catechizandis rudibus*,[101] and it has been claimed that the most important part of the narrative has to do with how our loves are healed within the divine economy.[102] This was a central tenet of what I argued was required of a theological account of human beings and affords the appropriate epistemic restrictions in making claims about human nature; we must be aware of the narratival-indexing of human beings, knowing that at this point in the narrative sin still distorts our perceptions of humanity. Augustine, argues Burnell, is committed to the same view:

> [I]n specifying human nature Augustine examines practical human experience rather than attempting definition in vacuo; yet he does not think our nature to be fully perceptible in its present condition, either, for that condition has thrown the nature itself into more or less violent disorder…Consequently, he brings into consideration (as

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[100] Cf. *de Mor.* I.13.21–23: "To him we cling through becoming holy. For, having been made holy, we are ablaze with love that is whole and entire, a love that alone prevents our being turned away from God and makes us conformed to him rather than to this world…Love, then, will see to it that we are conformed to God and, having been conformed and configured by him and cut off from this world, that we are not confused with the things that ought to be subject to us. But this is done by the Holy Spirit." Conversely, the "soul…is filled with folly and unhappiness the farther it wanders off from God to things lower than itself not by place but by love and desire." See also *Tr. Io. ep.* IX.9: "our soul, my brothers, is loathsome through wickedness; by loving God it is made beautiful." For a constructive account of sanctification along these lines, see Simeon Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[101] See Matthew Levering, "Linear and Participatory History: Augustine's City of God," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 5, no. 2 (2011): 175–96.

[102] A claim made by William Babcock, "Augustine and the Spirituality of Desire," *Augustinian Studies* 25, no. 1 (1994): 179–99.

therefore we must) the divine *administration* of human life in its three main stages: the Garden, this world, and heaven (or its privation).[103]

So, an economic indexing of the claims made about human nature and its healing is central to an Augustinian account of subjective human love.

As human beings love God and proceed along the different stages of human nature indexed by the divine economy, an internal integration of loves that were once contradictory begins.[104] Sanctification is the slow and painful process of bringing those desires into proper alignment. But Augustine also has a great deal to say about the nature of disordered love, or what love is like for those who do not love God and do not have the dwelling of the Spirit within their hearts. This warped expression of love goes by many names in the Augustinian corpus—*concupiscentia*, *cupiditas*, *libido*—but its basic attribute is "a dark drive to control, to appropriate, and turn to one's private ends, all the good things that had been created by God to be accepted with gratitude and shared with others. It lay at the root of the inescapable misery that afflicted [humankind]."[105] Distorted love is "the universal symptom *par excellence* of all forms of deranged relationships, among demons as among men."[106] It is tempting to multiply names for love in Augustine's thought, but what we are talking about here is not really *another* love than

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[103] Burnell, *The Augustinian Person*, 71. See also the comments made by Ian Clausen: "One reason Scripture floods the narrative in *Confessions* is that its author wants Scripture to claim control of his story; he wants it to show him where he is and where he is going" (*On Love, Confession, Surrender, and the Moral Self* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 20).

[104] The theme of internal integration will be examined in the next chapter. For now, see Rist, *Augustine*, 177, as well as Augustine's own comments in *de Spiritu et Littera* 34.60, *de Nuptiis et Concupiscentia* I.23.25 and *Contra Julianum* V.3.8.

[105] Peter Brown, *The Body & Society: Men, Women, & Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, 25th Anniversary Ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 418.

[106] Peter Brown, "Saint Augustine," in *Trends in Medieval Political Thought*, ed. Beryl Smalley (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 10.

that natural to human beings, but rather its privation, deformation and warping.[107] Whereas

godly, rightly-ordered love sees God in all things, recognizes their worth as gifts from God and

refuses to turn the beloved into an item for consumption and instrumentalization, disordered love

is rapacious, lascivious and selfish. This is due to original sin,[108] and it works only to destroy the

relations that obtain amongst lovers. It dominates the beloved as an exercise of power, with the

only result being mutually assured destruction, for the beloved is oppressed while the lover

becomes more and more dominating and vicious—for this reason Augustine calls it the *libido*

dominandi, the lust for domination.[109] It operates at the level of nations, but it also has a hold in

interpersonal exchanges, for "there is hardly anyone who is free of the love of wielding power or

does not long for human glory," a ruinous love "which creeps like a cancer."[110] It harms the

lover *and* their objects of love,[111] even to the point of acts of criminality like rape,[112] and is the

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[107] Thus Burnell: "Love, therefore, is in a sense divided, but its division is only into charity and that which wrongfully falls short of charity—charity and the (partial) privation of that virtue" (*The Augustinian Person*, 102). See also Schlabach, *For the Joy Set Before Us*, where he observes that Augustine's terms for love "probably had more to do with meter of his sentence, or with the need to retain parallels with other sentences, or with the scriptural allusion or Latin version of the Bible that he had in mind, than with any other factor" (200–1 n. 24).

[108] As Jesse Couenhoven rightly elucidates: "Augustine's typical picture is that original sin or grace operates in and on us by shaping our beliefs and loves, and that we consent to those beliefs and loves" (*Stricken by Sin, Cured by Christ: Agency, Necessity, and Culpability in Augustinian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 86).

[109] I.e., *de civ.* I.pref.

[110] *En. in Ps.*, 1.1. English translation from Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms, 1–32*, trans. Maria Boulding, vol. III/15, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000).

[111] *En. in Ps.* 105.34: "The plans of men and women are extremely harmful to themselves when they seek their own ends rather than God's." English translation from Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms, 99–120*, trans. Maria Boulding, vol. III/19, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2003).

[112] The relationship of sexual assault and the *libido dominandi* will be explored in chapter 6, but for now see Melanie Webb, "'On Lucretia who slew herself': Rape and Consolation in Augustine's *De civitate dei*," *Augustinian Studies* 44, no. 1 (2013): 37–58. On criminality in general, see *de civ.* V.19: "anyone who wants domination and power…will generally seek to obtain what he loves by even the most blatantly criminal acts."

opposite of genuine love which as a rule means that a " Christian must live in such a way as not to exalt himself over other people."[113] Sinful, disordered love does just that: it is characterized by Augustine as a prurient, power-hungry *grasping* in contrast to a delighted, equalizing *clinging*.[114]

Interestingly, sinful love is not religiously neutral but it is, for Augustine, very much a real effort to fashion gods of one's own making, a "self-cancelling political outflow of misdirected worship," as Paul Griffiths names it.[115] Love and worship are two sides of one coin, so devoting oneself in love to power and domination creates gods of them.[116] Griffiths continues: "To have the *libido dominandi* is to seek *dominatio*, which is, in turn, to seek to be a *dominus*. *Dominus* is the Latin rendering of the Tetragrammaton, the unsayable four-letter name of God, a fact of which Augustine is much aware. When he writes of the *libido dominandi*…he is depicting a desire to be God."[117] There is an irreducibly theological valence to the quality of one's loves, shaping the individual into a worshiper either of God or of self-made gods which are no more than projections of their greatest lusts.

4.2.5 Natural Love, Socially Expressed

At the end of all love is an object of worship of some kind, and this becomes important for understanding the final component of Augustine's account of human love to be considered here, namely, the power of love to create social bonds and identities. Recall that for Augustine,

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[113] *Tr. in Ep. Io.*, VIII.8.

[114] For an exploration of Augustine's language of *grasping* in contradistinction to *clinging*, see Schlabach, *For the Joy Set Before Us*, 67–68.

[115] Paul J. Griffiths, "Secularity and the *Saeculum*," in *Augustine's City of God: A Critical Guide*, ed. James Wetzel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 47.

[116] See, for instance, *de civ.* XI.1: "In contrast, the citizens of the earthly city," who Augustine maintains are characterized by the *libido dominandi*, "prefer their own gods to the founder of this holy city."

[117] Griffiths, "Secularity and the *Saeculum*," 48.

human beings are social by nature,[118] but the kinds of social identities they bear must be understood theologically, whether that is at a basic level or at a complex political level.[119] The most relevant detail of social organization is not primarily geographical location or anything of the like, but rather love, for only love "joins many hearts into one."[120] Thus, "even though there are a great many peoples spread across the world, living under various religious rites and moral customs and distinguished by a wide variety of languages, weaponry, and dress, *there are actually only two types of human society*; and following our Scriptures, we may rightly speak of these as two cities."[121] It is important to note, from that last citation, that the cities do not designate concrete cities in the world like points on a map, though within any actual cities and organizations of people, there is an "admixture" of members of the heavenly and earthly cities differentiated by their loves. So Augustine famously states:

> Two loves, then, have made two cities. Love of self, even to the point of contempt for God, made the earthly city, and love of God, even to the point of contempt for self, made the heavenly city…In the former the lust for domination dominates both its princes and the nations that it subjugates; in the latter both leaders and followers serve one another in love, the leaders by their counsel, the followers by their obedience. The former loves its

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[118] See *de bono coniugali*, I.1: "human nature is a social entity." English translation from Augustine, "The Excellence of Marriage," in *Marriage and Virginity*, trans. Ray Kearney, vol. I/9, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999), 29–64.

[119] There is actually a great deal of controversy about this claim within Augustinian scholarship. It began with R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine*, 2nd Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), who claimed that Augustine put forward a religiously neutral conception of social and political life. In response, authors like O'Donovan have responded that no such neutrality can be available when the teleological considerations of *de civ.* are taken into account. See Oliver O'Donovan, "The Political Thought of City of God 19," in *Bonds of Imperfection: Christian Politics, Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 48–72. Much of the debate surrounds the proper interpretation of *de civ.* XIX, especially 17, although a myopic focus on that can also generate problematic readings. For that correction, see Gregory W. Lee, "Republics and Their Loves: Rereading City of God 19," *Modern Theology* 27, no. 4 (2011): 553–81. Here I follow O'Donovan, Lee and others like Rowan Williams in interpreting the two cities as religiously charged, theologically non-neutral and teleologically oriented social communities.

[120] *de civ.*, XV.3.

[121] *de civ.*, XIV.1. Emphasis added.

own strength, displayed in its men of power; the latter says to its God, *I love you, O Lord, my strength* (Ps 18:1).[122]

In light of the foregoing discussion about the natures of rightly ordered and wrongly ordered love, it should be clear enough to say that the heavenly city *when it is operating as it is supposed to* is inhabited by those with genuine divine love, while the earthly city *when it is operating in its characteristic way* is inhabited by those ruled by the *libido dominandi*.[123] In fact, given what Augustine has to say about creation and election,[124] it is not too much of an oversimplification to say that the heavenly city constitutes the elect, both humans and angels, and the earthly city constitutes the non-elect, both humans and demons: "Love alone, then, distinguishes between the children of God and the children of the devil."[125] In the end, it seems to me that Rowan Williams articulates correctly that, with respect to the two cities, "their goals are distinct, and so will be their eternal rewards."[126] Or, in Lee's words, the cities "differ as much as their objects of worship."[127]

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[122] *de civ.* XIV.28.

[123] The italicized portions are meant to qualify the claim so as not to suggest that members of the earthly city are *always* sinful, and members of the heavenly city are *always righteous*. It is certainly true that members of the heavenly city who are still on pilgrimage on this earth are still being made fit for the city, and therefore still require a transformation of their loves, and members of the earthly city can still approximate virtue (a claim to be explored in chapter 6 with respect to justice).

[124] The two cities are spoken about in Augustine's earlier treatments of creation and providence: "These two loves—of which one is holy, the other unclean, one social, the other private…were first manifested in the angels, one in the good, the other in the bad, and then distinguished the two cities, one of the just, the other of the wicked, founded in the human race under the wonderful and inexpressible providence of God as he administers and directs everything he has created" (*de Gen. ad Litt.*, XI.15.20).

[125] *Tr. in Ep. Io.* V.7. This is a contentious reading, for it does not place an emphasis on the visible church to designate the cities, but on divine election, which does not correspond exactly to the visible church. For an argument for this reading, see James Wetzel, "A Tangle of Two Cities," *Augustinian Studies* 43, no. 1/2 (2012): 5–23.

[126] Williams, *On Augustine*, 110.

[127] Lee, "Republics and Their Loves," 567.

A people, then, is "a multitude of rational beings joined together by common agreement on the objects of their love," making it clear that "to discover the character of any people we should take a close look at what it loves."[128] Once again, what appears to be an over-theorized point gains quick familiarity when applied to examples. Augustine provides one himself. Those who love God and are members of the heavenly city will wish to

> bring others to love him together with you. If you were enamored of a charioteer, would you not pester other people to become your fellow-fans? A charioteer's fan talks about his hero wherever he goes, trying to persuade others to share his passion…[D]o not begrudge God to anyone. Grab someone else, as many people as you can, everyone you can get hold of. There is room for all of them in God; you cannot set any limits to him. Each of you individually will possess the whole of him, and all of you together will possess him whole and entire.[129]

Augustine's claim that common objects of love are the most important factor in community formation is readily observable to anyone who has attended a sports match, where a shared loved for a team (or, in his case, a charioteer) can cause strangers to embrace (or erupt into a fist fight). On another level, however, the cities are socially unique because they are divided by common objects of *ultimate* love, one an eternal blessing, the other eternal damnation.

This ultimate division, however, does not mean that self-confessing Christians should separate themselves from self-confessing non-Christians. There is a significant epistemic complication for doing so prior to the eschaton, because self-confession does not entail membership in any one city; election does. The church "in these evil days" has many "of the

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[128] *de civ.*, XIX.24. O'Donovan, in his theological appropriation of this claim, rightly adds: "Every concrete community, then, is defined equally by the things it does *not* love together, the objects it refuses to accept as a ground of its association" (Oliver O'Donovan, *Common Objects of Love: Moral Reflection and the Shaping of Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 22).

[129] *En. in Ps.*, 72.34. In *de doct.* I.29.30, Augustine employs the same example, except with respect to an actor. He even says of a fan of an actor, "if he notices someone is rather cool about him, he tries to stir him up by singing the actor's praises, while if he finds someone who takes an opposite view of his favorite actor, he hates and detests that person's dislike of his favorite."

reprobate mixed in with the good. Both are gathered, so to speak, in the nets of the Gospel, and in this world, as in the sea, both swim about without distinction, enclosed in those nets until drawn to shore, where the evil will be separated from the good."[130] There is a distinction to be made, but it is not one to be made by those who live in these evil days, who are still on pilgrimage to God. So what is the heavenly city to do in the meantime? How should it interact during the *saeculum*, the secular time extended between "the creation out of nothing of the cosmos as a beautifully ordered whole (*de civ.* II.3-6) and ends with the last judgment that definitively and irreversibly separates the Lord's city from the human city (XX.1, XX.14-30)"?[131] In some ways, Augustine's answer is surprisingly simple. The heavenly city "makes *use* of earthly and temporal goods like a pilgrim."[132] Use, of course, is that aforementioned type of rightly ordered love. So, it

> defends and seeks an accommodation among human wills with regard to the things that pertain to humanity's mortal nature. At the same time, however, it directs this earthly peace toward the heavenly peace which is so truly peace that, strictly speaking, it alone is to be considered and called the peace of the rational creature, namely, a perfectly ordered and wholly concordant fellowship in the *enjoyment* of God and of each other in God…by this faith it lives justly when it directs the attainment of this peace every good act it performs for God.[133]

It was texts like these that originally led Markus to conclude that the *saeculum* was a religiously neutral engagement with shared goods, but the foregoing discussion reveals that this is far from true. It is true that both cities engage the same goods in the span of time between creation and consummation—goods like food, government and familial relations—but they are calibrated to

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[130] *de civ.* XVIII.49.

[131] Griffiths, "Secularity and the *Saeculum*," 34.

[132] *de civ.* XIX.17. Emphasis added.

[133] *de civ.* XIX.17. Emphasis added.

radically different ends and are shaped by entirely different *norms of use*. The earthly city will

feel free to turn their enjoyment toward creatures, attempting to distort finite goods into objects

of ultimate satisfaction and blessedness. This is an expression of the *libido dominandi* insofar as

it attempts to turn lovable goods meant to be treated as gifts from God toward private

consumption. The heavenly city, by contrast, sees all beloved goods enjoyed during the *saeculum*

as gifts from God, images of God, and ordered according to a hierarchy established with God at

its peak, knowing that these goods need not be seized upon for they will perdure into the

eschaton. The difference is a matter of the telos; toward what is the engagement with earthly

goods directed, and is that telos the true telos for humanity, union with God? And how does that

telos shape the norms by which these goods are loved?[134]

Even so, this teleological separation does not mean the heavenly city should

sanctimoniously go about its business with its nose turned up to its earthly neighbor or enemy.

Far from it. The heavenly city lives a life true of sacrifice (Rom. 12:1), which for Augustine was

a matter of mercy and compassion shown toward those within and without the walls of the

church. Augustine claims that "mercy is the true sacrifice" of the heavenly city on pilgrimage

and calls upon it to engage in the work of cultural activity to benefit all.[135] So James Lee

concludes this about the work of the heavenly city on pilgrimage: "For Augustine, true worship

must yield works of mercy toward one's neighbor. A purely spiritual offering does not suffice for

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[134] Thus Lee: "Augustine's chief task in this text is to address different conceptions of the *summum bonum*, and his basic thesis is that the two cities differ on the *summum bonum* according to their desires for temporal and eternal happiness…he fundamentally rejects their position that the *summum bonum* can be found in this earthly condition" ("Republics and Their Loves," 568).

[135] *de civ.* X.5. On cultural activity, see *de Gen. ad Litt.*, VIII.9.17: "voluntary activity comes through the works of angels and human beings…in this other mode signs are given, taught and learned, fields cultivated, communities administered, arts and skills practiced, and whatever else is done, whether in the higher company of the angels or in this earthly and mortal society, in such a way as to be in the interest of the good even through the unwitting actions of the bad."

true charity, for charity necessarily yields works of mercy that are visible, such as the offering of 'bread to a beggar.'"[136] The task of the heavenly city is to be a compassionate, merciful and beneficial presence to all those in the *saeculum*, independent of their ends, so as to reflect most beautifully the sacrifice of Christ.

The elect will even have an awareness of systemic injustice. Augustine knows that since humans are inescapably social, "all the grinding evils with which human society abounds here in this mortal condition" will also be socially ingrained.[137] The "perverted love with which every son of Adam is born" causes this life to be "so wretched that it is like a sort of hell," and it is the task of the heavenly city to recognize and address these systems.[138] What is privately true of the lust for domination infiltrates human systems like families and governments,[139] and Christians must speak wisely into such organizations in an effort to show mercy to those who have been dominated by the libido of others. So, even though there is every bit of difference between the two cities, the heavenly city has no opportunity to be distant—it must be known for its compassion, mercy and true peace in a world infested by evil.

4.2.6 Loving as Pilgrims

Already touched upon a few times so far is a favorite image of Augustine's to summarize his theology of love, namely, that of a pilgrim. It will also serve as a fitting summing up of the

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[136] James Lee, *Augustine and the Mystery of the Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 109. He references *Contra Faustum*, XX.16. See further Stewart-Kroeker, *Pilgrimage as Moral and Aesthetic Formation*, 186–7: "Augustine has a very expansive view of sacrifice…Christ's sacrifice that elicits the love of believers, who sacrifice themselves to him in response, and, re-formed in the image of God, offer sacrificial acts to God and neighbor, becoming united in fellowship, and offered back up to God as the universal sacrifice of Christ's body."

[137] *de civ.*, XIX.5.

[138] *de civ.*, XXII.22.

[139] cf. *de civ.*, XIX.5–12.

presentation at hand. Sarah Stewart-Kroeker's recent monograph on the topic, a magisterial study

entitled *Pilgrimage as Moral and Aesthetic Formation in Augustine's Thought*, capably

demonstrates how in that image, most of Augustine's central contentions about human love are

contained. Her presentation of this fecund image is worth an extensive citation:

> Augustine's dominant image for the human life is *peregrinatio*, which signifies at once a journey to the homeland (a "pilgrimage") and the condition of exile from the homeland. For Augustine, all human beings are, in the earthly life, exiles from their true homeland—heaven. Only some become pilgrims who seek a way back to that homeland, a return mediated by the incarnate Christ. The return journey involves formation, both moral and aesthetic, in loving rightly…Attraction to beauty initiates the journey. Ongoing conformation in love to beauty—Christ's and neighbor's—sustains the sojourner. The full glory of this beauty awaits in heaven. The satisfaction of the desire for beauty that drives the pilgrim's journey is, indeed, deferred. And yet the necessary interplay of earthly and eschatological love and beauty means that persevering along the road to the homeland *requires* developing a taste—the right taste—for earthly things. Guided by the eschatological end, one's perceptions of and responses to earthly things are re-formed according to the beauty that truly fulfills desire. The wayfarer formed in and by truth, goodness, and beauty itself thus experiences the truly good beauty of the earth. This foretaste is real; its reality rests on its heavenly source. Only in light of that earthly-eschatological continuity is beauty truly and rightly loved, and by extension, are all earthly things truly and rightly loved. The eschatological orientation of loving beauty opens the Christian sojourner to true experiences of beauty and true relationships of love with others in this life. The continuity between earthly and eschatological beauty that creates the continuity between earthly and eschatological love rests on the mediation of Christ. As incarnate God, Christ is both the way and the end. He is the way *because* he is the end, simultaneously. Adhering to Christ, one has at once grasped the end even as one travels the way.[140]

Flowing forth from this metaphor are the themes for which I have argued so far. We are pilgrims

in foreign territory ravaged by sin, whose experience of misplacement and malaise Stewart-

Kroeker likens to that of an illegal immigrant[141] or to that of Israel in the wilderness.[142] As such,

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[140] *Pilgrimage as Moral and Aesthetic Formation*, 1–2.

[141] *Pilgrimage as Moral and Aesthetic Formation*, 12. That Augustine would make the experience of an illegal immigrant the *norm* for the experience of the Christian life has, I can only suggest, immense implications for the moral theological treatment of immigration. See further Robert W. Heimburger, *God and the Illegal Alien: United States Immigration Law and a Theology of Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[142] Augustine's own image in *Tr. in Ep. Io.*, VII.1.

"we are still on the way, a way however not from place to place, but one traveled by the affections."[143] Our pilgrimage continues as the ordering of our loves shape us more and more into the image of Christ, who himself models for us the way of true love:

> Anyone who is still on pilgrimage, walking by faith, has not yet reached home but is already on the way to it. A person who is not in that homeland, but does not believe, is not even on the way there. Let us walk then, like people who know they are on the way, because the king of our homeland has made himself our way. The king is the Lord Jesus Christ; there at home he is our truth, but here he is our way. To what are we traveling? To the truth. How shall we get there? Through faith. Whither are we traveling? To Christ. How shall we reach him? Through Christ.[144]

Our ability to love this Christ, however, is impossible apart from the Holy Spirit, who was sent "to empower us to love him in return."[145] Though we are assured that we are headed to God by means of God, Augustine warns his church, "You will have to put up with tough conditions on your journey through time, but you will attain joys that last forever."[146] Knowing that hardship, pilgrims must journey in love while paying close attention to Scripture,[147] singing "love-songs about your homeland,"[148] all while recognizing that they do not journey alone, but that their core community is formed by co-pilgrims along the way.[149] They are motivated by hope, knowing

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[143] *de doct.*, I.17.16.

[144] *En. in Ps.*, 123.2. See also *de doct.*, I.16 and *Tr. Io. Ep.*, X.1 for further claims about the Christology involved.

[145] *En. in Ps.,* 127.8.

[146] *En. in Ps.*, 36.2.16.

[147] *En. in Ps.*, 7.14, 119.5.

[148] *En. in Ps.*, 66.6.

[149] Cf. *En. in Ps.*, 57.5–6 and 121.2 for claims about how the church on pilgrimage (or, in more recognizable terms, the church militant) is the main social unit of the Christian. For powerful theological reflection on this theme, see Philip Ziegler, *Militant Grace: The Apocalyptic Turn and the Future of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), chapter 13.

that in "God's home there is an everlasting party."[150] In the meantime, pilgrims love the earthly goods they encounter, the relationships they foster and their own bodies. Yet, they do so precisely *as pilgrims*: "In this life they are schooled for eternity and, like pilgrims, make use of earthly goods without being taken captive by them, while they are either proved or corrected by evils."[151] It is a journey whose beginning requires the work of God the Father in sending the Son and the Spirit, and whose starting line is the beginning of love. It is a journey whose progress is the maturation of rightly ordered loves, taking along the good things with us on the journey, recognizing the role they will play at our arrival. And it is a journey whose culmination lies strictly in the bliss provided by the true homeland, who is the living God.

4.3 Conclusion

"The entire life of a good Christian is a holy desire," Augustine maintained.[152] This is an ambiguous claim; did he mean a Christian life consists entirely in good loves, or did he mean that there is no aspect of a Christian's life, no earthly good she encounters, that cannot be subject to a holy love? It seems to me that he meant both. We are what we love, and Christians are characterized by that love poured forth into their hearts in the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the world has been created good and is suffused with the divine presence and can be the object of love so long as that love is observed in right order. Before turning to see how the Augustinian account of human love just presented can be an aid for our understandings of gender, allow me to isolate and summarize each of the claims just made.

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[150] *En. in Ps.*, 41.9. See also *En. in Ps.*, 60.4 and 83.8 for the importance of hope and joy in motivating pilgrims on their journey.

[151] *de civ.*, I.29. Cf. *En. in Ps.*, 105.34.

[152] *Tr. ep. Io.*, IV.6.

First, I maintained that Augustine's account of love must begin with considerations about subjective divine love, that is, the nature of love in the Trinity, specifically the Holy Spirit. For Augustine the relation through which the Holy Spirit subsists is love, and since the triune God always acts inseparably, the motivations for creating all things included love, for there the Holy Spirit was involved. Second, all things were created according to measure, number and weight, the basic categories for Augustinian metaphysics. The weight of human beings—what pulls them to their proper rest, their telos—is love, and the rest toward which they are pulled is God, in whom alone genuine happiness can be found. This is not to exclude, thirdly, earthly goods, so long as they are loved as gifts from God, creatures to be received with gratitude, evaluated according to their proper order and used with a recognition that God is present therein and that the eschaton will be populated by them. Fourth came a consideration about subjective human love, how it is that we are what we love. This happens by means of our memories, as objects of love are internalized and incorporated, shaping who we are in a second-personal, narratival way. Since we become what we love, loving God sanctifies us and loving what is evil (or loved in an evil way) makes us more wicked. There is a process by which our holiness is cultivated, and it corresponds with our development along the different stages of the divine economy along with the integration of our desires. Yet, fifth, for those whose loves are disordered, the characteristic manifestations are domination, a lust for power and selfish consumption, which gradually destroy both lover and beloved. Sixth, love forges social bonds, organizes individuals into communities and is the chief factor in identifying the quality of those communities, of which there are fundamentally two—the heavenly city and the earthly city—even if their members are dispersed throughout the world. The two cities are not to be found on a map but in the hearts of individuals and are separated by the ultimate telos at which they direct all of their pursuits, either

blessedness with God or condemnation in separation from God. Finally, all of these pieces come together in the image of a human being as a pilgrim, venturing toward her true homeland with Christ and the Holy Spirit.

It will be the task of the next chapter to take what has been said here and situate gender within it. A suggestion in that direction, however, has already been made. If human beings are what they love, and if the objects of their loves leave their footprints on the lover so as to form their identities, then *gender-relevant* goods that are loved will, therefore, form gender identities. What it takes for an object of love to be gender-relevant will be explained, but if the central task of accounts of gender is to explain how it is that social identities are formed and how they might relate to the sexed body, then the pieces have been put into place for a theological account of gender. Love, for Augustine, is natural to human beings prior to any social relations *and* something that is deeply formative of social identities. That I love and form my identity through loving is both deeply rooted in my created nature (my weight) and in my social nature. If gender can be situated into this framework, it will be an account of gender that is social, natural and deeply informed by theological concepts.

I will attempt to show how this so in conversation with the thinker I take to be the leading theologian of gender writing today, Sarah Coakley. For Coakley, gender is fundamentally a *desire*, a claim which will be shown to have remarkable commonality with mine. Yet I take issue with the concept of desire, claiming that the account of love just sketched is a far more promising home in which to locate gender. In any case, it should be clear by now that there is available to the Christian theologian a remarkably rich account of identity which contemporary identity language echoes, even if imperfectly. If someone says, "I identify as x," an Augustinian appraisal will immediately jump to the person's loves. What do they love in order to make sense of such

an identification, and to what are those loves ordered? The means by which that identification happens is not mere choice or selfish individualistic expression—or at least it should not be, if that person has rightly ordered loves. For an Augustinian theology of human love, we should not dissuade individuals from identifying with social categories like genders. The problem is not with identification but with the account by which such identifications happen. However contemporary identities are said to be formed, Augustinian Christians will insist that at their center must be the loves of the individual, a love beginning and ending with God. And if this is so, then there is no escaping the theological relevance of the identity being claimed, for all loves must be directed to the ultimate enjoyment of God.

There are promising facets to treating identity in this way. It is not mere choice, it is not reduced to biology, it is not the arbitrary product of a culture, it is not the blatant negotiation of power—yet it has important things to say about all of these. It takes all of the important desiderata for claims about identity while retaining a robust theological frame, fit for speaking wisely into Christian discipleship. You are what you love, says Augustine, and you are also gendered. So how does love form your gender?

CHAPTER 5
GENDER AS LOVE: A THEOLOGICAL PROPOSAL

This chapter presents the central constructive proposal for this work, and it does so by bringing together the claims made in the chapters leading up to it. Specifically, it seeks to show that if gender is concerned with the organization of social goods around selves, and if identities are formed by our loves, then gender is about the formation of identities by means of our love for social goods according to the sexed body. I will introduce this complex claim by means of a view very similar to it, namely that of Sarah Coakley, for whom gender is a desire. Though similar to my own, Coakley's vision is susceptible to objections, which I put forward by placing it alongside Harry Frankfurt's philosophy of love. Love, I conclude, is a better category than desire for understanding gender. I then present the model, arguing that gender is a particular relation of love in which goods acquire social meaning in virtue of being loved because of the lover's sexed body. I conclude with concrete case studies, testing my view against actual expressions of gender today, especially ones relevant to the church.

5.1 Integrating Claims

To this point, I have argued for an assortment of claims that I now intend to integrate in order to put forward the main constructive proposal of this project. The arguments that will be pieced together ran as follows. In chapter one, I sought to clarify what identifies a theological account of gender as distinct from (but not independent of) other disciplines. In chapter two, I presented the most widely held family of views that seek to answer the question, "What is

gender?" These are social constructionist views, and while their historical and present-day

proponents have made many highly suggestive claims, the view itself is philosophically

problematic and untenable from the perspective of basic Christian theological concerns

(especially if taken in the more metaphysically revisionist sense Judith Butler proposes). Chapter

three began the positive project by discussing two feminist philosophers whose views have been

charting a unique and salutary way forward, namely Charlotte Witt and Mari Mikkola. From

their views, I distilled four foundational theses for a workable metaphysics of gender:

1. Gender is an essence, though this is not reducible to or identical with biological
   determinism or biological essentialism.
2. The complexity of gender, the noetic effects of sin and the current conditions of
   oppression complicate our epistemic access to gender's essence. All the same, we
   can be assured that gender will be fully known in the eschaton.
3. Any theory or theology of gender must be consistent with and supportive of the
   cultivation of justice.
4. Gender is concerned with selves or identity and the way selves organize social
   goods pertaining to their sexed bodies.

While in that chapter I argued *that* gender is concerned with identity and the organization of

social goods according to the sexed bodies of those bearing such identities, it took chapter four to

specify *how* social goods form identities in general. There I argued, with the help of Augustine,

that we are what we love, in the sense that the identities we bear are formed by means of our

loves. Now it is time to assemble these claims in an effort to put forward a theological account of

gender.

After the presentation of the above four principles, I offered a basic definition of gender:

gender is the appropriation of cultural goods pertaining to the sexed body by means of which the

sexed body is socially manifested. This is a *minimal definition* of gender, for I believe it applies

to any tenable account of gender, of which mine is one type. What gives my account its

specificity is the nature by which "appropriation" occurs, how this appropriation forges our

identities, how the social manifestation of the sexed body retains the attenuated essentialism of principle one, how the process of appropriation is consistent with the complicated access we have to the right relation to gendered goods and how the formation of love aids in our ventures toward gendered justice. This is the task of this and the following chapter.

To anticipate, I will argue that there are many things we love in virtue of our sexed bodies. Doing so grants to these beloved objects a social meaning and to us a social role, and this is our gender. More than that, we identify with these beloved goods, for they make us who we are and shape our narratives. Because our chief love is to God, moreover, Christians always have an obligation to evaluate these gendered goods in accord with the moral norms of all properly ordered love.

I will also seek to remain consistent with the principles of theological method set forth in the first chapter. To that end, this chapter will include a theological reading of the Song of Songs, prompted by the chapter's main interlocutor, Sarah Coakley, whose views will serve as an important propaedeutic to my own. Coakley, who maintains that gender is fundamentally a *desire*, has led the discussion amongst theologians attempting to give adequate theological attention to gender. She occupies an important space in the theological discussion, largely because she has denied, outright and with decades of consistency, the bifurcation between recognizable theological practice and careful reflection upon gender. Thus, to the theologians, she says, "It is perhaps even more common…for systematic theologians to be dismissive, even derogatory, about theologians interested in feminism or gender."[1] Yet, even when theologians do rise to the challenge, she says "they tend to import a gender theory from the secular realm

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[1] Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay "On the Trinity"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 34.

without a sufficiently critical *theological* assessment of it."[2] Therein lies the source of the

bifurcation, and the way out is not less theology, but more: "A robustly theological, indeed

precisely *trinitarian*, perspective on gender is required, and not one that merely smuggles secular

gender presumptions into the divine realm at the outset."[3] I am persuaded that Coakley is correct,

and the theological perspective she advances will have similarities with my own, even though

some significant differences will be discerned. Paying some attention to this groundbreaking

theologian, therefore, will set the stage in a helpful way for my proposal.

5.2 Sarah Coakley on Desire and Gender and a Frankfurt-Style Critique

5.2.1 Desire is More Basic Than Gender: Sarah Coakley

For an Augustinian project such as this one, it may seem an odd choice to call upon the

theology of Sarah Coakley as a salutary heuristic. Coakley, on the face of it, is critical of

Augustine and theologies which seek to appropriate Augustinian insights for questions of gender

and sexuality.[4] There is a lingering question as to whether Coakley is reading an Augustine

informed not by recent interpreters but by an older and more critical approach (as I suspect), but

the important point to notice is that there are, in point of fact, deep commonalities between

Coakley's theology and *aspects* of an Augustinian one. The trouble is that those aspects that

would resonate with her view are not the aspects upon which she focuses in her critique.[5]

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[2] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 34.

[3] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 34.

[4] The central objection she levels against Augustine is that he is too concerned with "the quest for corporate and controlled *order*—at the level of the life in the Trinity, of the city (*polis*), and of relations between the sexes" (*God, Sexuality, and Sexuality*, 289), a quest which renders him consistently suspicious of sexual activity and desire, even that which is blessed by God in marriage (cf. 278).

[5] Coakley focuses mainly on Augustine's theology of gender, which, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, is not the aspect of Augustine's thought I intend to retrieve. Specifically, she focuses on a particular reading of *de Trinitate* book XII that maintains Augustine did not think women are made in the image of God. This, as I

However, Augustine's theology of human love and its attendant notions of the *ordo amoris*, of the goodness of creation and all the rest, Coakley does not consider, but it is here that they share deep commonality.

Just as I intend to connect Coakley only to a particular aspect of Augustine's theology, I can only afford the space to treat a particular aspect of Coakley's theology. I cannot, for instance, delve deeply into her *théologie totale* method and its relationship to the social sciences, nor can I analyze the particulars of her theology of ascesis and prayer as they relate to her Anglicanism.[6] My focus will be on her understanding of desire and the way it informs and defines gender. This is no incidental component of her theology, however. The organizing element of Coakley's thought, as any casual inspection of her work will indicate, is a rich vision of desire that draws unto itself the various aspects of a human being's life, and chiefly her relationship to God as Father, Son and Spirit. She describes her work as an "*ontology of desire*": "a vision of God's trinitarian nature as both the source and goal of human desires, as God intends them."[7] Human persons are, for Coakley, fundamentally desirous beings, particularly because they are made in the image of a desiring God; these desires, moreover, are meant to be ordered in such a way as to culminate in desire for God through the Holy Spirit. Such a culmination—something which only occurs through the rigorously transformative practices of contemplative prayer—transforms the individual into that for which she was meant, purging the sin which malforms her. Gender, itself

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argued in the previous chapter, is not an accurate reading of this portion of Augustine's thought according to current scholarship.

[6] On the latter, see Ashley Cocksworth, "On Prayer in Anglican Systematic Theology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 22, no. 3 (2020): 383–411, where Coakley is treated alongside Graham Ward and Katherine Sonderegger.

[7] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 6.

a desire, when subsumed to these divine desires, is itself taken up into the life of God, no longer a source of harm and oppression but a means by which we access the triune God.

I find this a tremendously attractive picture, but while it sets the stage for my own view, it contains some conceptual problems. First, it is not clear which desires are the ones meant to constitute one's gender. At times it seems like it is strictly *sexual* desire (a narrow subset of the desires a human being experiences); at other times it seems like it is the complex of all desires at play in the social life of a human being. Second, the specific way Coakley claims gender is purified from a fallen "twoness" is unclear and does not seem to proceed discernibly from the reasons she provides. Third, and most substantially, Coakley's concept of desire itself needs reworking. While she takes care to qualify how she intends to use the term, there is insufficient conceptual analysis of it to see if it will bear the weight which she intends it to bear. Here I will refer to the work of Harry Frankfurt to show that desire language is ill-suited to describe the variegated interplay of volitions at stake in moral psychology, and by extension, human identity and gender. I will then demonstrate how the Augustinian vision of the previous chapter is actually a much better candidate to forward the kind of theological account of gender Coakley favors. This will set the stage for my more systematic statement of the view.

As broad as Coakley's theological vision is, any account of it must begin with her claim that "desire is divinely and ontologically basic."[8] Desire is basic, but basic to what? It seems to me that Coakley's position is that desire is basic to any personal being, whether that person is human or divine: "But a *theological* analysis such as I propose puts desire at the root—both anthropologically in the human, and theologically in the divine. Desire, I now suggest again— even fallen desire—is the precious clue woven into the crooked human heart that ever reminds it

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[8] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 10.

of its relatedness and its source."[9] Persons are basically beings who desire, whether we are describing the everyday activity of human persons, the relations amongst persons of the Trinity, or the relationship between God and creatures.[10] For this reason, human desire is the "'precious clue' woven into our created being reminding us of our rootedness in God, to bring this desire into *right* 'alignment' with God's purposes, purified from sin and possessiveness."[11] That we desire is a divine link to the God who has made us in God's image, meaning that desire can be a holy and restorative presence in human beings. At the fundamental level, then, a person is a being that desires, desire being a crucially necessary (though presumably not sufficient) condition for personhood.

As the last quotation suggests, there are two further features of specifically human desire involved in Coakley's vision, namely, the *ordering of desire* and the *purification of desire* from sin. It is important to consider each of these in their turn. First, human beings are not only created with a capacity to have objects of desire which define them, but they also bear the responsibility of undergoing "the godly ordering of desire."[12] We are called into "a *training* of desire, a lifelong commitment to what we might now call the 'long haul' of personal, erotic transformation, and thereby of reflection on the final significance of all one's desires before God."[13] There is a specifically theological duty to "evaluate and *adjudicate* desires, both sexual

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[9] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 58–9.

[10] Drawing on Dionysius, Coakley affirms that the outflowing of divine action, especially in the act of creation, is a form of desire (cf. *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 315–6). God, then, desires Godself interpersonally as well as desiring creation.

[11] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 309–10.

[12] Sarah Coakley, *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2015), 30.

[13] Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, 30.

and others, and how to live a life of balance and moderation such that desire is negotiated with ascetical realism, and in a mode conducive to genuine human flourishing."[14] But how is the theologian to do this? By what order does she adjudicate human desire? Here Coakley's thought is self-avowedly hierarchical (a surprising move in a work of feminist theology), yet the hierarchy she invokes is not the kind in which the higher attempts to dominate the lower. Rather, she defends a hierarchical order of human desire according to which the chief object is God alone.[15] When the "primacy of *divine* desire" is recognized as the anchor for right order, the deleterious hierarchies that produce oppression in human societies are seen for what they are, namely, aberrations of something made to be a creaturely good. Human beings were made to desire God and to order all other desires by directing them toward God and undergoing the purgation from wickedness that such orientation produces. When our non-divine desires fail to find their proper orientation toward God, or if they are intrinsically *unable* to be directed toward God, it follows that these are sinful desires, twisted, warped and misapplied instances of something originally meant for good.

Second, Coakley's notion of desire emphasizes the need for its purification. Desire, since it is not exempted from the distorting effects of the Fall, is always liable to abject uses and ends. Christian theology, felicitously, has at its disposal the "theological concepts of creation, fall, and redemption" which allow theologians to identify and place desires in accordance with where they are located within the divine economy.[16] Is a given desire good, created by God for human

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[14] Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, 3–4.

[15] Cf. Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 321: "I want to defend this idea of hierarchy in a particular sense in the *human* realm, and argue that we cannot do without it, if we are to *order* our values aright—order them appropriately, 'orient' them, towards God."

[16] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 53–4.

delight? Or is it fallen, an aberration of a good desire? Or has it been redeemed, the realignment

of an evil desire that once was good? Or is its realignment incomplete, awaiting a future

redemption in which it is completely fulfilled and directed in God? Of course, part of the

ordering task results in the purification task; by recognizing the proper order of desire one is

given a "map" for the purifying process. More will be said about that process and the

contemplative, Trinitarian prayer that accompanies it, but there is a surprising role played in it by

submission. This is not the submission featured in some theologies of gender where women

exclusively submit to men, but the *human* submission to God whereby the human heart is purged

and reformed in ways often too deep for words.[17] For now, it suffices to say that human beings

are not passive recipients of desires they cannot help but have; rather, they must recognize that

all desire is indexed by the divine economy and must be adjudicated against and purified by our

chief desire for God, to whom we submit in trustful repose.

Both of the above claims can be traced back in some way or other to a Platonist stream of

Christian theology that Coakley endorses (and ironically shares with Augustine).[18] The original

move she makes beyond this Platonic heritage is this: *gender is among those human desires*

which find their source and completion in desire for God. Thus Coakley: "I now want to extend

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[17] On this point, see Coakley's early work, especially Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 68: "'absolute dependence' is indeed at the heart of true human creatureliness and the contemplative quest. But such *right* dependence is an elusive goal: the entanglements with themes of power, hierarchy, sexuality and death are probably inevitable but also best brought to consciousness; they are an appropriate reminder that our prayer is enfleshed." See also her reading of the binding of Isaac, and the true notions of sacrifice and submission it illustrates, in Sarah Coakley, "In Defense of Sacrifice: Gender, Selfhood, and the Binding of Isaac," in *Feminism, Sexuality, and the Return of Religion*, ed. Linda Alcoff and John D. Caputo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 17–38.

[18] Cf. Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 316: "Why should Christianity and Platonism here *not* genuinely converge and intersect? It has indeed all along been the burden of this volume to suggest such." In Plato's *Symposium*, Socrates argues that the basic desires that motivate one towards giving birth to offspring are the same desires that motivate one to giving birth to virtuous works of philosophy. See Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Robin Waterfield, Oxford World Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 53–54 (210b).

that analysis to the issue of gender, and to hypothesize that *desire is also more fundamental than gender*; and that the key to the secular riddle of gender can lie only in its connection to the doctrine of a trinitarian God."[19] There is a "messy entanglement of sexual desires and desire for God," for "sexual desire finds [its] final meaning *only* in (the trinitarian) God."[20] Coakley summarizes the proposal in this way: "physical desire finds its origins in right divine desire…Dionysius' more ancient vision means that, in contemporary terms, Freud is turned on his head. Instead of 'God' language 'really' being about sex, sex is really about God."[21] Put differently, Coakley's view proceeds along the following lines. Gender is a desire, nestled in a complex of other desires by which human beings operate. All human desire, however, finds its source and telos in God, the desire for whom is chief and ultimate for all of humanity. This means that gender is swept up into our desire for God, for God is its source and end, and our desire for God is coiled up with our gendered desire.

At this point we encounter the first point of conceptual ambiguity that I would like to explore, for it reveals some senses in which Coakley's view is inadequate, even if it is not mistaken. What does it mean to say that gender is a desire? Coakley is not clear, and at points her views seem internally inconsistent. In some places, she seems to say that it is specifically *sexual* desires that constitute gender, such that my desire for persons of a particular sex or gender, or my sexual desire for this *particular* person, is what makes up my gender. In her treatments of homosexuality, for instance, sexuality, gender and desire are part of one nearly synonymous

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[19] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 52. Emphasis in the original.

[20] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 43, 15.

[21] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 316.

conceptual package,[22] and the quotes in the preceding paragraph show how she tends to employ "sexuality" and "gender" interchangeably, both spoken about as that desire which turns Freud on his head. Yet Freud spoke specifically about *sexual* desire, and if that is what Coakley means by gendered desire, it would exclude desires for other goods we typically associate with gender (like desires to wear certain kinds of clothes) as well as individuals who have no sexual desire at all. On this reading of her view, someone who has no sexual desire is not gendered. At other points, Coakley takes a much broader approach, arguing very persuasively that desire cannot be contained only to sexual desire, and that desire must be seen as a mutually implicative web in which all human categories rub elbows with the others: "'Erotic' desire has to be seen as in a tether of connected desires: for food, drink, comfort, intimacy, acknowledgment, power, pleasure, money, relaxation, rest, etc., as well as physical sex."[23] According to this broader understanding of gendered desire, we must take into account not just sexual desire when we consider what gender is, but also our desires for food, drink, clothing and so forth. The ambiguity, then, is this: is gender desire *the same as* sexual desire, or does it include our desire for other goods? My suspicion, and the option that will be assumed in this chapter, is that it is the latter. Gender, if it is a desire, must be a desire informed by many objects, so as not to exclude entire classes of individuals who are intuitively gendered, like those with no sexual desire. Coakley, however, does not clarify and does not seem to have a definite view about which desires are relevant for informing gendered desire.

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[22] See Coakley, *New Asceticism*, 141, for instance.

[23] Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, 8. See also 132: "sexual desire cannot, in this or any other context, ultimately be divorced from other forms of desire (for food, wealth, power, status, peace, and finally for God)—not, at least, when 'desire' itself is reflected upon *theologically*."

Supposing Coakley is correct that gender is a desire, it follows that gender itself can be ordered and purified. Like all other desires, it is situated within the divine economy such that our genders can be seen as created, fallen, redeemed and perfected, "which place the performances of gender in a spectrum of existential possibilities *between* despair and hope."[24] It is not enough simply to look around and perceive the ways gendered desire appears in the world and to validate it, for even if some gendered trait is ubiquitously evident, it may still be a sinful expression of gender, for sin is everywhere we look. This means that we cannot be sure that those things which we take to be normative and necessary for gender are not in fact fallen mutations of it simply because these gendered traits are putatively universal. Because gender is moved along the narrative of redemption, "gender is not unchangeable: it too is *in via*."[25] There is a trajectory of redemption that gender undergoes, one in which sinful aspects are being transformed by the redemptive work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.[26] This redemptive work, moreover, operates according to a distinct symbolism, and once again Coakley's view reveals its ambiguities. Sinful gender, Coakley maintains, operates according to a "twoness" eventually redeemed by the "threeness" of the Trinity: "It must be, then, that in this fallen world, one lives, in some sense, *between* twoness and its transfiguring interruption; so one is not, as in secular gender theory, endlessly and ever subject to the debilitating falseness of fallen gender, fallen twoness."[27] This is

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[24] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 54.

[25] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 54. This corresponds very nicely with my second principle from chapter four and renders problematic attempts to ground gender in something like natural law.

[26] Cf. Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 54: "a theological view of gender thereby also has an eschatological hope, one that it sees not as pious fiction or wish-fulfillment, but as firmly grounded in the events of Christ's incarnation and resurrection."

[27] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 56. Trinitarian "threeness" is of immense importance to Coakley. In her "The Trinity and Gender Reconsidered" essay, Coakley criticizes Moltmann for failing to ask, "What 'difference' does it make to the issue of gender that God is *three*?" See "The Trinity and Gender Reconsidered," in *God's Life in Trinity*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Michael Welker (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 139.

how God's trinitarian work redeems our genders, claims Coakley. It identifies instances of "twoness"—such as views of gender which insist on a binary—and interrupts and transforms them into "threeness." "*Twoness,*" she concludes, "*is divinely ambushed by threeness.*"[28]

But there are some concerns to be raised that cast doubt on this particular set of claims. It is not clear why it is the gender binary (and not other binaries) that is undone by the work of the three persons of the Trinity, much less why the number of persons in the Trinity alters the number of gender kinds in any way. Other binaries, like the Creator/creature distinction or the binary between "me" and "not me," are not eradicated by the triune work of God. Moreover, for the claim to make consistent sense of this numbering, Coakley ought to say that there are three genders instead of two (a straightforward conclusion drawn from the fact that God is three persons). Coakley sees the purification of gender by the Triune God as involving the erasure of gender as a binary, but this moves rather quickly, without showing how the conclusion follows from the reasons provided.[29] Linn Tonstad has therefore charged Coakley with engaging in "a kind of theological numerology" without giving an account of why it is that only certain binaries (men/women) are interrupted but not others (i.e., God/creation, divinity/humanity, me/not me).[30] Nor is it altogether obvious *what kind of difference* God's threeness is supposed to make for

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[28] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 58.

[29] Coakley's eschatology is not irrelevant here, though I cannot explore it in depth. For Coakley, gender in the eschaton "will certainly not conform to anything we can catch and hold in gender stereotypes *in this world*," possibly because there will be no gender in the eschaton, a position she derives from Gregory of Nyssa (*God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 283). See further Sarah Coakley, "The Eschatological Body: Gender, Transformation and God," in *Powers and Submissions*, 153–67. Coakley seems to adopt Judith Butler's view that both gender and sex are performative, such that the practices in which we engage (in which Coakley includes contemplative prayer) actually change our bodies. I have argued against this position in greater depth in Fellipe do Vale, "Cappadocian or Augustinian? Adjudicating Debates on Gender in the Resurrection," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 21, no. 2 (2019): 182–198.

[30] Linn Marie Tonstad, *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude*, Gender, Theology and Spirituality (New York: Routledge, 2016), 107.

gender, and what connection exists between what results for gender and the number of divine persons.

If we set aside these claims about the particulars of purification, we may ask further: How *are* our desires purified, according to Coakley? The answer is deceptively simple in articulation but indicative of one of the most strenuous dimensions of the Christian life, namely, through the arduous crucible of contemplative prayer. It is in prayer that our chief desire for God is transformed and purged, and it is no safe task, for here we encounter the triune God who is eager to remake us in the image of the Christ to whom and through whom we pray in the Spirit. Through a reading of Romans 8:14–17a and 26–27, Coakley maintains that prayer is always a Trinitarian act:

> [W]hat is being described by Paul is *one* experience of an activity of prayer that is nonetheless ineluctably, though obscurely, triadic. It is *one* experience of God, but God as simultaneously (i) doing the praying in me, (ii) receiving that prayer, and (iii) in that exchange, consented to in me, inviting me into the Christic life of redeemed sonship. Or to put it another way: the "Father" (so-called here) is both source and ultimate object of divine longing in us; the "Spirit" is that irreducibly, though obscurely, distinct enabler and incorporator of that longing in creation (that which *makes* the creation divine); and the "Son" is that divine and perfected creation, into whose life I, as pray-er, am caught up.[31]

Our desires are for a Trinitarian God, and in our prayers we are welcomed into the Trinitarian life and are thereby transformed. As our prayers are motivated by our chief desire for God, all of those other desires entangled with divine desire, including gender, are also transformed. So, in prayer, "the specific Gift of the Spirit cracks open the human heart to the breaking of that

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[31] Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, 90. It is this "three-ness" that Coakley maintains transforms human binaries. Since prayer transforms our desires, and prayer is always Trinitarian, those fallen binaries are thereby transformed. But, again, the *number* of the persons seems to support unjustified weight. It is not inconsistent to say that God transforms our desires by prayer, that prayer is Trinitarian, but that our desires are moved toward justice and love. No recourse is made to the number of divine persons on this account.

[gender] binary, making 'gender' ultimately fluid to the priority of divine desire."[32] Or again, she maintains that "rightly channeled *eros*, whether married or celibate, is impossible without deep prayer and ascetic perseverance."[33] Because of the profound embroilment that exists between gender desire and our desire for God in prayer, our prayers transform even our gendered desires, which is not saying anything different than stating that prayer transforms gender *itself*. So, if prayer is the means by which our desires for God are radically purified, and if all of our other desires supervene on that desire for God, then changes and purgations in divine desire *entail* changes and purgations in other desires, like gender. Thus, gender, desire and prayer are all deeply intertwined on Coakley's view.

Coakley, following certain monastic models of prayer, illustrates this process in three stages through which the one who prays progresses. At the first, purgative level, people who pray "need to know in precise, even legalistic, detail what will inculcate the virtuous Christian life," discovering those beliefs which inform practices, attitudes and postures to worldly goods that mark out a distinctively Christian life.[34] Here gender is relatively stable and one learns how to relate to gendered goods properly, illustrated by Clement of Alexandria's *de Paedagogus*. At the second tier, the person praying receives illumination, finding out ways in which Christian practices "re-modulate beliefs," as demonstrated in the *Rule of St. Benedict*.[35] What does this do to gendered desire, mention of which is curiously missing from Benedict's rule? Coakley states: "Societal gender expectations, it seems, have been left behind, in a curiously freeing way; but

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[32] Sarah Coakley, "Why Gift? Gift, Gender and the Trinitarian Relations in Milbank and Tanner," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61, no. 2 (2008): 234.

[33] Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, 51.

[34] Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, 112–3.

[35] Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, 115.

there is no hint, either, of any positive *upturning* or subverting of gender binaries."[36] This upturning is found at the third stage, which she calls the "unitive" stage. Here certain practices of prayer are *necessary* for direct and unvarnished knowledge of God, exemplified by mystical theologians like Theresa of Ávila. Gender, here, undergoes certain reversals (John of the Cross experiences a feminine posture in his soul, Theresa finds a "strong voice of authority," uniquely masculine) that reveal its fluidity.[37] The idea here is that the one who prays undergoes a process that alters her practice and belief the deeper she goes. The alteration, because it involves that desire for God upon which all other desires supervene (including gendered desire), implicates all of her life. Her gender, then, is transformed as she prays. The *particular nature of that transformation*, according to Coakley, is a removal of the twoness of gender into something fluid.

To summarize Coakley's view, we might say that the main thrust of her project is an attempt "to submit all of our desires to the test of divine longing."[38] Human beings are desirous creatures, reflecting the God in whose image they were made. Desire is fundamental to who we are, yet we are not passively carried along by whatever desire with which we find ourselves. Rather, we have the responsibility to recognize the order of desire, the chief object of which is God. God is the source of our desire, and the desire upon which all of our other desires depend, so much so that purgations and transformations to our desire for God impact them too. Gender is

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[36] Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, 117.

[37] Cf. Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, 121. For more on Coakley's understanding of mystical gender reversals, see her work on Gregory of Nyssa, especially *Powers and Submissions*, 127–129; Sarah Coakley, "Introduction—Gender, Trinitarian Analogies, and the Pedagogy of the Song," in *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Sarah Coakley (London: Blackwell, 2003), 1–13; and Sarah Coakley, "Gregory of Nyssa," in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 36–55.

[38] Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, 141.

also a desire, liable to transformation as it depends upon an ever-transforming desire for God. As we delve more deeply into maturation of prayer, our genders are brought into a redemptive trinitarian presence, whereby we see more clearly and become more truly the genders God intended for us to be. Everything hinges on the nature of desire—that we are fundamentally who we are because of desire, that gender is a desire, that prayer involves our desires in a purifying way and that our desires can be transformed. While I find the basic outlines of this vision extremely attractive, I believe it founders ultimately upon its reliance on this very language of desire. Coakley is proposing a remarkably suggestive account of gender, but it asks the concept of desire to do much more work than it is able to do. Through this objection we will see that Coakley's proposal, if it replaces desire with a more robust Augustinian account of human love, can be highly successful.

5.2.2 Desire, Love and Selfhood: A Frankfurt-Style Critique

Though I have raised two objections so far to Coakley's view—one to do with the ambiguities regarding which desires inform gendered desire and one challenging the particular way in which she thinks gender is transformed from a binary to something more fluid[39]—the main correction I believe her view requires centers upon its foundational concept, desire. In short, "desire" is not adequate to ground all of the moves Coakley makes and that something more robust is necessary. That is the vision of love presented in the previous chapter.

One helpful entry point into the issue at hand is to inquire about the relationship between desire and love. Oliver O'Donovan, at the end of his trilogy on moral theology, argued that

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[39] We may also consider the observation made by Kevin Hector in his review of Coakley's book that claiming that Christian contemplative prayer *alone* illuminates concerns about sex and gender is inconsistent with an open theological method such as her *théologie totale*. See Hector, "Trinity, Ascesis, and Culture: Contextualizing Coakley's *God, Sexuality, and the Self*," *Modern Theology* 30, no. 4 (2014): 566.

desire "is love experienced in a certain way, as a sense of want."[40] Coakley challenges

O'Donovan here, arguing that if that were true, God could not desire anything, for God lacks

nothing according to traditional Christian doctrine. O'Donovan chooses to talk about love

without desire, yet Coakley pushes him to consider a role for desire that is much more positive.[41]

In doing so, however, she collapses desire and love, terms she seems to consider fungible

throughout her books.[42] The trouble is that desire and love are not the same thing, as the work of

Harry Frankfurt will illustrate.

Coakley cannot be charged with lacking definitions for her terms; indeed in her glossary

she defines "desire" as "the physical, emotional, or intellectual longing that is directed towards

something or someone that is wanted."[43] This is a fairly standard account of desire; it is

fundamentally a *longing*, located in either physical, emotional or intellectual aspects of a human

person.[44] Frankfurt, however, argues that dependence on the language of desire fails to account

adequately for the complexities of practical reason and the shaping of human persons:

> When philosophers or economists or others attempt to analyze the various structures and
> strategies of practical reasoning, they generally draw upon a more or less standard but
> nonetheless rather meager conceptual repertoire. Perhaps the most elementary as well as
> the most indispensable of these limited resources is the notion of what people *want*—or,
> synonymously…what they *desire*. This notion is rampantly ubiquitous. It is also heavily
> overburdened, and a bit limp. People routinely deploy it in a number of different roles, to

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[40] Oliver O'Donovan, *Entering into Rest: Ethics as Theology*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 13.

[41] See Sarah Coakley, "A Response to Oliver O'Donovan's Ethics as Theology Trilogy," *Modern Theology* 36, no. 1 (2020): 189–90.

[42] See, for instance, in *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 316: "physical *desire* finds its origins in divine *desire*," and just beneath it, "no one can move simply from earthly, physical *love* (tainted as it so often is by sin and misdirection of desire) to divine love" (emphasis added). At the very least, Coakley makes no clear distinction between desire and love.

[43] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 346.

[44] It should be noted that there is significant body of literature that complicates and nuances this definition of desire. See, for instance, Timothy Schroeder, *Three Faces of Desire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), who introduces notions of motivation, pleasure and reward.

refer to a disparate and unruly assortment of psychic conditions and events. Moreover, its various meanings are rarely distinguished; nor is there much effort to clarify how they are related. These matters are generally left carelessly undefined in the blunt usages of common sense and ordinary speech.[45]

Though Coakley does far better than to be *careless* in her usage of "desire," she nevertheless fails to undertake the careful conceptual analysis necessary to distinguish desire within the array of terms operative in moral psychology, much less to distinguish different *instances* of desire so as to specify which ones she thinks are relevant for her theological project.

It becomes easy to see this when we think about instances of desire that would not be candidates for Coakley's robust usage of the term. Consider, for example, those desires on which we do not act. There are many of these: I desire to buy lunch today, but I also desire to be economical in my use of money, so I act upon my second desire and pack a lunch. The former, though it is a genuine desire I possess, is not an *effective* desire, that is, a desire "that moves (or will or would move) a person all the way to action."[46] Thus, there is a distinction between desires that do and desires that do not guide my conduct, those which actually lead to action and those which do not. Or again, we may consider our ability to be mistaken about what we actually desire. As Frankfurt notes, "a person may be as misguided in his preferences as in his desires," as when someone desires to enter a certain profession believing it will make her happy, only to find that it does not do so at all. What she really desired was the *idea* of the profession. But an idea of something is not the same as the thing itself, as she quickly finds out on the first day of the job.

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[45] Harry Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 10. See also Harry Frankfurt, *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 155: The notion of desire "is deployed routinely, and often rather carelessly, in a variety of different roles. It is important that these roles be carefully differentiated and severally understood. Otherwise, the significance of some fundamental aspects of our lives will tend to be severely blurred."

[46] Harry Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 14.

Other times, desires lack the consistency in our lives to make a difference to the individual who possesses them. Frankfurt notes: "It is possible to desire something, or to think it valuable, only for a moment. Desires and beliefs have no inherent persistence; nothing in the nature of wanting or of believing requires that a desire or a belief must endure."[47] So we might have *fleeting* desires, ones about which we forget with a passing moment. In this case, we do not care about such desires; these are the things we desire in the afternoon and forget by dinner. So there are effective and ineffective desires, desires we identify correctly and those about which we are wrong and desires that come and go quickly and those that stick with us for quite a long time.

Frankfurt also introduces the category of people designated as "wanton": "The essential characteristic of a wanton is that he does not care about his will. His desires move him to do certain things, without its being true of him either that he wants to be moved by those desires or that he prefers to be moved by other desires."[48] There is no reflexivity in the wanton; she may be full of desires which may or may not move her to act, but she never pauses to reflect if these are in fact the desires by which she *wants* to operate. Consider two consumers of pornography. The first has an uncontrollable desire to consume the pornography, yet because she knows that such material promotes violence and distorts the proper use of sexuality, wishes desperately that she was not moved by her uncontrollable desire and feels a burden of conflict within herself. The second has a similar desire to consume, yet he does not much care whether or not he desires it or whether such a motivation is something he wishes were effective for him. The latter is a wanton, the former is not. The wanton reveals that there is a difference between desiring and caring about something, for it is "quite common for people to want various things without actually caring

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[47] Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, 84.

[48] Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, 16.

about them, and to prefer satisfying one of their desires rather than another without regarding the object of either desire as being of any importance to them."[49] The second pornography consumer wants the pornography, but *whether or not* he wants to want it is not important to him.

So, it seems as though there is actually quite a wide diversity of desires encountered by any human person in any one day. One might ask Coakley whether gendered desire includes both effective *and* noneffective desires, whether gender is something on which we always act or not. Or again, must we always correctly perceive our gendered desires, or can we be mistaken about them? What impact would that have on our gender identity? Must our gendered desires be consistent? Or can they come and go, fading according to the different stages of our lives? Must we care about all of our gendered desires? Apart from the ones that are sinful, what criteria should we adopt for how to care about certain gendered desires? All of these questions basically boil down to this: Yes, let us say gender is a desire, but *what kind of desire is it?* Answering this, I shall argue, requires some conceptual sharpening, leading us to identify a specific kind of desire that we call love.

The first step toward this sharpening proposed by Frankfurt is to ascertain those desires that identify things that are important to a person and things about which a person cares. We regard things as important to us when they make a difference to us: "if it would make no difference at all to anything whether a certain thing existed, or whether it had certain characteristics, then neither the existence of that thing nor its characteristics would be of any importance to me."[50] So, Liverpool winning the Champions League is important to me because it

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[49] Frankfurt, *Necessity, Volition, and Love*, 157.

[50] Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, 82. Cf. *The Reasons of Love*, 25: "Something is important to a person only in virtue of a difference that it makes."

makes a difference to me that this state of affairs obtains. My life is affected by this in a way that

it is not by the result of a basketball or baseball game. This, in addition, is because I *care* about

the Champions League and not about baseball or basketball. Frankfurt notes that caring about

something and regarding it as important are "substantially equivalent": we sometimes care about

an object because it is important to us, we sometimes regard an object as important to us because

we care about it and sometimes both are at play.[51] They are both, in the end, a species of desire.

Caring, furthermore, is essentially a *second-order* desire *about* the desires that motivate

us, a reflexive mental act by which "we *objectify* to ourselves the ingredient items of our ongoing

mental life."[52] Caring, basically, is *when we desire to have the desires we actually have*:

> People want certain of their desires to move them into action, and they usually have
> certain other desires that they would prefer to remain motivationally ineffective. They are
> concerned about their desires in other ways as well. Thus they want some of their desires
> to persist; and they are indifferent, or even actively opposed, to the persistence of others.
> These alternative possibilities—commitment to one's own desires or an absence of
> commitment to them—define the difference between caring and not caring. Whether a
> person cares about the object of his desire depends upon which of the alternatives
> prevails.[53]

Caring occurs when our first-order desires are affirmed, appropriated and internalized by our

second-order desires, where a first-order desire is something a person wants, and a second-order

desire is one held by a person when he introspects what he wants and identifies himself with a

certain set of them. Those first-order desires he possesses but does not wish he possessed are

"external" to him in a certain way, while the desires he accepts are internalized in a particular

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[51] Frankfurt, *Necessity, Volition, and Love*, 156.

[52] Harry G. Frankfurt, *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting It Right*, ed. Debra Satz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 4.

[53] Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 21.

way.[54] For Frankfurt, there are no wantons who care; those who care are those who take stock of the desires which motivate them and take ownership of the ones which they find acceptable. Cares are effectively second-order desires about the desires that move us. The pornography addict who desperately wishes she was not moved to consume pornography cares about her first-order desires—the wishing is the caring.

Caring is, for Frankfurt, what makes us persons rather than, say, mere animals.[55] It is because we care about things that our worlds contain things that are important *to us*. So it is "by caring about things that we infuse the world with importance."[56] This is not necessarily relativism about importance; there may be many objectively important things in the world, none of which are important *to me*. Caring is the means by which we *appropriate* importance. A life that did not contain anything important to it would be no life at all, contends Frankfurt, for it would have no meaningful relationships, no genuine ambitions or goals, and no direction.[57] What is important to me, however, is not necessarily important to the next person, for objects of care are often unique; *my* daughter is important to me, while someone else's daughter is important to them, and these are not the same objects of care.[58] Caring, moreover, provides our lives with

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[54] On externalization, see Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, 63: "passions are external to us just when we prefer not to have them, or when we prefer not to be moved by them; and that they are internal when, at the time of their occurrence, we welcome or indifferently accept them."

[55] See *The Importance of What We Care*, 16–19, among others.

[56] Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 23.

[57] Presumably Frankfurt means that this would be true of a life that *could* contain importance but in fact does not. Someone in a coma, for instance, does not find anything important during the coma, but that is no fault of the person, for they could not find anything important under their circumstances.

[58] Frankfurt's position is actually stronger than this; for him, there can be "no rationally warranted criteria for establishing anything as inherently important" (*Taking Ourselves Seriously*, 22). That is, nothing is important in and of itself, but only as an object of human care. This, I think, is incompatible with the Christian faith, according to which, at the very least, God is inherently important.

"thematic unity": "The moments in the life of a person who cares about something, however, are not merely linked inherently by formal relations of sequentiality. The person necessarily binds them together, and in the nature of the case also construes them as being bound together, in richer ways."[59] There is a difference between events in one's life that merely follow one upon another, and ones we weave together into a coherent narrative of ourselves. If I did not care about anything, I would be a passenger in my own life. This was a crucial addendum to the Augustinian account of love from the previous chapter provided by Eleonore Stump. To know a person, she argued, is a second-person kind of knowledge. It is to know the narrative of their lives shaped by the objects of their care. The things we care about—our plans, relationships, heartbreaks, favorites, and so on—cohere to narrate who we are, so much so that if we really wanted to know someone (rather than merely know *about* them), we would have to hear the story of their lives, especially with reference to the things they have loved. As I care about various things in my life, they connect one with another because they are things that I have internalized and made my own. Care is the consistent denominator between the variously important moments and things in our lives, and it connects them.

Caring, Frankfurt notes in addition, identifies what those final ends are by which we actually live. He says: "Insofar as we care about anything, we make various things important to us—namely, the things that we care about, together with whatever may be indispensable as a means to them. This provides us with aims and ambitions, thereby making it possible for us to formulate courses of action that are not entirely pointless…without final ends, we would find nothing truly important as an end or as a means."[60] If our courses of action have no terminus, no

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[59] Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, 83.

[60] Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 52–3.

point of completion, it would be hard to make sense of life and the things we seek to accomplish. The objects of importance about which we care locate those points of completion, what Frankfurt calls a final end.[61] We then organize the other things we care about in virtue of accomplishing these ends. Without them, our courses of action would be meaningless. The final end of my writing this chapter is to complete this project on gender, and it is so because it is important to me that I complete the project. "If we had no final ends," maintains Frankfurt, "it is more than desire that would be empty and vain. It is life itself. For living without goals and purposes is living with nothing to do."[62] Caring and importance, then, detect the ends for which we organize our means, and this makes sense of all of our courses of action in life.

So care appropriates importance, provides thematic unity by means of our life narratives and identifies the final ends for which we act. But we can be even more specific, for the most important type of care is *love*: "love is a particular mode caring."[63] Particular instances of caring count as love, just as particular desires are instances of care. It seems to me that Frankfurt becomes less than useful for our purposes at this point (even though I agree that love is a species of care), for, on his view, the conditions under which care becomes love preclude intuitive objects of love. For Frankfurt, there are six conditions under which care is love: (1) when care is disinterested; (2) when care is ineluctably personal; (3) when one identifies with the object of care; (4) when care imposes necessity upon the will; (5) when care is involuntary; (6) when care

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[61] To be clear, a "final end" for Frankfurt is an end for the sake of which certain acts are performed and in life we have as many final ends as we have courses of action, whereas in Christian theology, a "final end" is that for which a whole life is lived, a "chief end." These are related, but not the same.

[62] Frankfurt, *Necessity, Volition, and Love*, 84.

[63] Frankfurt, *Taking Ourselves Seriously*, 40.

provides us a reason to act.[64] Though it seems to me plausible to say that *sometimes* instances of love meet some or all of these criteria, they are not always necessary conditions for love. (1) is incompatible with the Augustinian theology of love from the last chapter, for loving God is both good in itself and good *for us*, and loving must not place its objects in competition. We may also love non-personal objects, making (2) and (3) irrelevant. I may love Brazilian food, but it need not be *this* Coxinha (I'll take any!), nor do I need to identify with the interests of the food (as if it had any). Further, it seems too strong to say that love cannot be voluntary or chosen; there are many things that are good that I *should* love, the absence of which would be a moral fault in me. If I fail to love the poor and those without a voice, as Prov. 31:8–9 calls me to do, I should want to acquire such a love and engage in practices which would cultivate it. It seems to me better to say, therefore, that care is love when it conforms to the description of love in the previous chapter, that is, when it is produced by the Holy Spirit, made possible by the capacities with which we were created, implanting objects of love in our memories, shaping our narratives, forging communities and all the rest.

Nevertheless, Frankfurt is clear that we are what we love. This extends from the nature of caring; if love consists in those desires that I have appropriated and with which I have identified, then those desires are *who I am*, in some sense. "The willing acceptance of attitudes, thoughts, and feelings transforms their status," Frankfurt claims, "They are no longer merely items that happen to appear in a certain psychic history. We have taken responsibility for them as authentic *expressions of ourselves*."[65] If loving provides the coherence to the sequence of my life, infuses my life with importance and identifies the ends for which I act, then it is by loving that "our

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[64] See *The Reasons of Love*, 79–80 for (1)–(4) and *Taking Ourselves Seriously*, 42 for (5)–(6).

[65] *Taking Ourselves Seriously*, 8. Emphasis in the original.

individual identities are most fully expressed and defined."[66] We organize our lives according to

what we love, and without loving, our lives would be held captive to an insidious kind of

boredom according to which "we have no interest in what is going on," an inhuman state where

our lives do not really feel like our own.[67] Instead, most human beings feel a pull to be

wholehearted, or not to feel a sense of division and dislocation in one's desires. There are many

ways an individual may be divided: their second-order desires may conflict with their first-order

desires, as is the case with the first pornography addict. Likewise, a person may have a

conflicting set of second-order desires, such that she both does and does not want to be moved by

certain desires.[68] The person who says, "For I do not do the good I want [second order], but the

evil I do not want is what I do [first order]" (Rom. 7:19) knows what it is to be divided. Being

wholehearted, then, is a matter of unification: "The wholehearted person is fully settled as to

what he wants, and what he cares about."[69] On this point, Frankfurt is quite controversial, for he

believes that it is entirely possible for a person who is "dreadfully and irredeemably wicked" to

be wholehearted, so long as he is unified in his desire to be that way.[70] Eleonore Stump criticizes

Frankfurt on this matter, claiming that such unification around moral wrong would inaccurately

be called whole-heartedness. Moral wrong, according to Stump's Thomist picture, is always a

fragmenting force in one's life.[71] This is also true for the Augustinian view of love I outlined, for

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[66] Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 50.

[67] Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 54.

[68] See Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, 164–5.

[69] Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 95.

[70] Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, 98.

[71] Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 126. Though I think Stump is correct to critique Frankfurt, I think it is too strong to say that internal integration of desire is necessary for love (cf. 131–34). It seems to me that such an integration is only available as an eschatological reality, when all concupiscence is purged from human life. The life of the Christian

it is the weight of every human to love and find their rest in God. At best, persons who passionately orient their lives around evil are deceived under the distorting enchantments of original sin. Such a person is not whole-hearted; they are broken hearted and fail to know it.

Despite the need for this corrective, Frankfurt *has* shown us that Coakley needs to be much more specific when claiming that gender is a desire. If gender is to form our identities, then it must not be *mere* desire, but *love*, for love is that specific kind of desire that takes into account our cares and what is important to us, thereby forming our identities. Our gendered desires are those we appropriate and with which we identify. That is what makes them love. Not all desires do this, but only those that count as love. With this preparatory discussion in mind, let us turn to a full statement of the model I would like to defend, namely, that gender is love.

5.3 Gender as Love: The Model

I think that Coakley is basically correct in her claim that gender is defined by that which makes us who are, our *identities*, something that cannot be separated from our basic orientation to God, the one in whom our identities are made whole. But desire is not the right word for what shapes identity, or at least it must be specified quite heavily. Rather, gender is love, for love makes us who we are. Recall from the previous chapter that we are created as lovers by nature, for our weight is our love (a property with which we were created even before any creaturely relations into which we enter). We were created with the ability to love and with a proper object of ultimate love: God. Only when we are properly ordered to the love of God, brought about by the Holy Spirit, are we genuinely happy. Or, in Frankfurt's terms, only when we love God with undivided wills can we be wholehearted. But this does not preclude the love of earthly goods, for

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until then, I am persuaded, is characterized by Gal. 5:17: "For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want." If integration requires the elimination of such opposition, then it can only come with the resurrection.

we can love God in these goods, recognizing them as gifts from the Divine gift-giver. All of our objects of love are stamped into our memories and place us in a narrative that details our true selves, making us who we are. Loving rightly sanctifies us; loving wrongly makes us into dominators of the beloved. Communities and social identities are forged by those who share common objects of love, for they share similar identities. To modulate it to Frankfurt's terms, care is love when it operates by means of our weight, or that natural ability to appropriate objects of love to ourselves. We love when our second and first order desires align toward an object that implants in our memories, shapes our stories and forms our communities. When the Holy Spirit indwells us, our second order desires are radically recalibrated toward God, and the slow and sanctifying process of having our first order desires come into line begins.

Altering Coakley's theology of desire to an Augustinian theology of love, as I plan to do, is no slight modification, however. It carries with it implications for the order she invokes and for the kinds of transformation undergone by gender. These will become clear as I proceed, but a hint as to where the differences lie is found in the objections I have already made to Coakley's view. The objects of love that inform gender and the particular way in which they are redeemed will be particular points of difference, as will the eschatological vision that undergirds it. Thus, though there are deep resonances, and my view is not incorrectly seen as an extension of Coakley's, it cannot be said to be a view with which she identifies or recognizes as her own.

So what is the model of gender that I am presenting?[72] Gender is ultimately about the organization of goods by which the sexed body is socially manifested, in which the lover

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[72] Recall that, given the epistemic restriction to which I committed myself in chapter three, I seek to offer a model, not a full–blown theory, of gender. Gender is remarkably complex, and a model acknowledges that complexity at the outset, offering instead a simplified, yet still truth-apt, construal of what it seeks to capture, like the model of an airplane captures reliably what an airplane must be like.

identifies with the beloved, shaping who she is. To begin unpacking this claim, let us consider

human nature. When God created human beings, a number of traits went into categorizing just

what their natures would be like, features the possession of which makes one human and the

lacking of which makes one another kind of thing. I do not pretend to know what all of these

features are; but I *am* committed to the fact that there are at least three. First, human beings are

sexed;[73] second, human beings are created with the capacity to love the world around them;

third, human beings are created to be social. It would be hard to deny these properties of human

nature, even if disagreement exists about the precise details involved therein. There are

theological reasons to think that human beings are naturally sexed, but suffice it for now to say

that there has been, in point of fact, no human being who has entirely *lacked* those biological

features that inform one's sex. Having ambiguous genitalia, or XXY chromosomes, or some

other condition associated with intersexuality does not mean that someone is not sexed; it might

mean that they are a different sex, or possess an unclear sex, or that they are experiencing

impediments to their proper function with respect to certain gonads, or something else. Sex is

not, however, *absent*. That is a question about how many sexes there are and how to classify

individuals according to them, not about *whether* there are sexes.

Further, it would be hard to argue that human nature lacks the ability to love. Someone

might lack love of the good or love of the people around them. But they very likely love

something else instead; absolute boredom, in Frankfurt's sense, seems like a practical

impossibility, so long as the conditions for the capacity to love are met (like the proper function

of the requisite faculties). But I will assume love's participation in human nature, on the

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[73] Until the following chapter, I will remain silent about how many sexes there are. A discussion of that question will require a discussion of intersexuality/Disorders of Sexual Development, a topic best treated in conjunction with the doctrines of creation and redemption.

Augustinian theology of love I have defended. As Augustine has already reminded us, there is "no one of course who doesn't love, but the question is, what do they love? So we are urged not to love, but to choose what we love."[74] Third, human beings are social creatures, and this is a complicated claim that has received a tremendous amount of attention in theology.[75] Whatever its nuances, it is not too controversial to say that human beings are creatures who, under suitably favorable conditions, associate with one another on the basis of something which binds them together. An Augustinian theology of love will go beyond this; since "human nature is a social entity," and the particular societies into which they enter organize themselves differ according to the objects of their love (ultimately a love of God or a love of self), humans are always pre-disposed to gather and to do so according to whether they are occupants of the heavenly or earthly cities.[76] Human beings, then, are naturally sexed, naturally possess the capacity to love and are naturally social.

These three properties of human nature, I contend, are not unrelated. Rather, we manifest our sexes in our social lives by means of loving particular goods that pertain to the sexed body, thereby granting to them a social meaning. A helpful way to think about this is with recourse to Eleonore Stump's notion of "the offices of love." To love something is inherently a relation, as Augustine maintained, something which binds two things together. Two persons may be in a

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[74] *Serm.* 34.2. English translation from Augustine, *Sermons 20–50*, trans. Edmund Hill, vol. III/2, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991).

[75] For a treatment of the question with which I find myself in agreement, see Harriet A. Harris, "Should We Say That Personhood Is Relational?," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51, no. 2 (May 1998): 214–34.

[76] Cf. *de Civitate Dei*, XII.28.27 and *de bono coniugali*, I.1, both of which make this same claim.

relationship of love when they serve as one another's object of love,[77] but something must be said about how these love relationships differ from one another. We can do so with recourse to the offices of love, which are "differing *kinds* of relationship of love," and "the nature of an office circumscribes the sort of union that is appropriate to the love of that office, and so it also delimits the sort of love appropriate within that office."[78] Examples of offices of love include mother and daughter, husband and wife, consumer and consumed (as in the case of, say, the love of food). Such offices specify just what kind of acts of love are appropriate to obtain within the relationship as well as what kinds of goods are needed for that office to obtain. All of us occupy many different offices of love in our lives, all at once, even in a single day. On my model, one such office of love, in fact one very *sizeable* office that takes into account many different objects of love, is our gender.

What I mean is this: there are many things we love because we are sexed beings, just like we love things because we are mothers or fathers. The relation of love in question is the one that obtains between us *as sexed individuals* and the objects of our love. As we love these things, moreover, we acquire a social role by means of new norms that are attached to it. For instance, there are primary goods we love as sexed individuals. These are, for instance, other people—in marriage, reproduction or sexual attraction—but may also include things like clothing, the roles we play in jobs or in the household, the food we choose to consume or the music to which we listen. There are also secondary goods we love in order to facilitate the primary goods we love as sexed beings. Someone might love wearing certain kinds of clothes in order to facilitate the love

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[77] In the case of persons, this is bidirectional, where the persons love one another. In the case of love for non-personal objects, of course, the relation is unidirectional, where the beloved does not need to reciprocate the love (because it obviously cannot).

[78] Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 98.

they have for a particular sexual partner, maybe to impress them, and once we take into account the complex web of goods loved in order to facilitate primary goods, we see just how large this office of love can be. There is a variety of secondary objects of love that have ties to the primary relation of love. Imagine a brand new father who feels like everything about his life connects back to the primary love relationship he has for his baby, whether it is the activities with which he is involved day to day, or those from which he feels he must refrain, or the way he spends his money. In such a case, he has a primary good he loves in virtue of his sexed body, namely his child as a father, and many secondary goods informed by the primary good.[79] Now, *whether* the things we love in virtue of our sexed bodies are appropriately loved in this way is a separate question, for it remains true that very many things are loved in virtue of sexed bodies. We shall explore some concrete case studies below, but the basic point is this: our gender is an office of love when we love various things in virtue of our sexed bodies.

Are there inherently gendered goods that serve as appropriate objects of love *qua* sexed human beings, or can any good be loved in this office? It seems to me that, most of the time, it is the latter, though I do not wish to close the door on the existence of intrinsically gendered goods. The love of a father for his daughter, for instance, is intrinsically gendered, since it is not the office obtaining between a *mother* and a daughter. There are particular jobs, too, that have historically been intrinsically gendered, like a wet nurse. But, by and large, goods are gendered when we give to them a social meaning by loving them as sexed beings. There is nothing, for instance, *intrinsically* gendered about wearing dresses, but doing so is gendered insofar as it has been an object of love with which a particular sex identifies. This, I should say, is where social

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[79] It might be strange to call a baby a "good," but I intend to use a term as broadly as possible. A beloved good can be a person, a relationship, an item, a position, a role, a memory and much more.

constructionist views have made significant contributions to our understanding of gender—many, if not most, of the goods we love in virtue of our sex are not intrinsically gendered but acquire a social meaning that is gendered.

So, we love a variety of primary of primary and secondary goods as sexed beings, creating offices of love, which are our genders. As we love these as sexed beings, our sexes acquire a social meaning. But what is this social meaning? Recall Charlotte Witt's distinction between feeding and dining.[80] Feeding is a biological function, one that requires only biological features like mouths, digestive systems and the like. Dining, by contrast, is what happens when feeding acquires new social roles and norms to which it is responsive and under which it is evaluable. To feed, all one needs are biological organs; dining is feeding when it takes place in a particular context, with additional norms and processes and for a different purpose. Dining only occurs in rooms appropriate for it (for instance, a dining room), is governed by norms of propriety (for instance, politeness) and accomplishes a different purpose (for instance, gathering some friends for a time of fellowship). It would be incorrect to say that dining is entirely different from feeding; rather, feeding is "elaborated" into dining; it is what results when feeding is socially manifested.

So it is with gender as an office of love. Sexed bodies are biological entities, something we possess apart from any creaturely social relations, but they acquire social meaning by relating to social goods that provide for them new norms, contexts and purposes. When a male loves a social good like a particular style of dress, he acquires a new social role as a man and is evaluable under such a role by virtue of the way he appropriates that good to himself by that

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[80] See chapter three and Charlotte Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 37.

love. It would be misguided to say that here the gender is *constructed*, for it cannot occur apart from the sex from which it is elaborated, nor is the process by which it occurs strictly social. The love that guides us to appropriate goods according to our sexed bodies is a part of our human nature in a way that particular social goods are not, and a full explanation of the process by which gender arises could not occur merely by recourse to social explanations. In chapter two I distinguished between subjective social construction (where the process by which a social entity comes into being is social) and objective social construction (where the entity itself is social). On neither level is gender merely social. This is a view of gender in which social considerations are key, but just because something has a social *meaning* does not mean that it is socially *constructed*. On my view, an account of gender restricted only to social explanations would be incomplete. Claims about non-social human features, like the capacity to love and the sexed body, must be included, both in the process and the result.

But gender is not just a matter of occupying roles and being evaluable to norms. Such a construal would appear somewhat lifeless. As the intransigence and vehemence of cultural debate indicates, gender is about *who we are*. It is about our *identities*, those aspects of who we are about which we care most deeply. This is why it is important to talk about it in terms of our loves. As Augustine and Frankfurt tell us, if we want to know someone's identity, we must inquire about what they love. If we want to inquire about someone's *gender* identity, therefore, we must see what gendered goods they love and how loving those goods gives coherence to their gendered selves. These goods, loved *qua* sexed body, are brought into the individual's very self, implanting themselves in their memories and forming their personal narratives. As we care about them, they are incorporated into that story we tell about ourselves which provides our lives with its thematic coherence. The variety of objects of gendered loves interweave to guide our action in

the world and persist in our lives to mold our stories. We find ourselves desiring certain goods in virtue of our sexed bodies, we affirm those desires within ourselves, incorporating them and allowing them to persist as who we are.[81] Interestingly, we might think of gender dysphoria as a particular kind of division within the system of first and second order gendered desires a person finds themselves having. Perhaps they desire a particular kind of gendered good, but *wished* they had other desires for other gendered goods. Such a conflict disintegrates the self, highlighting just why dysphoria is so difficult for individuals.

Everything said so far is true of gender broadly understood. Christians theologians, however, must say more, for they are committed to the fact that there is no aspect of being human, no matter how complex or culturally fraught, that is not fit for redemption by the gospel. This gospel provides the moral guidance necessary for the right evaluation of goods loved in virtue of sex, for very often these goods are loved wrongly or should not be loved at all as a gendered good. As Coakley rightly claims, "theology involves not merely the *metaphysical* task of adumbrating a vision of God, the world, and humanity, but simultaneously the *epistemological* task of cleansing, reordering, and redirecting the apparatuses of one's own thinking, desiring, and seeing."[82] Concrete examples of such things will be provided below, but it is not difficult to imagine how this might go. Certain goods are sometimes said to be designated solely to be loved by those with male bodies, say, the ordination to the priesthood. Debates about the ordination of women are, in many ways, debates about *whether ordination is a gendered good*, a good only to be loved and appropriated by those with particular bodies. Is ordination a gendered good to be

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[81] I should be clear that such affirmation need not be intentional or conscious; we might have deep desires to be certain kinds of people and only come to such knowledge through introspection, or a tragic event, or therapy, or some other moment of conscious discovery.

[82] *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 20.

loved in virtue of one's sex, or should it be seen as a good to be loved independent of sex? For some, it is unjust to preclude in a categorical way all those with female bodies from loving this good and occupying the social role it creates. For others, that this is a gendered good is clear from revelation, and God would not reveal to the church something that is harmful to it. However we settle that question,[83] Christians should understand that there is an additional responsibility to seek the proper moral evaluation of gendered goods.

At this juncture, it is important to recall Augustine's theology of love. For any object of love, the beloved is loved properly, rightly and in a holy way *when it is loved in God*. The world is full of beautiful things to love, on an Augustinian picture, but it is the *manner* in which they are loved that makes all of the difference. They cannot be loved above God, who alone provides the true felicity for which human beings were designed. There is an order to love, and while this notion accords with Coakley's understanding of the order of desire, it also says a good deal more. Certain things are to be loved more, less or equally. I can love my new car, my daughter and my God, but if that is the order in which I love them, I have made a dreadful mistake. Additionally, all things are to be loved as gifts from God, in the manner specified by the gift giver. Since all creatures bear the marks of their Creator and will be retained in the eschaton insofar as they are stripped of their sin, we can love God through them. As Stump avers, "any created good loved for the real goodness in it will lead eventually to an awareness of the creator of that good and to a love for God, if only the love for the good in that created thing is allowed to deepen."[84] In short, love always has a morally evaluative aspect if it is Christian love.

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[83] For a particularly persuasive answer, see William G. Witt, *Icons of Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Theology for Women's Ordination* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020).

[84] Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 442.

So it will be with a Christian theology of gender. As Coakley crisply says: "It is not sex that is the problem, but worldly values."[85] On this model, it is not gender that is a problem, but which gendered goods are loved and the character of that love. There are various ways in which gendered goods are loved contrary to godly love. As mentioned, perhaps a good is inappropriately turned into a gendered good, when in fact it is something to be enjoyed by anyone of any gender, so long as it was received rightly. Perhaps a gendered good is received wrongly; where it was meant to be accepted with gratitude, it is turned into an object of selfish consumption. Associating it with gender would enable a host of vices that deteriorates the lover. Or again, a gendered good may be the sort of thing a person should not allow to form their identity. Perhaps the way they love it cultivates vices like arrogance, dominance or greed. Or, it may simply be the kind of thing that should not inform one's identity. When Paul states that "whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her" (1 Cor. 6:16), he is saying that loving a prostitute is the wrong kind of thing to love because all objects of love are unifying, especially sexual ones, and it is wrong to treat an identity-forming union as a means to temporary and lascivious self-gratification, especially since other human beings are involved. The governing principle of the kinds of moral evaluation involved require both openness (the world is full of goods that may also be gendered goods) and restrictiveness (but the way in which we love them must undergo careful scrutiny), and is captured well in 1 Timothy 4:4–5: "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by God's word and by prayer."

The interesting thing about a Christian theology of gender is that there is, in point of fact, nothing (or very few things) explicitly stated in Scripture about what women and men *must* be

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[85] Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, 50.

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like or what the specific goods are by which a woman or a man *must* be identified. Even when

Paul commands the Corinthian church to "act like men [andrizesthe]" in 1 Cor. 16:13, he is

addressing the church in its entirety, men *and* women, likely commending them to be

courageous.[86] Where commands are given specifically to men or women, they are often

injunctions about how best to live *as Christians* within the culture in which they find themselves,

a culture having already provided gendered goods for them to love. In their world, *these* are

gendered goods; how should a Christian think about them? Such was the case regarding head

veils, as discussed in chapter three. It would be wrong to read the text of 1 Cor. 11 and conclude

that *what it means to be a woman* is to wear a head covering, full stop and without contextual

consideration. Paul was providing instruction on how best to relate to a particular gendered good

of the day—a head veil—in a way that best reflect the fact that a woman's worth is derived from

her union to Christ (as is a man's worth), and that gendered goods should not be taken to

promote an alternative system of worth in competition with the church's identity in Christ.[87]

Ultimately, Scripture is concerned with the ways in which the gospel governs how gendered

goods are loved, whatever those goods might be. The details of such a claim will be unpacked in

the following chapter, especially as we consider the implications of the doctrines of sin and

redemption as they relate to gendered love, but for now, keep in mind the Augustinian analysis

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[86] See the discussion in Cynthia Long Westfall, *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 50–51. Of course, I cannot survey every passage of Scripture that appears to say what traits men and women must have in order to be men and women. Here I defer to Westfall's masterful book, which covers the majority of these (since they are mostly in Paul).

[87] Even the famous—or notorious—woman of Proverbs 31:10–31 is probably not best read as a straightforward description of biblical womanhood, whatever that might mean. The figures of "Lady Wisdom" and "Lady Folly" in the book's opening chapters serve as the complementary bookend to this final figure, indicating that these women are models to be imitated (or avoided, in the case of Folly) by women and men *alike*. For an argument for this reading, see Craig Bartholomew and Ryan P. O'Dowd, *Old Testament Wisdom Literature: A Theological Introduction* (Downers Grover, IL: Intervarsity Academic, 2011), chapter 5 and Albert M. Wolters, *The Song of the Valiant Woman: Studies in the Interpretation of Proverbs 31:10–31* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2001).

of rightly loved goods. Rightly loved gendered goods are those we recognize as gifts from God, to be used according to the specifications of the gift-giver, which is to say for the flourishing of humanity, in the promotion of kindness, gentleness and virtue. Wrongly loved gendered goods are those we love with the intent to dominate them, for rapacious purposes, in a life contrary to that depicted by the kingdom of God. In the next chapter, sexual assault will be seen as the paradigm case of such wrongly loved gendered goods.

Finally, since gender is not only an *individual* matter but something that characterizes persons in their communities and cultures, it is important to provide a theological analysis of its broader social dimensions. Already we have seen that, on an Augustinian analysis, a people is defined by the objects of its love. What makes a number of persons a society rather than a random gathering is that they share objects of love, primarily God or self. So it is with gender. A people agrees upon goods to be loved by those with male sexed bodies, and this common agreement characterizes the gendering of the group. Just as a common agreement on the object of love defines a people, so also a common agreement on the objects of *gendered* love defines the *genders* of a people. Yet, the inhabitants of the heavenly city have God as its ultimate object of love and this overarching love qualifies and reshapes all other loves. Thus, in whatever culture or society a Christian finds herself, as a member of the heavenly city she must constantly adjudicate the objects of gendered love found her in her society in accordance with their consistency with her love for God. The city of God does not have gender categories, but it does constrain or widen, affirm or deny, challenge or approve the genders found in any human society in which its

members find themselves. Likewise, the earthly city is characterized by a love of self and of domination, and this love warps and curves the love of gendered goods toward that end.[88]

I have argued that gender is about the appropriation of social goods by means of our loves. But is this an adequate ontology of gender according to the measure specified by the four theses of chapter three? I believe so. The most obvious so far has been the satisfaction of the fourth thesis, according to which gender must be seen as concerned with our identities and the way one organizes goods and appropriates them to oneself. Here the theology of love outlined by Augustine, especially as it supplements Coakley's notion of desire, is the operative means of appropriating social goods in order to shape identity. Is it a form of gender essentialism, thereby avoiding gender skepticism, while still evading biological essentialism? It is, but the kind of essentialism at play is very attenuated. On my model, the kind essence "man" requires nothing other than a male body and the identity forming love of particular social goods, and the kind essence "woman" requires nothing other than a female body doing the same.[89] Note that this essentialism is useful for virtually nothing other than the prevention of gender skepticism; it does not say which social goods are properly masculine or feminine. *That* question is not answered by the essentialism; it is answered by the criteria for moral evaluation outlined above. It also takes into account the apparent arbitrariness of gendered goods pointed out by social constructionists. So, it is not inherently unnatural for a man to wear a dress, let us say, for a dress is not an

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[88] To clarify once again, it is not the case that all members of the heavenly city *consistently live according to its characteristic traits,* and vice versa. It would be perfectly consistent to tell a Christian, "You are a member of the heavenly city whose love is for God—start acting like one!"

[89] It is worth nothing that this is not *necessarily* a trans-exclusive ontology of gender. As many theorists have pointed out, the only modification that would need to be made to this view would be that the organization of goods would be organized around the *perception* of a male body (*mutatis mutandis* for female bodies). The actual possession of a female body is not needed to be perceived as having one. Though I do not make that move here, it is one available to someone who finds this model of gender attractive and wishes to accommodate for trans* ontologies.

intrinsically gendered good. But if wearing the dress is done *for purposes that are unjust*, or without regard to the way clothing is a gift from God to be used in the ways God intended clothing to be used, then men should not wear dresses.[90] But that is not because there is anything *about dresses* that make them feminine; it is not difficult to conceive of a world where societal norms make it perfectly expected for men to wear dresses. The more interesting question is how clothing is to be morally evaluated. The modest clothing mentioned in Scripture (i.e., 1 Tim. 2:9) addressed expressions of wealth and the acquisition of social capital through one's clothing, something that ran the risk of elitism and pride, which had no place in a gathering characterized by the gospel. The "poor person in dirty clothes" of James 2:2 is to be welcomed just as much as the person in wealthy clothes, and the wearing of clothes in order to make oneself a superior member of one's gender is the wrong way to associate with gendered goods. Now, there are a great deal of gendered goods that are, for all intents and purposes, just part of the cultural package we inherit, and they are hard to evaluate morally in a positive or a negative way. In these cases, it is fine to partake of them—but, of course, they can always be misused, and that must always be the concern of those Christians who love them.

This then satisfies the third thesis, that a viable ontology of gender must be consistent with and supportive of the cultivation of gendered justice. We must constantly ask ourselves whether our relationship to gendered goods is just and characteristic of the kingdom of God and of the kind of community shaped by Christ's gift. But this will always be a complicated business, at least until we are raised again in the new heavens and earth. A proper recognition of the noetic

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[90] For a powerful theological reflection on the nature of clothing, and the moral relevance of our having been clothed in Christ and made beautiful thereby, see Lauren F. Winner, *Wearing God: Clothing, Laughter, Fire, and Other Overlooked Ways of Meeting God* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 32–61. For further theological analysis, see Robert Covolo, *Fashion Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020).

effects of sin is crucial, for our assurance that we are relating well to the goods that make us men and women must always be provisional. Christians must be a people willing to give up the gendered goods they enjoy the moment they have been shown to be problematic; that means that Christians must be ready to recognize, admit to and correct the sexism in which virtually all societies are implicated. If it is the case—and it very often is—that men enjoy the attachment to a gendered good which is harmful to women, then they must surrender attachment to that good. It should be more obvious that a good that causes and promotes harm to women cannot be a good loved in God. The pursuit of gendered justice is a matter with which pilgrims on the road to their homeland must always concern themselves. We will be raised again as women and men, and only then will we rightly relate to the gendered goods in our lives. Here the sense of purification I promote is different from Coakley's; rather than instability and fluidity being introduced to the twoness of gender, I am suggesting that the nature of the purification has to do with the sinful loves by which we attach ourselves to gendered goods, a sickness from which we will not be healed until Christ returns. "[Y]our life is hidden with Christ in God," says the Apostle Paul in Colossians 3:3–4, and only "[w]hen Christ who is your life is revealed" will we be "revealed with him in glory." So it must be with our genders. Only when the fullness of our lives in Christ is revealed will our gendered lives be understood rightly.

So the model satisfies the theses required for an ontology of gender. We can also see that it is a suitable *theology* of gender. In the next chapter I shall trace the ways in which the biblical economy frames gender at its different stages, but for now consider one particularly powerful biblical vision of human love and gender, namely that of the Song of Songs. Coakley's work has been remarkably important in highlighting the salience of this book for understanding gender, and she argues that it is a prime example of the intertwining of gendered desire and desire for

God for which she advocates.[91] Much contemporary biblical scholarship now agrees with this approach to the text, arguing that the Song presents a vision of humanity where sexual love and love for God are delicately interdependent. This is a fact about how we were created both to love God supremely and as sexed beings called to express our sexed embodiment in appropriately social ways. The typical approaches to the Song have, however, been truncated in detrimental ways. Medieval interpreters tended to favor a strictly allegorical interpretation unrelated to sex or gender, whereas some contemporary commentators insist upon a strictly secular expression of human romantic love. Resisting this division requires seeing a deep connection between sexual love and the love for God, all while acknowledging that human beings do not usually compartmentalize their loves.

Here the work of Ellen Davis stands tall. If the Song is merely about human love, she contends, then "nowhere within the covers of the Bible is there a truly happy story about God and Israel (or God and the church) in love," for even in the richest expressions of love in Scripture there is a tinge of sorrow (Christ's death on the cross being a clear example).[92] Alternatively, if the Song is merely allegory for divine love, then "the Bible lacks any strong statement about love between man and woman enjoyed in the full mutuality and equality of status."[93] Yet, there are textual reasons to hold both together, for while the romantic love is readily seen in the Song, the fact that it is filled with citations from various portions of the

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[91] Coakley especially endorses the reading of Gregory of Nyssa, whose *Homilies on the Song of Songs* illustrate the gender reversals she maintains typify the purification of gender desire. See Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, chapter 1, Coakley, "Gregory of Nyssa" and Sarah Coakley, "Introduction - Gender, Trinitarian Analogies, and the Pedagogy of the Song," in *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Sarah Coakley (London: Blackwell, 2003), 1–13.

[92] Ellen F. Davis, "'The One Whom My Soul Loves': The Song of Songs," in *Getting Involved with God: Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 67.

[93] Davis, "'The One Whom My Soul Loves,'" 68.

Hebrew Bible, specifically passages directed to God, reveals a distinct divine orientation.[94] Davis proposes that we hold on to both, allowing the Song to show "that the sexual and the religious understandings of the Song are mutually informative, and that each is incomplete without the other. For a holistic understanding of our own humanity suggests that our religious capacity is linked with an awareness of our sexuality…genuine intimacy brings us into contact with the sacred."[95] In the Song, it seems, we find loved expressed toward a gendered good (in this case, the romantic partner) that also finds its culmination and perfection in the love for God.

The word consistently employed for the relationship between the two speakers of the Song is usually "love" or "beloved." That the woman addresses her lover as "you whom my soul loves" (1:7, among others) is meant to trigger an allusion to the chief command of the Hebrew Bible to love the LORD with all one's heart (as in Deut. 6:5). But in 7:10, we do find the woman saying, "I am my beloved's and his *desire* is for me." *T'shuqah*, the term for desire, is found only here and in Genesis 3:16 and 4:7 (both in negative, sinful and dominating senses), lending significant warrant to a deliberate echo. But the reversal is key: here the man's desire is for the woman, not the other way around, as in the cursed state of Gen. 3:16. What we find is a restoration of the original intent of creation, a reparation of the relationship characterized by sinful desire and rule after the Fall. The result is a replacement of unjust and unequal desire with harmonious and mutually beneficial love, where it is said "I am my beloved's and my beloved is

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[94] See especially 4:8–15, calling to mind the restoration of the Temple's glory by reference to Lebanon (cf. Isa. 60:13), along with several echoes of 1 Kings 6–7. It is worth bearing in mind that citations then did not operate in the verbatim manner of contemporary practice.

[95] Ellen F. Davis, "The Song of Songs," in *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 233, 235. For a similar approach, though much more reliant on a particular defense of the place of the Song in the canon and the nature of allegory, see Robert W. Jenson, *Song of Songs*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

mine" (6:3).[96] The right kind of relation to gendered goods, so it seems, is not one of mere desire (which in the Hebrew bible is a term designated toward sin) but specifically of love.

There are further indications that what the Song seeks to restore is the love with and for which we were created. There are frequent allusions to a "garden," and commentators do not hesitate to associate them with the Garden of Eden. Song of Songs 4:11–5:1 describes the setting in which the lovers meet, and it is a garden that flows with milk and honey, a scene at once recalling the state of creation and God's covenantal promises of land. Davis claims that such a scene "represents the reversal of that primordial exile from Eden…At the theological level of interpretation, the Song as a whole represents a return to the Garden of God, the place where humanity once enjoys full intimacy with God."[97] Yet, such restoration does not involve the undoing of the sexed body or any removal of the twoness according to which we were created, for "it is precisely our embracing sexually differentiated bodies whose union is sanctified by its likeness to God's own love. The heart is indeed the seat of love, but it is those hands and their placement—and the lips, and the paired organs of pleasure and procreation, and the tongues and…—which are the heart's actuality, at least for the Song."[98] The hope and restoration promised by the Song are in continuity with the categories of creation, including our sexed bodies.

Be that as it may, the Song does not portray the recovery of creation in uncomplicated terms. This can be seen in two places. First, in a moment of desperate seeking after her lover, the woman is stripped and assaulted by the "sentinels" of the city (5:7). Here we are reminded that

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[96] Likely an echo of the covenantal formula, "I will be their God and they shall be my people" (i.e., Jeremiah 32:38).

[97] Davis, "Song of Songs," 232, 267.

[98] Jenson, *Song of Songs*, 33.

even as we yearn after God in this world, such yearning is constrained by enduring conditions of sin, and the particular gendered sin in question is that of sexual violence.[99] Though our love of gendered goods is purified as we seek after God, the antithesis is always lurking, namely, the desire to dominate, control and harm the beloved. Second, and relatedly, the Song reminds us that our loves in this world remain fragmentary. Though it is a love poem, the Song does not seem to culminate in the permanent and blessed union of the lovers. There are moments of elated love, to be sure, but there are also moments of desperate seeking in the darkness, something medieval commentators such as John of the Cross and Theresa of Ávila emphasized. The Song "is not, upon close reading, a poem of love fulfilled. If the lovers do live 'happily ever after,' we never hear about it."[100] The love is proleptic, constantly seeking the beloved until that eschatological moment when it will be truly fulfilled. Thus, 3:1 describes a dark night of the soul: "Upon my bed at night, I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer." We might also consider 5:6–8 or 8:14 as depictions of a searching love called to hasten toward the beloved, but the point of the Song is this: just as God is hidden and our love for God must at times wrestle with periods of absence and dissatisfaction, so also must our love for gendered goods show the appropriate epistemic restraint, always evaluating whether they are appropriately loved. Creation's love will be restored and brought to its genuine perfection, but this is what the Song *promises*, not *depicts*. We know the direction in which it will head, but we do not as yet experience it fully.

These all too brief soundings in the Song of Songs, I submit, illustrate the central components of my model of gender. The Song interweaves the loves that make us women and

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[99] Cf. Davis, "Song of Songs," 278–9.

[100] Davis, "'The One Whom My Soul Loves,'" 79.

men with the love we have for God, showing us that they can be mutually informative. The love we have for gendered goods (here, preeminently, other persons) is transformed by the love we have for God just as it grants a glimpse into the kind of relationship God has with God's covenant people. Here the categories of creation are not eliminated but restored and perfected, meaning that our gendered redemption is not an elimination of masculinity and femininity but their purification from sin. So we can retain a basic gender essentialism, but we must also take into account the Song's constant seeking, reminding us that the redemption of our bodies and genders is yet incomplete. We await a resurrection in which we will see God in beatitude, and only then will our seeking end. But love will not end (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8), for the enjoyment of God knows no end. This is the standard against which one can measure the unjust practices of gender. In the Song of Songs, I propose along with Coakley, Jenson and Davis, we find "the chief biblical resource for a believing understanding of human sexuality, of the *lived meaning* of 'Male and female he created them.'"[101]

Let us take stock of the model of gender just proposed. Gender is the appropriation of social goods according to the sexed body. We are created as sexed, with an ability to love and with an impulse toward forming societies. These things come together in the ways we love as sexed beings, specifically in the relationship established between human as sexed beings and the objects of their love. This relationship can be seen as a particular office of love with norms and roles specific to it, norms that elaborate it into a social plane, granting to it a social meaning. They then become *gendered* goods, the loving of which shapes our identity. They imprint themselves into our memories and weave themselves into our stories, providing our lives with thematic coherence and making us who we are as gendered beings. We care about these goods,

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[101] Jenson, *Song of Songs*, 14.

and they shape our attitudes, establish the everyday goals of our lives and appropriate the meaning provided by these goods. There are further theological considerations, and they come primarily in the form of the moral evaluation of these goods, in the order according to which they are loved and so forth. Gendered goods must be loved in God, in the order intended for proper use and according to the specifications of the gift-giver. They must be loved justly, but the pursuit of such just love is always incomplete this side of the eschaton. Our genders are healed in the same way that all things are healed by God, namely, restored to the original purposes provided in creation, yet without losing the eschatological surplus. It is gender essentialism, for a man is a male who appropriates social goods by his love, but it does not say *which* goods are to be loved in any one time or place. Much more relevant are the constraints placed upon the way in which they are loved. This allows gender to have sufficient cultural diversity—the beloved goods will always differ amongst times and places—while retaining the stability of gendered categories, insofar as they are produced by the relevant properties of human nature, namely, sex, love and sociability.

Up until now, the discussion has remained theoretical, attempting to talk about the properties of gender in the abstract. But any attempt to provide a theological account of gender must be anchored in the real world, measured against the actual experiences of gender had by real people. It must be able to make sense of these experiences adequately, and the moral evaluation it provides must be able to address concrete situations facing ordinary people. In the final section, I will attempt to do this by considering some brief case studies that depict contemporary experiences of gender. I will focus specifically on conceptions of masculinity, for consistency and simplicity, but also because contemporary masculinity lends itself to moral evaluation quite easily and obviously, as the examples depicting its wrongness will show. These

studies will therefore provide the raw data against which to test my model, thereby allowing its theological value to be shown in its fullest light.

5.4 Case Studies

In considering the applicability of my model to concrete expressions of gender, I begin with guns. The United States has a complex history with guns, a particular aspect of which has to do with the way it has associated gun ownership and use with masculinity.[102] Much of this association is the product of the way the gun industry perceived the most effective means to sell its product, namely, attaching emotive purchase to firearms by means of their ability to develop boys into men. Michael Austin describes the strategy employed by one major firearms manufacturer:

> As time passed, the gun industry succeeded in attaching emotional value to firearms. So, one reason Americans love guns is that the people who sold guns to them elicited that love. They did so in a variety of ways, one of which was to make the gun a rite of passage for young boys. Winchester had a marketing strategy called the "boy plan," which fostered this idea. One ad stated that "Every real American father or mother is proud these days to have a boy who can place five shots straight in the bull's eye and wear a Winchester sharpshooter medal." More tellingly, Winchester's campaign to win over parents included the claim that a gun will "make a man of any boy," teaching him the trait of self-reliance. Guns were thus tied to class and masculinity.[103]

Tied into the development of a boy into a man, then, was the possession of a gun and the increasing ability to use it accurately. As time wore on, further masculine elements were added to gun ownership, particularly the development of the man as a "citizen-protector."[104] The citizen-protector sees it as his duty to be an everyday defender of the populace against crimes, and the particular defense he believes himself to offer is the courage to injure or kill that is

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[102] For the broader history, see Pamela Haag, *The Gunning of America* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

[103] Michael W. Austin, *God and Guns in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 6.

[104] See Jennifer Carlson, *Citizen-Protectors: The Everyday Politics of Guns in an Age of Decline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

lacking in the ordinary man or woman. But it is distinctly *as a man* that he believes himself to be a protector, for the role of a citizen-protector arose during a time of economic variability, when "many men [felt] as if they can no longer assert their masculinity as providers or productive workers. Guns offer a way to do so."[105] Thus, a citizen-protector is a man who, believing it a part of masculinity to offer protection to the people around him, owns a gun and is willing to use it harmfully under the pretense of threat, even when those around him lack the courage to do so.

In the model presented above, we might say that the object of love being identified with in virtue of the possession of a sexed body is a gun. Guns, on this phenomenon, are fit objects of love for those with a male body. Guns make him a man. When a male has a gun, he is evaluable under new norms, such as the expectation to have the courage to harm. He is expected to be self-reliant; and this is the particular social role he acquires. The male with a gun becomes a man because he is a citizen-protector, one who is not governed by fear but extraordinary courage. He is a man, and the social meaning of his loving attachment to guns makes him so.

What might a Christian moral evaluation of this gendered good look like? Of course, it will depend on the Christian and what kinds of moral norms they derive from their faith. Questions about Christianity and non-violence will have to be considered, as well as the role guns have in racialized violence. But the relevant question for our purposes is *whether* a gun should be a *gendered* good, especially in the creation of citizen-protectors. When we consider the kinds of character-shaping practices that must be in place to form such a man, it becomes clear that it is a highly problematic gendered good. Men who see themselves as needing to acquire sufficient courage to kill another human being when no one else is willing to do so find themselves having to learn to suppress the resistance to take another human life that seems to be

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[105] Austin, *God and Guns in America*, 7.

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natural to most human beings. The most common practices for doing so are learning to shoot quickly and without reflection, often at targets that have a human shape but not a human face. This helps them to see the objects at which they aim as morally inferior and ill-suited for empathy—*inhuman*, even.[106] If there is a proper use for a gun, surely this is a far cry from it. It cultivates men who see their masculinity as defined by a lack of empathy, a ready willingness to be violent, even take a life, without any of the humane considerations required by such a weighty act, all in the name of manly courage. It predisposes one to remove the image of God with the pointing of a barrel and to take the worth of one's perceived enemies into one's own hands. To be a man, on this picture, is to be willing to reduce the target to a carcass *before the person is even killed*.

It should not take too much argument to claim that this is a heartless way to be a man. There are theological reasons to think so, and Austin (who himself is in favor of a modest view of gun ownership) summarizes the way Christian courage directly challenges the "courage" of the citizen-protector: "Christian courage, at its root, is grounded in love, not in human power…for the Christian, it is the courage of the martyr that is the best example of Christian courage. That is the kind of courage that Jesus has…This is a courage in which one suffers and endures an evil that either cannot or should be defeated by physical force…Love, not a gun, can make such courage, such self-sacrifice, possible."[107] If Christians can own guns (and that is a question still up for moral debate), it cannot be for the purposes of inculcating manly courage that is always ready and willing to take a life, for the kind of courage that Christian women *and* men must display is one characterized by a desire to love one's enemy and a confidence in the

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[106] See the discussion in Austin, *God and Guns in America*, 112–116.

[107] Austin, *God and Guns in America*, 117–118.

hope of the justice of the resurrection. To create men who define their masculinity according to the norms provided by their gun ownership, specifically the norms of callousness, cruelty and a lack of love, is an un-Christian way to be a man and to display courage. That kind of courage, when compared to Christ and the martyrs, is shown to be craven. For these reasons, a gun is morally inappropriate as a gendered good (though this does not mean that it is not permissible for Christians to own them as such, only not in virtue of being male).

Masculinity has also been formalized in specifically Christian directions. Consider the portrait of evangelical manhood provided by Kristin Kobes Du Mez in her book *Jesus and John Wayne*.[108] Her central claim is that evangelical culture over the last sixty years or so has developed an intertwining of authority-driven masculinity, a political agenda that portrayed men as warriors and a sense of cultural embattlement. She provides ample evidence for the ways in which evangelical understandings of masculinity blended these three elements, from the level of the family all the way to attitudes toward public and foreign policy. She summarizes this mindset in the following way: "Women, children, churches, and nations all needed masculine decision makers; America was great only when its men were great…The very existence of the nation again depended on the toughness of American men, and raising young boys into strong men became elevated to a matter of national security."[109] There is always a threat facing American culture, according to this conception of masculinity, though that threat was always a moving target. It varied from communism, socialism, or the prevalence of Muslim immigrants, but such

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[108] Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright, 2020).

[109] Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 125, 180.

threats were combatted only by men who acknowledged their authority and did whatever it took to defend the family and the nation.

This can be seen in the wide popularity of Christian books like Gordon Dalbey's *Healing the Masculine Soul*, Steve Farrar's *Point Man: How a Man Can Lead His Family*, Stu Weber's *Tender Warrior: God's Intention for a Man* and, most famous of all, John Eldredge's *Wild at Heart*. The first of these, which eventually sold over 250,000 copies, maintained that "manhood requires the warrior," replacing an image of Jesus "as a meek and gentle milk-toast character" with one based on "the warrior spirit in every man."[110] Farrar's book was even more explicit about the necessity of the warrior man to defend against threat: "If you are a husband/father, then you are in a war. War has been declared upon the family, on your family and mine. *Leading a family through the chaos of American culture is like leading a small patrol through enemy-occupied territory*. And the casualties in this war are as real as the names etched on the Vietnam memorial."[111] For Farrar, men are equipped with testosterone to meet this challenge with whatever aggression is necessary, and the threats he lists included abortion, suicide, homosexuality and social awkwardness. Men can prevent such things because "God made boys to be aggressive. We are to accept it and channel it."[112] Weber, finally, maintained that all men have "warrior tendencies," seeing the apostle Paul as an "ancient warrior" alongside Jesus, a trait necessary for fighting in the gender wars.[113] Perhaps the most famous of these masculinity

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[110] Gordon Dalbey, *Healing the Masculine Soul: An Affirming Message for Men and the Women Who Love Them* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 120, 76, 129. Cited in Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 161.

[111] Steve Farrar, *Point Man: How a Man Can Lead His Family* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1990), 24. Cited in Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 162–3. Emphasis in original.

[112] Farrar, *Point Man*, 13. Cited in Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 163.

[113] Stu Weber, *Tender Warrior: Every Man's Purpose, Every Woman's Dream, Every Child's Hope* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2006), 43, 74–75. Cited in Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 164–5.

manuals was John Eldredge's *Wild at Heart*, which sold over four million copies in the United States and claimed that God made men to be strong, heroic and even *dangerous*.[114] The outcome was that "the American soldier modeled true Christian manhood," both figuratively, in the way a man must always defend against perceived threat, and literally, where evangelical men reliably supported the wars in which the U.S. was engaged since the sixties.[115] Men are, by their definition, bellicose, belligerent, pugilistic and militant.

It is certainly troublesome to witness the willingness with which these pastors and teachers associated masculinity with violence and danger, but it is downright disturbing to observe the fruits of such a conception of masculinity in the cases of sexual assault rife within churches that have affirmed it. Du Mez provides a harrowing history of this in the final chapter of her book and argues that it was the natural flowering of this vision of masculinity: "Many of the men implicated in the abuse, or in the covering up cases of abuse, were the same men who had been preaching militant masculinity."[116] If masculine aggression is God-given, she argues, it does not take a large leap to direct that aggression toward the women (along with boys and men) around them. The list of pastors who were embroiled in sexual scandal is damning. Consider a selection of allegations made in the 2010s alone: claims against Ted Haggard for paying a male escort for sex for three years; charges against Pete Newman of Kanakuk Kamps for molesting boys for several years; the discovery that C.J. Mahaney's church network was silencing, threatening and gaslighting women and children who were being abused by fathers; accusations against Bill Gothard by more than thirty women of harassment and molestation, even as he wrote

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[114] See the discussion and citations in du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 173–6.

[115] Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 217. For discussion of the support of war, see 48–9 on Vietnam and 184–5 on Afghanistan, for instance.

[116] *Jesus and John Wayne*, 277.

that a victim of abuse is just as guilty as the assailant if she fails to speak out; Doug Wilson's

defense men in his school and ministry training program found guilty of sexual crimes against

young girls; Bill Hybels' resignation after seven women accused him of sexual misconduct and

other abuses; and Paige Patterson's praise of a pastor he promoted to positions of power even

after claims of rape, molestation and other sexual wrongdoings surfaced.[117] To that, we can add

the recent discovery of evidence that apologist Ravi Zacharias engaged in repeated sexual

misconduct in a spa he partially owned.[118] Finally, in terms of sheer numbers, one can witness a

recent investigation done by the *Houston Chronicle* that uncovered that from about 1998 onward,

there were more than *700 victims of sexual abuse* within the Southern Baptist Convention.[119] Du

Mez concludes that years of claiming men were made to be aggressive and dangerous led to "a

vision that promised protection for women but left women without defense, one that worshiped

power and turned a blind eye to justice, and one that transformed the Jesus of the Gospels into an

image of their own making."[120]

I will have more to say about sexual assault in the next chapter but consider the above in

light of this chapter's model. It is clear that the objects of love associated with masculinity are

characterized by a desire to dominate, control and harm. Proponents of this kind of masculinity

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[117] *Jesus and John Wayne*, 278–90.

[118] Daniel Silliman, "Ravi Zacharias's Ministry Investigates Claims of Sexual Misconduct at Spas," Christanity Today, accessed January 19, 2021, https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/september/ravi-zacharias-sexual-harassment-rzim-spa-massage-investiga.html. Though not an evangelical or a published proponent of a vision masculinity described above, Jean Vanier might also be included after it was discovered that he engaged in sexual misconduct with six women. See Julie Zauzmer, "Jean Vanier, Founder of L'Arche, Accused of Abusive Sexual Relationships with Six Women," The Washington Post, February 24, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2020/02/23/jean-vanier-once-talked-about-nobel-or-sainthood-candidate-is-accused-abusive-sexual-relationships-with-six-women/.

[119] Robert Downen, Lise Olsen, and John Tedesco, "Abuses of Faith," *Houston Chronicle*, February 10, 2019. Cited in Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 291.

[120] Du Men, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 294.

cherished the picture of a domestic warrior, granting them the social roles of a conquering hero. They then conformed their spiritual practice to facilitate this vision—neither Jesus nor the apostle Paul were warriors, but if their being so allowed these males to love goods that enabled them to be men defined by strength, power and authority, then they become such. But this is idolatrous and a cruel, domineering and threatening way to be a man, and the only ones conquered and dominated were their victims. These are goods loved sinfully, in the name of an insidious and rapacious libido, the paradigm of sinfully expressed love. As Augustine has already predicted, "anyone who wants domination and power…will generally seek to obtain what he loves by even the most blatantly criminal acts."[121] The men who saw themselves as dangerous warriors were characterized by a love that sought to dominate, and the fruit of such a sickly tree was threatening and dangerous to the people with whom they came into contact.

Already mentioned are themes of gender and political activity, and this will serve as the theme of our final case study, namely, the gendered goods loved in the name of Christian nationalism. In their recent investigation into Christian nationalism in the United States, sociologists Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry show that a commitment to Christian nationalism is a high predictor of and serves as a warrant for particular conceptions of gender. For them, "Christian nationalism" is "an ideology that idealizes and advocates a fusion of American civic life with a particular type of Christian identity and culture," and it provides a "cultural framework—a collection of myths, traditions, symbols, narratives, and value systems— that idealizes and advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civic life."[122] Included in this

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[121] *de civitate Dei*, V.19. English translation from Augustine, *The City of God*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. William Babcock, vol. I/6, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012).

[122] Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), ix, 10. They give a further definition: "Christian nationalism is a cultural framework that blurs distinctions between Christian identity and American identity, viewing

cultural framework are particular convictions regarding the headship of a man in a Christian family, the absence of which is the source of cultural instability in the United States. Christian nationalists, when surveyed, consistently agreed that men were better suited for politics, that a preschool child suffers if her or his mother works, that it is God's will that women care for children, that a husband should earn a higher salary than his wife, that homosexuality should not be given legal status and occurs when men are not adequate leaders, that transgender individuals should use the bathroom of their biological sex and that divorce is wrong and too easily granted (even though there is no serious difference in divorce rates between those who affirm and those who deny Christian nationalism, 10.8 and 15.3 percent, respectively).[123]

Now, to be quite clear, it is a *separate* question whether Scripture teaches that men are to exercise leadership in the home[124] and what sorts of moral conclusions regarding sex and gender follow from it, for as Whitehead and Perry show, even if Christian nationalists hold to the same positions as merely religiously committed Christians, they do so *for different reasons*. For the Christian nationalist, the "primary concern with these issues is not *moral* in a personal sense, but

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the two as closely related and seeking to enhance and preserve their union. It is undergirded by identification with a conservative political orientation (though not necessarily a political party), Bible belief, pre-millennial visions of moral decay, and divine sanction for conquest. Finally, its conception of morality centers *exclusively* on fidelity to religion and fidelity to the nation" (15).

[123] Whitehead and Perry, *Taking America Back for God*, 129–141.

[124] As in texts like 1 Corinthians 11:3 ("I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ") and Ephesians 5:23 ("For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church"). My persuasion is that these texts do not actually teach that men are the head of women in a sense denoting *authority*, but that "head" (*kephale*) has more to do with "source," as in the "head of a river." My inclinations for believing so are the contextual references to the creation narrative of Genesis 1 and 2, according to which the woman was made from the rib of the man. That she was taken from the man does not entail an authority relation, and many Christian commentators point out that being taken from the side of the man (as opposed to the feet or the head) indicates Eve's equality and parity. This was forwarded by early Jewish midrash and picked up by Peter Abelard, Hugh of St. Victor and Peter Lombard. See John Flood, *Representations of Eve in Antiquity and the English Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2010) and Westfall, *Paul and Gender*, chapter 3.

political."[125] This is reflected in the warrants provided for their stances on, for instance, homosexuality. Both Christian nationalists and Christians resistant to Christian nationalism maintained that homosexuality was morally wrong, but the former arrived at this conclusion from the perceived effect homosexuality had on American culture while the latter's "attitudes toward same-sex marriage seemed to be shaped more by his conservative Christian faith than his commitment to the politicization of that faith."[126] The latter did not see it as *necessary* to have particular Christian stances reflected in law, while that was the *primary motivator for the former.* So, while the *positions* of a mere Christian and a Christian nationalist may be the same, the warrants provided for them and goals obtained therefrom are drastically different.[127]

It seems to me that the model I have developed in this chapter accounts for this sociological phenomenon. The reason why religiously committed Christians and Christian nationalists differ on the warrants provided for their stances on gender is due to the fact that they *have different objects of love*. The primary good loved by Christian nationalist males that grants them the social role of headship and authority and leads them to conclude that homosexuality is wrong is the fusion of American politics with Christianity, the promotion of which all of their social roles serve. Their headship is meant to safeguard their Christian nationalism, while those Christians opposed to Christian nationalism who still hold to traditional Christian gender norms

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[125] Whitehead and Perry, *Taking America Back for God*, 142.

[126] Whitehead and Perry, *Taking America Back for God*, 147.

[127] In fact, Whitehead and Perry show that, in most cases, "Christian nationalism often influences Americans' opinions and behaviors in the *exact opposite direction* than traditional religious commitment does," especially in cases of social justice and concerns of racial violence and inequity (*Taking America Back for God*, 20, cf. 15). Attitudes regarding sex and gender are the only ones in which they neatly overlap, leading them to conclude that "religion, at least for contemporary Americans, may be more fundamentally related to issues of gender, family, and sexuality in ways that it is not related to ethnic, racial, or national boundaries and hierarchies" (143). Nevertheless, though Christian religiosity and Christian nationalism overlap on this question, they do so for diametrically different reasons, as has been discussed.

claim to do so out of a commitment to church community, Scripture or broader moral conviction.[128]

Christian nationalism has received a great deal of attention in recent years and this is not the place to assess it in its entirety. Even scholars in secular disciplines, however, have noted its idolatrous nature: Christian nationalism, says Yale sociologist Philip Gorski, "is just national self-worship. It is political idolatry dressed up as religious orthodoxy. Any sincere believer should reject it."[129] This kind of political idolatry, of course, is not a viable option for the Augustinian analysis of love previously outlined. For Augustine, though members of the earthly city and the heavenly city might share common goods like political systems in the time stretching from creation to Christ's return, they do so with an orientation to radically different ends. As pilgrims, Christians are called always to have a certain restiveness in their posture toward extant political organizations, even as they share goods in common with others, for it is all too easy to turn them into objects of worship. Augustine, for instance, provides an illustration of certain people returning from a voyage to their homeland, only to become so enchanted with the pleasures of the voyage that they lose interest in the homeland.[130] Or we can imagine someone who, on their way to the vacation destination of their dreams, became enamored with the comfort of the airplane seats, the spaciousness of the overhead bins and the tastiness of the airline food, so much so that, upon landing, they did not want to leave the aircraft. Such an

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[128] Thus Whitehead and Perry: "Religious commitment, we argue, is something more personal and less orientated toward societal order and hierarchies. Rather, it reflects a commitment to one's faith community, deity, or system of moral beliefs itself. Those who evidence greater religious commitment, then, even if they are not strong Christian nationalists, may still favor more traditionalist interpretations of gender, family, and sexuality" (*Taking America Back for God*, 146).

[129] *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 3.

[130] See *de doctrina Christiana*, I.4.4.

attitude would be ridiculous, but it illustrates how sinful love always has a proclivity to fashion gods of their own making, especially at the political level.[131] This, however, is precisely what Christian nationalism attempts to do. By blending their conception of the United States with their faith, adherents effectively operate according to an alternative gospel. It takes what ought to be seen as a shared, penultimate good (namely, the common life partaken by all during the *seculum*) and marries it to the ultimate good of human life, thereby reshaping its core narrative into something ersatz. As Stanley Hauerwas states it in characteristically pithy terms, "when Christians no longer believe that Christ's sacrifice is sufficient for the salvation of the world, we will find other forms of sacrificial behaviors that are as compelling as they are idolatrous. In the process, Christians confuse the sacrifice of war [or the identity of a nation] with the sacrifice of Christ."[132] To identify one's national identity with one's Christianity is to take the fullness of what is given in Christ and in the eschatological and teleological nature of God's reign and reduce it to the short-lived insignificance of a single country, a single nationality and a single people group. This is abject confusion, conflating the *shalom* of a sinless new creation for the simulacrum of ideals provided not by the biblical narrative but by the mythology of a nation. The issue with Christian nationalism, ultimately, is its mistaken object of worship.

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[131] There is a broad literature on Augustinian political theology, and I can only gesture at it here. See, among others, Charles Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); James K. A. Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology*, vol. 3, Cultural Liturgies (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017); Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996); Gregory W. Lee, "Republics and Their Loves: Rereading City of God 19," *Modern Theology* 27, no. 4 (2011): 553–81; Luke Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life: Political Theology and the Case for Democracy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019).

[132] Stanley Hauerwas, *War and the American Difference: Theological Reflections on Violence and National Identity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 34.

This provides ample resource for the proper moral evaluation of a masculinity derived from this misbegotten love. Note that the issue is not necessarily with the particular construal of masculinity, or with the stance on homosexuality, or with the opinions regarding bathroom policy for transgender individuals. It is with what *motivates such conceptions of gender*, namely, the elevation of the love of one's country to the point where it is entangled with one's faith. It is characterized by precisely the kind of love that Augustine claimed was incompatible with true divine charity, for it looks to an earthly good to provide ultimate satisfaction. Right political engagement directs the goods employed therein to the love of God and to acts of mercy toward one's neighbor; Christian nationalism takes political goods and elevates them to the level of divinity. Any conception of gender fueled by such loves is guilty of turning creaturely politics into an object of worship, for no creature can serve as the final end of one's loves.

A theology of gender must be tethered to the real and concrete experiences of those whose genders it attempts to explain, and this has been my purpose in discussing these case studies. By considering them as objects of love associated with sexed bodies, we can see the ways in which guns, authority and nationalism have become distinctly gendered goods, and we can furthermore provide a distinctly theological moral evaluation of them. Admittedly, my analysis has been limited to a *negative* evaluation, highlighting instances of gendered love gone awry. I will attempt to say something more positive in the chapter that follows, but I hope that, minimally, I have shown the model of gender presented above to be adequate for explaining gender as it is, in the real world, and as it ought to be, in the world we one day hope to inhabit.

5.5 Conclusion

I have attempted to assemble a wide variety of claims argued for in previous chapters, while remaining careful to do so in a manner consistent with the theological method outlined in

the first chapter, retaining philosophical precision about terms, demonstrating how the theological claims made proceed from Scripture and how the model of gender put forward manages to speak to concrete situations faced by actually gendered people in today's world. In an effort to summarize, recall the four theses required for a workable ontology of gender and the ways in which my proposal has attempted to give them shape.

First, *gender is an essence, though this is not reducible to or identical with biological determinism or biological essentialism*. Following Mari Mikkola, I have attempted to provide a very attenuated version of gender essentialism, one that attempts to avoid gender skepticism and no more. On the view I propose, gender is (minimally) one's identification with social goods as a means of manifesting one's sexed body in the social world. So a man is someone who identifies with social goods according to the male body and a woman is someone who identifies with social goods according to the female body. I do not say *which* goods a male should appropriate to himself, for the moment this occurs one runs into the problem of having too many gender kinds depicted in chapter two. The theological model just presented is much more concerned with *how* goods are appropriated and only shows interest in *which* goods are appropriated when they display sinful patterns of attachment. This is because, as feminist theorists have pointed out, very few gendered goods are *intrinsically* gendered and are consistently gendered across time and place. But I retain the essentialism denied by social constructionist accounts, if only to avoid skepticism. But the essentialism in question tells us very little about what it means to be a man or woman, for it does not specify by which goods gender kinds are defined, only that this occurs according to the sexed body.

Second, *the complexity of gender, the noetic effects of sin and the current conditions of oppression complicate our epistemic access to gender's essence. All the same, we can be assured*

that gender will be fully known in the eschaton. Women and men, on my model, have the painful, confusing and arduous challenge of always evaluating the goods to which they are attached, testing them for the poison of sin. The way gender is now is not the way gender ought to be, and what I mean by that is not a particular list of attributes, but the manner in which gendered goods are loved. This is an attempt to retain the social constructionist insight that what is universal is not what is natural, yet natural here refers to our sexed bodies, our sociability and the way God has designed us to love the world, not a particular set of gendered traits. If men love a gendered good wickedly, it is the responsibility of those men in whom dwells the Holy Spirit to challenge such norms and debunk them. But, as it is, we will always have trouble discerning just when this occurs and what is the best way to challenge them. Of course, here we rely on the Scriptures, which tell us that love is patient, kind, not envious, boastful, arrogant or rude, not insisting on its own way, not irritable or resentful, fails to rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in true as it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things (1 Cor. 13:4–7). The fact is that many gendered goods are loved in ways that run afoul of Paul's description of natural love, the love we were meant to display as image bearers. The task of the gendered pilgrim is always to test the goods that make her who she is, seeing if the goods to which she is attached reflect the virtues of genuine love.

Third, *any theory or theology of gender must be consistent with and supportive of the cultivation of justice.* The moral evaluation of gendered goods is central to my model. There is an order in which they ought to be loved and they must always undergo the purifying forces of the spiritual life. In the next chapter, I will attempt to connect this with a vision of what it means to live justly as women and men. In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate the more negative side of the duty laid upon Christian men and women to identify the goods in their lives that fail

to conform to a godly love. This was seen in the case studies and was informed by the Augustinian theology of human love of the previous chapter. The failure to provide accounts of gender that sustained moral inquiry was one of the chief failures of the social constructionist model, and though the moral norms provided here are not *intrinsic to gender*, they are intrinsic to identity formation, of which gender is a part. There are ways to say when men are morally faulty *as men*, and it occurs when males appropriate social goods in ways contrary to the order and proper function of love. Rightly ordered loves love all things in God, to be used as gifts according to the specifications of the Gift Giver, as images of their Creator and with eschatological consistency. Wrongly ordered loves tend toward domination and rapacious consumption, turning creatures into objects of ultimate satisfaction, to the detriment of both lover and beloved.

Finally, and perhaps most important, *gender is concerned with selves or identity and the way selves organize social goods pertaining to their sexed bodies.* In this chapter, it was important to specify just how this organization occurs, namely, by means of what we love. In an Augustinian theological anthropology, you are what you love. So, if you are gendered, then that must happen somehow by means of your loves. We become what we love when the beloved imprints itself on our memories, forming our personal narratives in ways appropriate to second-personal knowledge through acquaintance. Our loves are what we care about most deeply, those parts of us that we appropriate. Now, there are certain goods we love and appropriate in virtue of possessing sexed bodies, as well as other goods we love in order to facilitate the loving of those primary goods. This is akin to an office of love, a relationship of love that specifies the kind of relationship it is and the interactions appropriate to it. As we love goods salient to our sexed bodies, they acquire social meaning and confer new social roles to the lover, just as feeding

becomes dining when new norms are attributed to it. Thus, a male loving a gun enables him to become a citizen-protector, or another male loving Christian nationalism grants to him the role of authoritative head. Through their loving these goods, they become men. That does not mean that this is what *should* make them men; for these beloved goods are nonetheless liable to moral evaluation. But they are what they love: men who become men through loving these particular goods.

As I mentioned in the first chapter, human beings are narratively-indexed. That is to say, humans have the properties they have in virtue of the place they occupy within the divine economy. In the next and final chapter, we will see how this is applied to gender as well. What does it mean to say that gender is created, fallen, redeemed and glorified? How does that fill out the model above in ways that connect it with the broader Christian confession of the gospel? What does creation have to do with our embodiment, and how does it accommodate intersexed/DSD individuals who have experienced the confession of creation as declaration of their exclusion? How does sin affect gender, and how does knowing that the main way love is sinfully distorted is through the lust for domination help us to understand sexual assault? How is gender redeemed, and how does it set us on a course for the pursuit of gendered justice? Finally, for what can we hope as gendered beings in the resurrection? To that we now turn.

CHAPTER 6
GENDER IN THE DIVINE ECONOMY

In this final chapter, I contextualize the theological model of gender from the previous chapter by situating it within the divine economy, or the history of redemptive action spanning from creation to consummation. This, in part, is an effort to remain consistent with the theological method presented in chapter one, where I maintained that human beings have the properties they do in virtue of occupying the particular places they do in this narrative; this makes human nature "narratively-indexed." So it is with gender: as created, it is good and a gift to be received, not something from which one must be redeemed; as fallen, it is corrupted, especially at the hands of those whose sinful loves drive them toward domination and abuses of power; as redeemed, it is the appropriate locus for the pursuit of justice and no longer a basis for worth; and, as consummated, it will be purged finally from all sin and raised to its appropriate role in human life. Along the way, disquisitions will be had into intersex/DSD, sexual assault, the appropriate degree of importance attached to gender categories and the nature of the resurrected body, all derived from the gospel and its intrinsic concerns.

6.1 Introduction: The Narrative–Indexing of Humanity

In the first chapter of this study, I made the claim that part of what it means to give a theological account of gender requires observation of two principles. First, human beings have the properties that they have in virtue of the place they occupy within the divine economy, or

what John Webster calls the "historical form of God's presence to and action upon creatures."[1] So, as the trinitarian persons enter into space and time to create, redeem and perfect all things, those divine acts acquire a specific pattern or shape, the sum of which is called the "divine economy" (following texts like Eph. 1:10) or may simply be called "the gospel." At different stages within this economy, humans have particular sets of traits they do not have in others. Thus, at creation, human beings are good, though they are not perfect, for they await their confirmation and perfection. Fallen human beings are universally sinful (with the exception of the human nature assumed by the Son) though they are not *naturally* sinful, for it is not part of the definition of humanity to be that way, as creation attests. At their redemption, human beings begin to be realigned to their redeemer, getting glimpses of what they will experience fully at the perfection of their natures in the resurrection. This perspective on humanity has a venerable pedigree, attested to by Augustine's distinctions between humanity's ability and non-ability to sin. But it also retains the important distinction made by feminist authors like François Poulain de la Barre that putative universal gender traits cannot automatically be assumed to be natural. This led to my second principle: that only when the entirety of the divine economy is in view can we make confident pronouncements about what is natural to humanity, for it is too easy to mistake a trait specific to a moment of the economy with a trait that spans its entirety.

The previous chapter made recourse to human nature without the requisite sensitivity to its narratival-indexing. I drew upon three components of human nature: that humans are sexed, that they are able to love and that they are social. These components I derived from my Augustinian theology of love, but they also carry some intuitive appeal. Taken together, I

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[1] John Webster, "Biblical Reasoning," in *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 117.

maintained that gender is the social position we acquire when we appropriate certain goods to ourselves in virtue of our sexed bodies. Our sexed bodies are elaborated thereby into acquiring a social meaning. But what or whom we love, to the extent that these sediment themselves upon our memories and form the narratival coherence of our lives, tells us who we *are*, in a second-personal, non-propositional sort of way. This makes sense of the claim that we possess a "gender identity," though not necessarily in the commonplace way this phrase is used. If one's identity, according to an Augustinian theological picture, is formed by one's loves, then one's *gender* identity must be formed by one's *gendered* loves. So, when these goods are loved, they form who we are as gendered people.

I maintain that all of this is natural to human beings, so in a sense, we are naturally gendered, though by this I do not mean biological essentialism, nor does this preclude the social dimensions of gender. But since human natures are not the kinds of things that exist without temporal considerations, how does the model summarized above adapt itself to the various moments of the divine economy? What is gender like at its creation, when subject to sin, when redeemed by Christ and at its perfection? These are the questions this chapter will attempt to answer. Under the headings of *creation*, *fall*, *redemption* and *consummation*, I will draw forth the implications the characterizing features of these stages in the divine economy have for gender. Though I am restricting myself to these four, this is not necessarily the best way to carve up the biblical storyline. I acknowledge, for example, that there are live discussions about whether only *divine* acts should define the economy and not human ones like sin, about the centrality of the election of Israel and even about the coherence of the biblical storyline as it relates to the coherence of the economy.[2] Such an acknowledgement, however, does not detract from this

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[2] For instance, N.T. Wright proposes a five-act schema: creation, fall, Israel, Jesus, Church (N.T. Wright, "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?," *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991): 7–32). Alternatively, Samuel Wells divides the

rudimentary rubric for understanding the economy. Should my construal require alterations, I do not think the actual implications for gender will be all that different, only where they are located with respect to the economy. So, if "Fall" does not actually comprise a standalone moment in the economy, what I have to say about the implications of sin for gender will simply be relocated to whatever replaces it. With these preliminary statements in place, let us turn to see how gender, being natural to human beings, metamorphoses as it proceeds along the narrative constituted by God's creative and redemptive acts.

6.2 Creation

Space will not allow a full treatment of what is required of a Christian doctrine of creation and how its elements fill out our understandings of gender.[3] In the interest of parsimony, I restrict myself to two central tenets of a doctrine of creation. First, that the creation of the world by God must be seen as the first episode out of which the broader economy unfolds. And second, that we need a positive account of what makes creation "good" (Gen. 1:2, 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25), with something more said than that creation, at that point, lacked sin. Following Hebrew Bible scholar John Walton, I shall argue that this consisted in its proper function.

economy into creation, Israel, Jesus, Church and eschaton (Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 52–53). Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen add a sixth, dividing into creation, fall, redemption initiated, redemption accomplished, mission of the church and redemption completed (Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 12). Finally, Kevin Vanhoozer opts for creation, election, sending of the Son, sending of the Spirit, return of the King (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 98).

[3] There is a lively resurgence of dogmatic explorations of the doctrine of creation, that in substantial ways moves beyond the intransigent debates regarding the age of the earth and the compatibility of "faith and science." See, for instance, Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Ian A. McFarland, *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014); Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation: Cosmos, Creatures, and the Wise and Good Creator* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017); Bruce Riley Ashford and Craig G. Bartholomew, *The Doctrine of Creation: A Constructive Kuyperian Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020). For a historical account of how debates about creation have taken on a restrictive cultural influence in the United States, thereby shaping how the doctrine is approached, see Adam Laats, *Creationism USA: Bridging the Impasse on Teaching Evolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

First, God's creation of the world must be seen as the first episode of an unfolding economy. Another way to state this feature of creation is that inherent within it is an intent for growth and perfection, something not quite true yet of the created state. Of course, creation is "good," and more will be said about that, but it could not yet be called "perfect," for perfection entails achieving an intended completion, a culminating end. In order to obtain that end, a process of maturation along the divine economy must occur. Creation, then, must be the first moment of a coherent economy of growth.

This idea was central to the thought of Irenaeus, the second century theologian whose major work, *Adversus Haereses*, is devoted to combatting a particularly ersatz vision of creation called Gnosticism.[4] It is helpful, then, to witness the ways an understanding of creation can go awry—perhaps *the* way it can do so—in an effort to contrast it with a more beneficial path forward. For the Gnostics, it was equally important to have an operative notion of economy, and they regularly employed myth and narrative to depict their account of the economy of salvation. As Peter Brown states,

> What distinguished Gnostics, in the eyes of their enemies, was their use of myth as a
> chosen vehicle of religious instruction…By unfolding, with majestic precision, an

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[4] Recently, certain scholars have begun to question whether there is any such thing as "Gnosticism." Among them are Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996) and Karen King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003). For these historians, the category "Gnostic" was prefabricated by an earlier wave of scholarship, which then went on to guide their readings of the primary materials. In other words, one only finds a stable and identifiable category assignable as "Gnostic" if one forces one's readings of the Nag Hammadi library into an already extant definition. For a useful introduction to this approach to the diversity of Gnosticism, see Nicola Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to "Gnosticism": Ancient Voices, Christian Worlds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), chpt. 1. For a defense of a measured definition of Gnosticism that is still historically defensible, see David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012). Although the approach I take will favor Brakke, I do not think this debate actually does much to call into question an analysis of the *theological merits* of Gnosticism. Even if there was no historical group called "the Gnostics," we can still evaluate the merits of what the church has rejected under that label, just we can evaluate the merits of Nestorianism, even though it has turned out that Nestorius was not much of a Nestorian after all. What is in question is not the *historicity* of Gnosticism, but the body of assertions that has been typically attached to it. Even if the question of historicity is debunked, Gnosticism would still be problematic, even if ill-named.

account of the distant origins of the original world and of the dire sequence of events that had led to the present misery of the soul within it, Gnostic teachers enabled their disciples to pass through the equivalent of a healing séance…Their story was the story of a cure.[5]

Gnostic thought recognized the theological need for an economy, even one that employed the concepts of creation and redemption. The trouble was not an underdeveloped theological vision, but a misconstrual of the relationship between those two moments in the story.

Bentley Layton, in his commentary and translation of the main corpus of Gnostic literature, suggests we consider looking at the divine economy promoted by the Gnostics as a four-act drama.[6] Act one lifts the curtains on the creation of the non-material universe, or the *pleroma* or "fullness," in which a perfect divine source emanates a series of other spiritual beings and realms by means of its own self-contemplation. As it does this, its thought becomes independently extant, at which point act two is introduced. One of the members of the *pleroma*— sometimes called the *Demiurge* or Ialdabaōth—is responsible for creating the material world with the help of another spiritual being, Sophia. This action, however, is not a noble or solicitous undertaking; rather, it is poorly motivated and results in creating something attritional in comparison to the original *pleroma*. "The Reality of Rulers" presents Ialdabaōth as an arrogant blasphemer who, instigated by Sophia, created matter "after the pattern of the eternal realms that are above, for by starting from the invisible domain the visible domain was invented."[7] Ialdabaōth gazes down into "the region of the waters" and, becoming selfishly enamored with the image, creates humanity (which marks Layton's third act) after the image seen in the

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[5] Peter Brown, *The Body & Society: Men, Women, & Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, 25th Anniversary Ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 106, 108.

[6] Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures: A New Translation with Annotations and Introductions* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 14–17.

[7] All citations from Gnostic sources comes from Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*. In this instance, from Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 68.

reflection.[8] Layton comments: "The gnostics' craftsman or cosmic creator is thus distinct from god the ultimate first principle," indicating that "Ialdabaōth and his fellow heavenly 'rulers' are possessive and arrogant and try to dominate all human affairs."[9] In another myth, though members of the *pleroma* created the material world, the perfect divine source assured them that doing so was "not humiliating; for the agitation and forgetfulness and the modeled form of deception were as nothing, whereas established truth is unchangeable, imperturbable and cannot be beautified."[10] Thus, though these spiritual beings created matter, such a mistake was of no consequence, for their foolishness and arrogance produced something futile and that paled in comparison to the spiritual realm.

The Gnostics were clear that human bodies were embroiled in the problematic features of created matter, for the body "was deeply alien to the true self…It came from matter, from *hylé*, a substance that would not have existed at all, if it had not been for the tragic 'bubbling over' of Sophia."[11] For this reason, the unstable nature of matter—including the body—will give way to the stability of the soul, for those in whom spiritual wisdom from the *pleroma* remains. This follows from the origins of matter; those responsible for its production were not motivated by love or goodness, but impulsiveness, blitheness and conceit, and the product reflected these faults. Such characteristics, moreover, give shape to the nature of redemption, Layton's fourth act. If the nature of the wrong is inexorably tied to that which is material and the motivations that caused it, then redemption means the removal of materiality. As Peter Brown summarizes: "Parts

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[8] Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 69.

[9] Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 16.

[10] Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 253.

[11] Brown, *The Body & Society*, 109.

of the universe, the human body among them, would eventually be cast off as abortive and misconceived creation."[12] Perfection is found only in the immutability of the spiritual realm, not in the shambolic material fabrications of arrogant lesser deities. The Gnostic "Treatise on Resurrection" is paradigmatic of this position: resurrection does not involve the body, but "the element superior to the flesh that imparts vitality to it… For you will not pay back the superior element when you depart. The inferior element takes a loss; but what it owes is gratitude…what is the meaning of resurrection? It is the uncovering at any given time of the elements that have 'arisen.'"[13] This is directly attributable to the fickle nature of the material creation: ""all changes, the world is an apparition…resurrection is not of this sort, for it is real."[14] This means that our redemption is not of the body, but *from* the body. For the body, being material, is not the kind of thing fit for the bliss of the spiritual realm. Fortuitously, for the Gnostics at least, this meant that resurrection is available in the present insofar as one does not live "according to (the dictates of) this flesh," for anyone "rushing toward this outcome (that is, *separation from the body*)" has already achieved the fullness of the resurrection.[15]

These, then, are the four stages of the Gnostic drama: spiritual creation as good, material creation at the hands of a foolish deity, the creation of human beings in the same way and redemption from matter. It is also worth foregrounding the distinctly gendered dimensions of Gnostic mythology. For the Gnostics, the unstable matter from which we must be saved is symbolized by femininity, while the stable spirit into which we ascend is masculine. This is the

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[12] Brown, *The Body & Society*, 109.

[13] Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 322–23. Contextually, the inferior element is the body while the superior one is the soul.

[14] Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 323.

[15] Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 324. Emphasis added.

background to the well-known claims made in "the Gospel of Thomas": "See, I am going to attract her to make her male so that she too might becoming a living spirit that resembles you males. For every female (element) that makes itself male will enter the kingdom of heavens."[16] Just as matter is intrinsically defective, so also is femininity, in virtue of what it symbolizes.[17] Women "stood for all that was open, aimless, lacking in shape and direction…the very element of otherness condensed in the polarity of male and female, as in that between spirit and its opposites, matter and mere soul, must vanish."[18] This claim must not be confused with a straightforwardly patriarchal one, however (though it certainly is *atypically* patriarchal). This is because the masculinity into which women will be transformed cannot be equated with *masculinity as we experience it now*, for all created expressions of gender are cancelled out: "When you (plur.) make the two one and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside and the above like the below, and *when you make the male and the female be one and the same, so that the male might not be male nor the female be female*…then you will enter [the kingdom.]"[19] Thus, though still masculine, redeemed gender is *numerically distinct* from any genders we see now or that were present in the creation of the world, something like a "super-masculinity." Built into the Gnostic economy, then, is a strong disjunction between

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[16] Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 399.

[17] It is for this reason, chief among others, that Elaine Pagels' claim that Gnostic thought is more liberating for women than their orthodox counterparts is deeply flawed. It is clear that for the Gnostics, all bodily gender was defective, but femininity was *especially* defective, a view clearly intolerable to any feminist theology. See Elaine Pagels *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979) and *Adam, Eve and the Serpent: Sex and Politics in Early Christianity* (New York: Random House, 1988). For a contestation of Pagels' views, see Sara Parvis, "Irenaeus, Women, and Tradition," in *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 159–64 and Beth Felker Jones, *Marks of His Wounds: Gender Politics and Bodily Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 93.

[18] *Brown, The Body & Society*, 112, 113.

[19] Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures,* 384. Emphasis added.

creation and redemption, for it is precisely *from* created categories that we are redeemed. As theologian Douglas Farrow aptly summarizes, "the interest is in redemption *from* the world, not *of* it."[20]

Gnosticism provides a vision of the economy according to which its constitutive moments are *disjointed*, or at odds with one another. Creation and redemption are not woven into a seamless narrative, but the latter supersedes the former. This supersession is laden with gender symbolism, for the ramshackle creation of haughty deities is distinctly *feminine*, while that to which humanity is redeemed can, in some Pickwickian sense, be called *masculine*. With this in view, how did Irenaeus respond? This brings us to our first tenet of creation doctrine mentioned above, which I take to be the main thrust of an Irenaean response: the divine economy must be consistent with itself, and for that creation must be seen as the first moment of an unfolding whole. Thus he alleges that the Gnostics "disregard the order and the connection of the Scriptures and, as much as in them lies, they disjoint the members of the Truth."[21] The Gnostics had all of the components necessary for an understanding of the economy, but the issue was with how they assembled the parts, rearranging them into something entirely unrecognizable, like repositioning the pieces of a mosaic of a king to illustrate the image of a dog or a fox. Irenaeus, therefore, saw his task as providing the necessary guidelines for a suitable construal of the divine economy, one that best represents the Scriptures and the God who brought all things into being.

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[20] Douglas Farrow, "St. Irenaeus of Lyons: The Church and the World," *Pro Ecclesia* IV, no. 3 (1995): 336.

[21] Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, Book 1, Chapter 8, Paragraph 1, hereafter *AH* 1.8.1. Translations of books one through three of the *AH* come from Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, trans. Dominic J. Unger, vol. 1, Ancient Christian Writers 55 (New York: The Newman Press, 1992), Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, trans. Dominic J. Unger, vol. 2, Ancient Christian Writers 65 (New York: The Newman Press, 2012) and Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, trans. Dominic J. Unger, vol. 3, Ancient Christian Writers 64 (New York: The Newman Press, 2012), respectively. Translations of books 4 and 5 come from the Irenaeus, *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 1, https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.i.html.

Like the Gnostics, Irenaeus begins with a *pleroma* or fullness, but he understands the

fullness in question as referring to God's inner triune life. Among the Father, Son and Spirit

there exists perfect love and goodness, and the motivation for creation is an external outworking

of a blessedness that already obtains immanently. Contrary to Gnostic accounts of creation, God

creates not out or arrogance of over-extension, but from a desire to share the abundance found in

God's immanent life:

> In the beginning, therefore, did God form Adam, not as if He stood in need of humanity,
> but that He might have [someone] upon whom to confer His benefits. For not alone
> antecedently to Adam, but also before all creation, the Word glorified His Father,
> remaining in Him; and was Himself glorified by the Father, as He did Himself declare,
> "Father, glorify Thou Me with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was."[22]

This difference in motivation makes all the difference in the resulting product, for instead of

instability and wretchedness, matter is an opportunity for sharing in God's goodness. As

Matthew Steenberg elaborates: "God creates, that creation might participate in his glory, his

goodness, which is that shared eternally by Father, Son and Spirit and exemplified by the Son's

incarnate relationship to the Father through the Spirit in the economy of salvation."[23] This is best

illustrated by Irenaeus' image of God creating by means of the Father's "two hands," the Son

and the Spirit, who replace the lesser Gnostic deities as mediators of divine action.[24] This means

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[22] *AH* 4.14.1. Some translations, such as this one, have been altered for gender inclusivity, hereafter noted by "Translation Altered." Already detected is a deep resonance with the theology of John Webster from chapter one, according to whom all theological inquiry required prior grounding in the Triune God's fullness and gratuitous self-communication.

[23] M.C. Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 36.

[24] See, for instance, *AH* 4.20.1: "It was not angels, therefore, who made us, nor who formed us, neither had angels power to make an image of God, nor any one else, except the Word of the Lord, nor any Power remotely distant from the Father of all things. For God did not stand in need of these [beings], in order to the accomplishing of what He had Himself determined with Himself beforehand should be done, as if He did not possess His own hands. For with Him were always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, by whom and in whom, freely and spontaneously, He made all things."

that what we observe in material creation is the loving product of a craftsperson, for intra-trinitarian love and goodness take the form of external trinitarian acts of love and goodness.[25]

Just as God's "two hands" shaped and characterized the original creation, so too was there an equal commitment to a providential carrying out of created intent; this was no "hands off" procedure. Creation was always meant to result in ultimate participation in the divine life and included within it were intentions for creaturely maturation and growth into perfection. An aspect of the goodness of creation was a built-in teleology meant to be carried forth throughout the subsequent stages of the divine economy. With respect to the creation of humanity, Irenaeus states that Adam at creation was yet "a child; and it was necessary that he should grow, and so come to his perfection."[26] Irenaeus regularly refers to God as a "wise Architect," in reference not only to God's good fashioning of the whole world, but also to God's wise design of the economy proceeding from it.[27] So, God, as Architect of creation as well as of history, is responsible for it all: "He Himself, indeed, having need of nothing, but granting communion with Himself to those who stood in need of it, sketched out, like an architect, the plan of salvation to those that pleased Him."[28] Steenberg emphasizes that for Irenaeus, creation and redemption must be seen as "two aspects of a single story," ultimately weaving into a single economy.[29] Eric Osborn captures the

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[25] As John Behr states Irenaeus' view: "each Person of the Trinity has a particular role: the Father plans and orders, the Son executes these orders and performs the work of creating, and the Spirit nourishes and increases…The Father is the origin of all creation, expressed by the prepositions [*ek*] and [*apo*], but he created everything through [*dia*] the Son and in [*en*] the Spirit, making the creation of man into a trinitarian activity of the one God" (John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 38.

[26] Irenaeus, *Epideixis*, 12. English translation, with some modification for gender neutrality, comes from Iain M. MacKenzie, *Irenaeus's Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching: A Theological Commentary and Translation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

[27] Cf. *AH* 2.11.1.

[28] *AH* 4.14.2. Cf. also 1.10.3, 5.17.4.

[29] Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 49. Cf. *AH* 2.27.1, 5.30.1.

nature of this theological vision well: "The economy is the whole plan of God. One divine economy belongs to the one God, one plan to the wise architect. The universal economy is made up of smaller diverse economies of events which form the different saving dispositions which God has granted."[30] Motivated by love, God creates all things and sets into place a coherent economy in which all of God's acts are consistent with one another and in which all of the moments therefore share the same consistency.[31]

More can be said about Irenaeus' notion of creation and redemption in the economy, especially the centrality of Christ,[32] but we can conclude with the picture of eschatological redemption that results from such convictions. For Irenaeus, all created beings will be retained and restored, the only difference lying in the removal of the sin within them: "For neither is the substance nor the essence of the creation annihilated (for faithful and true is He who has established it), but 'the *fashion* of the world will pass away'; that is, those things among which transgression has occurred."[33] The annihilation of creatures, for Irenaeus, is equal to an admission of wrongdoing on God's part, something the Gnostics were ready to attribute to their lesser deities. But if God is truly perfectly good and loving, thereby only making good creatures

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[30] Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 77–78.

[31] A particularly interesting feature of Irenaeus' presentation of this point is his typological exegesis of the days of Genesis. For Irenaeus, the days cannot correspond to literal days; instead, they correspond to different stages of the divine economy, each lasting one thousand years, since "with the Lord one day is like a thousand years" (2 Pet. 3:8). Whatever we make of such temporal speculation, it remains clear that if the days do in fact indicate subsequent stages of the divine economy, then *included* in creation is a subsequent sequence of events which make up such an economy. See *AH* 5.23.2, 5.28.3–4 and 5.33.2.

[32] For Irenaeus, the divine Architect so orchestrated the flowing of events in the divine economy that they find their fulfillment in Christ, who brings all things under his rule, making sense of all time and completing the flow of redemption. This is, of course, central to Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation. Genesis 1 is inseparable from John 1, and so though Irenaeus "may rightly be considered a theologian of economy, of history," this history must be "read Christocentrically—not simply taking Christ to be significant to all phases of history, but to be in his person the grounding of all history" (Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 50).

[33] *AH* 5.36.1.

out of love, then it is the *sin* inhering in those creatures that will be removed when they are restored to their created intent, something like the purging of an infection. For human beings, this will mean the beatific vision,[34] but all things will have their place. The important thing to note, as will become important in subsequent discussions in this chapter, is that redemption does not require the replacement, annihilation or destruction of creation, as it does for Gnostic thought, but only the removal of sin to restore all things to the design of their Architect.[35]

Creation, then, must stand as the fountainhead of an unfolding and internally consistent economy in the efforts to articulate a doctrine that resists the chief mistake of Gnosticism. Because it is the one God who made all things and who enjoys goodness and blessedness in the triune life, creation cannot be seen as a haphazard product of foolish semi-gods. Moreover, because it is that same God who is the redeemer of all things, creation and redemption cannot be placed in opposition to one another, as Gnostic mythology attempted to do. The created is the redeemed, for God is no feckless craftsperson. Rather, creation is good and will be perfect when it is perfectly redeemed, for the economy unified.

But what does it mean to say that creation is "good"? This brings us to our second tenet of creation doctrine, namely, a positive account of goodness. Often, the goodness of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 is seen *privatively*, as the lack or absence of sin, and surely this is true. But

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[34] Cf. *AH* 4.14.1.

[35] Interestingly, Irenaeus was clear that his view requires the existence of sexed bodies in the resurrection. He notes that sexed bodies must have been a feature of the created state, for otherwise the nudity of Adam and Eve would make no sense. They were naked and without shame, but nakedness without a sexed body makes no sense (an exposed ankle is rather different than exposed genitalia, for instance). So, the numerically identical sexed bodies with which humanity was created will be the ones with which they are raised. See *AH* 3.22.4 and 2.33.5 for discussions. Behr concludes: "Not only is bipolarity as male and female man's created state, but interaction between the two, in holiness, is clearly envisaged as a dimension of their life, growth and maturation…human existence as male and female will not cease, for it is the condition and framework, as created by God, for the man's never-ending maturation and growth towards God" (*Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement*, 112–113).

something *positive* must be said about this goodness, something describing its distinctiveness

and basic traits. Recently, a new proposal has been put forward by Hebrew Bible scholar John

Walton, according to which the main message of Genesis 1 is that God created an orderly

universe and that this order consists in the proper function of all things.[36] Walton proposes that

this is simply consistent with what would have been expected by readers and hearers in the

ancient world when claims were made about bringing something into existence:

> I propose that people in the ancient world believed that something existed not by virtue of
> its material properties, *but by virtue of its having a function in an ordered
> system*…Unless something is integrated into a working, ordered system, it does not exist.
> Consequently, the actual creative act is to assign something its functioning role in the
> ordered system. That is what brings it into existence. Of course something must have
> physical properties before it can be given its function, but the critical question is, what
> stage is defined as "creation"?[37]

To be clear, Walton's claim is not that God is not responsible for material origins; rather, it is

that Genesis's concern is not to provide an account of such matters. In the historical context of

which Genesis is a part (indicated through the comparison of its language with that of other

creation myths), there were certain ontological principles at play, ones that prioritized the proper

function of that entity (what it is supposed *to do*) more than its material properties. Thus, Walton:

"In the ancient world, what was most crucial and significant to their understanding of existence

was the way that the parts of the cosmos functioned, not their material status."[38]

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[36] Along with the work discussed below, see John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2011); John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).

[37] John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 24, 25. Emphasis in original.

[38] Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 26.

The warrant for this view is not difficult to discern. He demonstrates how the Hebrew verb translated as "to create" does not necessarily require a material understanding and is often employed to emphasize the purpose the created object was meant to serve.[39] When the earth is said to be "a formless void" in Gen. 1:2 (even though it already seemed to exist materially, since there must be a referent to these descriptors), this is best understood as a description of "that which is nonfunctional, having no purpose and generally unproductive in human terms."[40] This is as much a philosophical claim as it is one about how the terms would have been understood contextually, for Walton believes these must inform one another. Thus, the provision of form is the endowment of function. But what does he take a function to be? Here some further ontological refinement is necessary, for Walton's definition of a function as anything that is "not the result of material properties, but the result of purpose" is insufficient.[41] The insistence upon a disjunctive claim is somewhat confusing; if something is the result of purpose, can it not also be the result of material properties? Are functions necessarily not material properties? The function of a car, so it seems, is to drive, and this is surely the result of material properties (having an engine, gasoline and all the rest). Here, Walton's historical reconstruction can be supplemented by more recent literature on the nature of functions.

Normally, a function is understood as what an entity is *supposed* to do, not merely what it does in point of fact. The function of a heart, putatively, is to pump blood and the function of a librarian is to check out books. But further qualifications are required, for not just any thing that pumps blood that is a heart (machines do this too), nor is everyone who checks out books a

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[39] Cf. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 41–45.

[40] Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 48.

[41] Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 49.

librarian. Alvin Plantinga, who has invoked the concept of a function to advance claims in

epistemology, points out that something's function carries with it specifications about a suitable

environment for its performance.[42] A librarian with no library cannot be said to be doing the

work of a librarian, for if he attempts to check out books in his local grocery store, he would not

be performing his function. Likewise, if a heart is used for purposes other than to pump blood in

a body (say, to pump a red dye in a laboratory setting), it cannot be said to be doing what it is

supposed to.

> In addition, a function requires a *design plan*.[43] As Plantinga explains,

> The notion of proper function…is inextricably bound with another: that of a *design plan.* Human beings and their organs are so constructed that there is a way they *should* work, a way they are *supposed* to work, a way they work when they work right; this is the way they work when there is no malfunction…there is a way in which a human organ or system works when it works properly, works as it is supposed to work; and this way of working is given by its design or design plan.[44]

If a function specifies what an entity ought to do in its proper environment, something must

describe its successful performance, what it looks like when it has done what it was meant to do.

For a librarian, one might reasonably find a design plan in the job description; for a heart, that

might be found in the pages of an anatomy textbook. The idea is, though, that if there are such

things as functions, then there are specifications for their conditions of success, for it "is the way

the thing in question is 'supposed' to work, the way in which it works when it is functioning as it

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[42] Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 7.

[43] Though there are implications here for questions about evolution, this need not be confused with *intelligent design*. It is possible, though difficult, to believe that only evolutionary processes provided entities with their design plans with recourse to purely naturalistic explanations.

[44] Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 154. See also Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 14: A design plan is a "set of specifications for a well-formed, properly-functioning human being—an extraordinarily complicated and highly articulated set of specifications, as any first-year medical student could tell you."

ought to, when there is nothing wrong with it, when it is not damaged or broken or nonfunctional."[45] It also provides the rationale for *malfunction*, or what occurs when a function does not obtain its intended purpose.

A function, then, is what something ought to do in its apposite environment and according to its design plan. Returning to Walton, we can see this approach can be employed to give a positive account of the claims of goodness in Genesis 1. As Walton maintains, "the repeated formula 'it was good'…I propose refers to 'functioning properly.'"[46] When God created the heavens and the earth, all things were good in the sense that they did precisely what they were meant to do. Fish swam, birds sang, and all things enjoyed the life the Creator had caringly created for them. Each created entity functioned according to their design plan, consistent with their natures, in an order that flourished. We might expand on these details by saying that understanding goodness according to proper function requires commitment to at least three claims: first, all entities have purposes for which they were created, what they are supposed to do, or to use an older Medieval term, their *rectitude*; second, a creation full of creatures behaving according to their proper functions forms an orderly system; third, the proper function of a being within an orderly system is its fittingness, what it ought to do in relation to a system of other beings doing what they ought to.[47]

With these two tenets for creation in hand, what implications can be detected for gender? Let us first consider the claim that created goodness consists in proper function. Among the

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[45] Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 21.

[46] Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 50.

[47] I have elsewhere argued that these three claims comprise St. Anselm of Canterbury's doctrine of creation, thereby lending catholic pedigree to the view I am proposing. See Fellipe do Vale, "Anselm on the *Rectus Ordus* of Creation," *The Saint Anselm Journal* 14, no. 1 (Fall 2018): 93–109.

creatures made by God in Genesis 1 and 2 are, of course, human beings with material bodies (1:27) that were able to reproduce sexually (1:28).[48] Attempts to understand the command to "be fruitful and multiply" any differently were usually motivated by questionable ways human reproduction could have occurred, forcing the text to say something it does not seem to say.[49] If sexed bodies were created and called "good," then it follows that sexed bodies also have a proper function, along with all other natural human traits, like our sociability and our ability to love.[50] The claim that all aspects of the body have a proper function, moreover, seems to have canonical backing. We see it asserted in Romans 12:4, for instance, that "in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same *function* [*praxin*]." While Paul is making a claim about the church here, it is nevertheless true that he is employing certain facts about the human body to illustrate his point, and the fact to which he makes reference is that all parts of the human body have a proper function. So what might be the proper function of the sexed body?

According to a certain type of natural law theorist, the answer to the question of sexed proper function is singular: reproduction.[51] This strikes me as far too reductive, even though it seems true that this is *one* such function. If we recall the view of Charlotte Witt from chapter three, the role of a function was central to her gender essentialism. Witt's uniessentialism

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[48] This was a position Augustine eventually came to embrace, though he rejected it at first. See Augustine, *de Genesi ad Litteram*, III.21.33.

[49] See the position of Gregory of Nyssa, for instance, who thought that the original humans would have reproduced like the angels. See *de Hominis Opificio*, XVII.4. This is a tenuous position, however; who's to say angels reproduce *at all*? The only instance we have of such a thing potentially happening is the Sons of God reproducing with *human* wives, something clearly rejected by God (cf. Gen. 6:4).

[50] Walton himself lists maleness and femaleness among the things with proper functions in creation (cf. *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 67). For a discussion of the proper function of our ability to love, see Jesse Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin, Cured by Christ: Agency, Necessity, and Culpability in Augustinian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 132, 138–40.

[51] This is the view, for instance, of Edward Feser, "The Role of Nature in Sexual Ethics," *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 69–76.

explains why there is a composite entity rather than mere parts. Why is something a house rather than wood, glass and metal assembled in a house shape? These materials, for Witt, constitute a house because they are organized in such a way as to perform a function, such as provide shelter. Witt goes on to claim that gender is the social position acquired by the social meaning of the engendering function, and that it organizes all of the other social positions in which one finds oneself. I suggest something much simpler while still retaining the role of functions Witt highlights. The proper function of the sexed body, in conjunction with its ability to love and its tendency toward sociability, is to organize and appropriate social goods as a means to manifest itself socially. When it does so, it is a gender. In other words, on the model presented in this project, the proper function of sex is to be gender. Why is this particular organization of social goods pertaining to the sexed body and appropriated to oneself by means of our loves a single and unified identity? Because, when they are organized around their function (which we may plausibly call its gender), they are constituted into a composite whole.

Second, that creation is the first moment of an internally consistent economy requires that gender is seen as a created good, not something to be overcome and done away with. The categories established at creation are, in Walton's words, *archetypal*,[52] and though there are distortions after the introduction of sin, it remains true that the categories of creation tell us what it means to be a properly functioning instance of that kind of thing, even after the Fall. Now, it is virtually universally accepted that the narrative of Genesis 1 and 2 teach (or at least depict) the creation of humanity as male and female (Gen. 1:27–28, 2:18–24). The controversy arises around the *normativity* of that narrative for ongoing understandings of gender after the Garden. Is it the

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[52] See Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 69: "The fact that the ancient Near East uses the same sorts of materials to describe all of humanity indicates that the materials have archetypal significance…an archetype serves as a representative for all others in the class and defines the class."

case that Genesis requires that we understand humanity as exclusively male and female, or does it teach less than that, allowing for greater flexibility?[53] If creation stands at the head of the economy presided over by the Divine Architect, and if Genesis truly is archetypal, then it seems that its depiction of the creation of two sexes must be normative for the remainder of the economy, even if sin introduces complexities both to our perceptions of this and to the actual proper function of sexed organs.

Immediately, a further question arises. There are intersex/DSD[54] individuals who are either born with ambiguous sexed characteristics or who have such ambiguous characteristics as a result of medical procedure. "Intersex/DSD" is in fact an umbrella term for a variety of states of affairs, one that at times has seemed inadequate for the conditions it attempts to describe. Nevertheless, a person is intersex/DSD when their "bodies do not line up clearly with the medical norms for biological maleness or femaleness (e.g., chromosomes other than XX or XY, ambiguous genitalia, internal reproductive structures of one sex with external sex features of the other sex, just to name a few possibilities)."[55] Consider the two most frequent intersex/DSD conditions as examples, namely, Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS) and Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH).[56] At risk of oversimplification, someone with AIS possesses

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[53] A rather strong thesis in this direction can be found in Deryn Guest, "Troubling the Waters: תהום, Transgender, and Reading Genesis Backwards," in *Transgender, Intersex, and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Teresa J. Hornsby and Deryn Guest, Semeia Studies (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 21–44. Guest argues that though Genesis teaches that there are two sexes, there is reason simply to reject this teaching. As far as consistency within the economy is concerned, it is a flat rejection of any attempt to do so.

[54] I use the term "intersex/DSD" in order to show how the nomenclature is still not agreed upon, and some will prefer "intersex" while others prefer "DSD," standing for "disorders of sexual development" (or sometimes "diversity of sexual development"). Naming is important in discussions such as these, and I hope to show as much sensitivity as I can.

[55] Megan K. DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female, and Intersex in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), xiv.

[56] In the glossary to her book, Susannah Cornwall provides a helpful summary of the most well-known intersex conditions, along with their frequencies, causes and potential health risks. See Susannah Cornwall, *Sex and*

external genitalia that are either completely or partially female (with a clitoris and labia) while the internal reproductive organs are male (undescended testes rather than ovaries and no uterus), and though the individual is female to the eye, they are chromosomally XY and will not menstruate. In the womb, due to a variant SRY gene on the Y chromosome, the fetus' androgen receptors do not respond to the androgens produced by the gonads, which are responsible for sexual differentiation in the fetus at around the sixth week of gestation. As a result, the child is XY, with external female genitals and male internal reproductive organs. Though it is difficult to say just how many infants are born with AIS, numbers range from 1 in 13,000 to 1 in 20,000 for complete AIS, while partial AIS is at about 1 in 130,000. In CAH, the body produces excesses of cortisol due to the absence of the CYP21 gene, which converts progesterone to cortisol. In an attempt to correct the low cortisol levels, the adrenal gland is overworked, making more and more testosterone. This results in an XX individual with unusually large genital development, typically a large clitoris and sometimes fused labia, which gives the appearance of small male genitalia. In general, 1 in 10,000 people have CAH, though rates differ in certain geographic locations (it is much higher amongst Yupik Native Alaskans, for example). Though these two are the most common intersex/DSD conditions, included are also 5-alpha-reductase deficiencies, Genetic Mosaics and Chimeras (who have a combination of XX and XY cells with varying morphological impact), individuals with both male and female genital tissue, Klinefelter's Syndrome (individuals who are 47-XXY, XXXY, XXXXY or XXYY), Turner's syndrome (females who are missing one sex chromosome, XO), hypospadias (where the urinary opening is not at the tip of a penis on a male), micropenises and vaginal agenesis. It is often said that, as a

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Uncertainty in the Body of Christ: Intersex Conditions and Christian Theology, Gender, Theology and Spirituality (New York: Routledge, 2010), 237–46. I draw the information in this paragraph from her glossary.

rule of thumb, there are about as many intersex/DSD individuals as there are people with Down's Syndrome.

Tragically, individuals born with intersex/DSD conditions are subject to horrific surgical treatment. These surgeries are regularly performed while the child is quite young, often just after birth. They have very mixed success rates, frequently requiring regular follow-up treatment well into adulthood. What is more, doctors have been noted as having a very strong repulsive reaction to intersex/DSD births,[57] leading many to conclude that disgust, anxiety and insecurity have often motivated the surgical intervention, not care for the health of the baby. When interviewed, individuals who have undergone these procedures report lifelong sentiments of fear and shame. They disclose feeling like a fraud in their own bodies and in the world. Their follow-up treatments involved being told to lie in a prostrate position while doctors and interns probe and inspect one's genitals, less like the offering of medical care and more like the tinkering of a science experiment. Many intersex/DSD individuals describe such medical practices as abusive. Within the church, this sense of "freakishness" (as one person describes it) does not abate. Sally Gross, an intersex/DSD woman who was responsible for initiating many of the conversations about the issue in the church, describes being told that, on the basis of Gen. 1:27, she is not human (for humans are either male or female) and therefore cannot have a valid baptism. To her, the church viewed her as grotesque and unfit for redemption by Christ.[58]

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[57] One urologist has been quoted to say: "Have you seen a baby with CAH? It's grotesque." For the quote, see the discussion and quotations in Jennifer Anne Cox, *Intersex in Christ: Ambiguous Biology and the Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018), 28–32. The descriptions here are drawn from her presentation.

[58] Sally Gross, "Intersexuality and Scripture," *Theology & Sexuality* 11 (1999): 70 n. 7.

As Cox puts it, "shame is above all the most significant problem."[59] Intersex/DSD individuals have suffered enormous physical and psychological trauma because of the perception that they are abject examples of humanity, cases of medical curiosity rather than image bearers reflecting the care and craft of a Creator who has made them with beauty. Regularly, the justification for their mistreatment has come from the theological position I have just defended, namely, that there are two sexes, and two sexes only. If Genesis is normative in saying that humanity is female and male, does this make intersex/DSD individuals subhuman? That some have acted as if this is so is nothing short of abusive and heinous, an awful application of doctrine that any Christian should recognize as a failure of love. But does this render the teaching of Genesis false? Should we revise the number of sexes in order to reflect the experience of intersex/DSD individuals better?[60]

The first two monograph-length theological treatments of the question at hand have argued for precisely this conclusion: because of what we now know about intersexuality/DSD, we must reject the claim that there are only two sexes, even if that claim is found in Genesis 1 and 2. The first of these, Susannah Cornwall, argues, "Intersex shows that human sex is *not* a simple binary; and since any exception to a dualistic model necessarily undermines the model in its entirety, this make essentialist assumptions about what constitutes 'concrete facts' even more precarious."[61] Cornwall seems to think that intersex/DSD conditions *by their very existence*

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[59] Cox, *Intersex in Christ*, 31.

[60] This was the original proposal of the Brown University biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling in Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*, Revised Ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Anne Fausto-Sterling, "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough," *The Sciences* 33, no. 2 (1993): 20–24; Anne Fausto-Sterling, "The Five Sexes, Revisited," *The Sciences* 40, no. 4 (2000): 18–23.

[61] Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ*, 125. Elsewhere, she says, "To maintain that every human being is *exactly and ineluctably male or female* and that this entails a specific path of gendered and sexual orientation, and that any human being who cannot or will not follow this trajectory is more sinful, flawed or fallen than any other human, is unjustifiable in light of what scientific evidence tells us" (13, emphasis added). This is a

challenge the view that there are only two sexes, for they take what belongs to one sex and attribute it to another, questioning the very stability of the category in the first place.[62] There is, however, a deeper metaphysical commitment that makes such a conclusion possible, for as it is readily known, some intersex/DSD individuals seek to live within a sexual binary and do so rather successfully. For Cornwall, intersex/DSD is a reminder of a more profound truth about reality, namely that claims about normativity, especially claims about what bodies are like, are strongly socially constructed. So, she maintains that "what is deemed normal is never an objective or *a priori* decision, but is shaped by what else is going in a given society or culture" and that the "'character' of any body, then, rests both on its conscious self-projection and on its reaction from, and constitution by, others."[63] Cornwall, then, is a metaphysical anti-realist about the body, claiming that it is literally *constituted* by the shaping of culture. Thus, "All bodies are constituted by their wider body—political, social, religious—and constitute that body."[64] As they are found in her book, however, these are mere assertions without argument—the warrant for these claims comes from the ways in which individuals do not fit prescribed categories. By and large, she relies on Judith Butler's views and appropriates them for her purposes.[65]

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more ambiguous claim, for as the emphasized part shows, it is far too stringent to say that anyone is ineluctably male or female. Anyone who believes in the effects of sin upon the human body will say that this cannot be true of anyone.

[62] Thus Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ*, 87: "If something (be it tissue or something else) which 'belongs' to males, which is the sole preserve of males, is annexed by non-males…or if the perimeters of what constitutes access to a given category are blurred; then questions are raised about whether it is the *actuality* of the body which has socio-cosmic significance, or merely the passing appearance."

[63] Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ*, 48, 100.

[64] Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ*, 106.

[65] Cf. Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ*, 12.

If there are no objective norms for bodily traits, it is also true that there are no normative

traits that inform sex. "Sex," she maintains, "is bolstered by the customs and standards of

society, which are provisional human standards despite having been co-opted to back-up

'overarching' theological models."[66] It is not merely gendered properties that are socially

constructed, but sexed properties also, those traits that differentiate biological males from

biological females from intersex/DSD individuals. Cornwall is willing to accept the metaphysical

price for such a claim; she also denies the existence of human natures,[67] an insight she judges to

be bolstered by disability theologies and queer theory.[68] This enables her to draw upon Galatians

3:28, which will be an important text in this chapter, to argue that redemption in Christ erases

sexual differentiation:

> A realized temporal world where there is no male and female—or where biological
> maleness and femaleness are not the only available options—has seemed too unrealistic
> or utopian for most theologians to take seriously…The Galatians text implies that there is
> something about participation in Christ, about *perichoresis* between Christ and the church
> and between humans, which means that even such apparently self-evident concepts as
> sexed nature are not to be taken as read in the nascent new order.[69]

Cornwall is enabled to take the "literal" reading of Gal. 3:28 because of the metaphysics she

assumes, and she therefore maintains that in Christ the categories of Genesis 1 and 2 are erased.

They are neither fixed nor limiting categories, but redemption will introduce new ones. Gal. 3:28

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[66] Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ*, 232. Cf. also 129, 135

[67] "Whether or not an action or event is 'natural' thus cannot be appealed to as the be-all and end-all of whether it is legitimate, for nature itself is a disrupted category" (Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ*, 215). Cf. 172.

[68] Cf. Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ*, 169 on the former, 201 on the latter.

[69] Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ*, 72. She is imprecise in this quote—the erasure of male and female is not the same an expansion of options in addition to male and female. This ambiguity is never resolved in her book, and it is not clear whether "the erasure of binarism" (72) means the undoing of all stable sex categories or the multiplication of them.

is minimally at odds with Gen. 1:26–28, and what Christ provides is an openness not yet experienced before.[70] In light of this reading, along with her metaphysical anti-realism with regard to bodies, she concludes: "For the normally-sexed male-and-female to truly take account of differently sexed bodies, it will be necessary to move to an understanding that the dichotomously-sexed world is not the 'only' or 'real' world."[71] In order adequately to "take account" of intersex/DSD (whatever that might mean), one must abandon a two-sex model.

From a different methodological standpoint, Megan DeFranza similarly argues that the intersex/DSD conditions require us to abandon commitment to the existence of only two sexes: "Christian theological anthropology can no longer assume that all humans fit into the category of either 'Adam' or 'Eve.'"[72] She helpfully points out that Christ's mention of "eunuchs who have been so from birth" in Matthew 19:12 might be a reference to intersex/DSD, elevating the status and worth of these individuals as those fitting for the kingdom.[73] DeFranza draws the following conclusion from Christ's mention of eunuchs: "the eunuch provided an important supplement to the binary model of human sex and gender. The eunuch emerged as a symbol of the sexless spirit, Christian perfection, the angelic life, and life in the resurrection—when distinctions of

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[70] For Cornwall's treatment of Genesis, see especially *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ*, 73, 120 and 130.

[71] Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ*, 178.

[72] DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology*, 17.

[73] DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology*, 70. For precedent in the Hebrew Bible for such an association, see John Hare, "Hermaphrodites, Eunuchs, and Intersex People: The Witness of Medical Science in Biblical Times and Today," in *Intersex, Theology, and the Bible: Troubling Bodies in Church, Text, and Society*, ed. Susannah Cornwall (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 79–96. Hare's studies helpfully points to several categories of eunuch in the Hebrew world, of which the *saris khama* is said to be the one in mind in this context. It is not obvious, however, that we can easily transpose such a category to contemporary intersex/DSD individuals, for in the context of Matt. 19, Jesus is commending those who do not marry. If the eunuchs from birth really are intersex/DSD people, then it would appear as though Christ is commanding them not to marry, a conclusion no intersex/DSD advocate would adopt. If intersex/DSD people marry and are able to have stable family lives (and they are), then the association in Matt. 19 is undermined.

gender would be shed and men and women would relate to one another according to a common humanity, an identity hidden in Christ."[74] Like Cornwall, DeFranza argues from the fact that intersex/DSD individuals exist to the conclusion that there are more than two sexes (or the absence of sex, it is not clear), yet she bolsters her claims with appeal to Christ's affirmation of the life of the eunuch.

DeFranza has a dedicated treatment of the creation narratives of Genesis 1 and 2 and it merits special attention. She acknowledges that Genesis depicts creation in sexually binary terms, for God creates only males and females. She rejects, however, that this depiction is normative or paradigmatic for future expressions of humanity, for Genesis serves as the fountainhead of an ever-expanding diversity of human life, including sex: "Reading the Genesis account in light of the larger biblical narrative, we are able to affirm the goodness of sex difference as the fountainhead of human difference without requiring the male-female pattern to become the paradigmatic form of the other."[75] DeFranza claims that from Adam and Eve spring forth "other ages, other languages, other cultures, and even others whose sex does not match either parents," and so the general thrust of the economy is from a simple set of categories to an ever-expanding set of diverse expressions of humanity.[76] Therefore, the Genesis account is "not to be understood as the final word. Rather, true humanity is found in Christ as a future toward which we are moving."[77] Like Cornwall, she takes a "literal" interpretation of Gal. 3:28, where

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[74] DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology*, 106.

[75] DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology*, 179–180. Cf. also 178: "Rather than identifying male and female as the paradigmatic forms of otherness, they can be interpreted as the fountainhead of others who may become more 'other' than their parents could have ever conceived."

[76] DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology*, 182.

[77] DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology*, 239.

in Christ there is literally no sex or gender.[78] Adam and Eve, therefore, "function as *progenitors* rather than *paradigms* of human difference-in-relation."[79]

Like Cornwall, DeFranza relies on Judith Butler[80] to argue that sex along with gender is a social construct, having the features it has in virtue of social and cultural dynamics. She is forthright about the metaphysical underpinnings of her view: "Language is now believed not only to describe the world but also to create worlds, enabling us to see some things and not others, to think some things and not others. The history of the sexes, especially the history of intersex, illustrates this very point."[81] Yet, like Cornwall, we are not provided with a straightforward argument for this view; instead the social construction of sex is taken as a "given," or we are "reminded" that sex is socially constructed, or we are "confronted with the reality of the social construction of sex."[82] We are not, however, given a philosophical or theological argument for this view, except for what has already been provided by Butler. Intersex/DSD individuals, however, are meant to serve as *confirmations* that this thesis is true, even if many of them do not wish to abandon a two-sex system.

DeFranza's constructive solution is intended to be flexible and open-ended. She maintains, "Statistically significant differences remain useful for medicine, politics, psychology,

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[78] Cf. DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology*, 184. Both Cornwall and DeFranza also argue that in Christ there is literally intersexuality/DSDs, for Christ *himself* was intersex/DSD. Though he was externally male, he had no human father from whom he would have acquired a Y chromosome, suggesting that he had a severe form of CAH. This argument is found originally in Edward L. Kessel, "A Proposed Biological Interpretation of the Virgin Birth," *The Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 35 (1983): 129–136.

[79] DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology*, 287.

[80] Cf. DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology*, 263 for her appropriation of Butler's metaphysical anti-realism.

[81] DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology*, 137.

[82] See DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology*, 29, 35, 51.

sociology, and theology, so long as they are not employed in oppressive ways. Intersex certainly requires an alteration of the binary model. It necessitates opening up space in between the categories of male and female. Instead of two discrete categories, intersex shows how these overlap in various ways."[83] She leaves the precise features of that space undefined, and perhaps deliberately so. So, she does not enumerate how many sexes there are, nor how medical practice can follow statistically significant differences. But what is clearly false, on her view, is the claim that there are only two sexes. Eunuchs illustrate this, the Genesis narrative does not confine us to it and the social construction of sex allows for it.

There are many levels at which to engage Cornwall and DeFranza, and these scholars are to be commended for giving serious theological attention to a category that has often been invisible. Nevertheless, there is considerable reason to question their proposals. It is not clear exactly what it is that they are proposing in the first place. At times, they seem to be moving toward a metaphysical state of affairs where there are *more* sexes, perhaps as many sexes as there are biological expressions. At other times, especially in their reliance upon Gal. 3:28, they seem to indicate that there will be no sex. Sometimes, *androgyny* (the possession of both male and female sexual traits) is seen as an apt representation of intersex/DSD, while at other times it is denied.[84] It remains entirely unclear what kinds of metaphysical revisions to sex one is meant to make—refute the binary, expand it, or collapse its categories so that they are not exclusively expressible? Different arguments found in their books lead to different conclusions; if we follow Gal. 3:28 in the way they propose, then we will be inclined to think that there is no longer any

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[83] DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology*, 270.

[84] Cornwall is especially guilty of this equivocation. See *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ,* 10, 72, 82, 212 for identification of intersex/DSD with androgyny, while at 119 she admits that "most intersex/DSD people do not have both male and female gonads" (cf. also 92 and 99).

sex, but if we take DeFranza's suggestion that Genesis 1 gives rise to greater diversity in human expression, then we will be inclined to think there are many sexes. But those are not the same claim, and it is unclear for which conclusion they are arguing.

Another obvious issue with their views is their simplistic reliance upon the metaphysical arguments of Judith Butler to show that sex is socially constructed. Since I have already engaged with Butler in chapter two, I will simply point out that their arguments stand or fall with Butler's, and I have attempted to show that Butler's metaphysical anti-realism is indefensible. If Butler is unreliable as a representative for the social construction of sex, and if one's warrant for holding such a view depends on her, then the foundations for advancing such a view are equally unreliable.

More relevant to the purposes of this section, it is clear that Cornwall and DeFranza reject both tenets of the doctrine of creation for which I have argued. Yet, they do not give persuasive reason for rejecting them, nor do they replace them with satisfactory alternatives. On the question of the internal coherence of the divine economy, both Cornwall and DeFranza maintain that the categories provided at creation are neither archetypal nor consistent with the categories of redemption. Put another way, Gen. 1 and 2 are at odds with Gal. 3:28, such that redemption means redemption *from* the categories of creation. DeFranza attempts to make sense of this by arguing that creation is a progenitor of future possibilities, but this still requires denying any normativity or continuation of created categories. In this, both Cornwall and DeFranza offer us *Gnostic visions of creation*. This is not empty derision; just as the Gnostics construed the divine economy as one according to which redemption freed us from the categories of material creation, so also do they recommend the same. Creation, on a non-Gnostic (Irenaean, even) understanding *echoes through Scripture*, even in a fallen world. Much like the theme of a classical piece of

music, it is introduced at the outset, replayed in a minor key, crescendos in another movement and finally blares forth in a *fortissimo* at its conclusion.[85] As many commentators have observed, Genesis 1 and 2 present creation as a temple, the seat of God's interaction and presence, one that is represented in the tabernacle,[86] in the temple,[87] in the incarnated human nature of Christ[88] and in the new heaven and earth.[89] Thus, though creation is under the subjection of sin, it is nevertheless a persistent presence in the economy, exerting its normative force and yearning to return to the trajectory established for it in Gen. 1 and 2. An economy that severs the categories of Genesis from the world into which we are redeemed is Gnostic by definition, and it is incompatible with the resonance of Scripture. Cornwall and DeFranza, by disjointing the economy, offer a Gnostic remedy to a genuine problem.

Second, it is difficult to see what makes creation "good" on their view, even though they both seem to retain some kind of proper functional understanding of human bodies. It is virtually impossible to understand intersex/DSD conditions without reaching for language about the

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[85] I borrow this illustration from Matthew Mason, "The Wounded It Heals: Gender Dysphoria and Resurrection of the Body," in *Beauty, Order, and Mystery: A Christian Vision of Human Sexuality*, ed. Gerald L. Hiestand and Todd A. Wilson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 143.

[86] The moments of the construction of the tabernacle mirror the moments of creation in their "Yahweh said to Moses" construction (Ex. 25:1, 30:11, 17, 22, 34, 31:1), concluding with an instruction for Sabbath observance (Ex. 34:12–13).

[87] Walton highlights 1 Kings 7, whose objects are direct recalls of creation of the universe, so much so that Josephus commented: "every one of these objects is intended to recall and represent the universe" (*The Lost World of Genesis One*, 80–83, citing Josephus, *The Jewish War* 3, 7.7, trans. H. St. J. Thackery, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 403).

[88] In the New Testament, it is regularly observed that the prologue of John echoes the "temple-vision" of Gen. 1 when he says, "*In the beginning* was the Word…And the Word became flesh and dwelt [lit., ἐσκήνωσεν, 'to tabernacle'] among us" (1:14). Thus Richard Hays: "The prologue of John's Gospel is best understood as a midrash on Genesis I, a midrash that links the idea of a preexistent creative divine *logos* to the motif of divine Wisdom seeking a home in the world (e.g., Sir 24:3–8)" (*Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 310).

[89] The fulfillment of Revelation 21 and 22 is a fulfillment specifically *of* creation, stocked with its own "tree of life" (Rev. 22:2).

improper functioning of sexed organs. Thus, AIS refers to androgen receptors *unable* to respond to the androgen, and CAH to an *inability* of the body to convert progesterone to cortisol, thereby creating too much testosterone. Cornwall admits as much: "In fact, many people do not understand their conditions [as sex identity issues], and prefer to figure their intersex/DSD state as a *medical* condition rather than one which inevitably affects sex-gender identity."[90] The rationale for this, as intersex/DSD advocates like Bo Laurent and Ellen Feder point out, is to ensure that intersex/DSD individuals actually receive adequate medical care. One intersex/DSD individual, for instance, died of vaginal cancer, partly because doctors did not understand the particulars of this individual's condition.[91] Thus, it is important to retain the language of proper function when it comes to sexed bodies, something that sometimes protects the interests of intersex/DSD individuals themselves. But if this is so, much of the reasoning for revising the categories of male and female is undermined, for not all biological expressions of sex are the same. Some are properly functioning, others are not. It is important to point out—and this can be a step forward in mitigating the stigma of intersex/DSD—that *everyone* has an improperly functioning sexed body to some extent or other, especially if we include things like our loves and desires. All sexed bodies—*all of humanity*—does not function properly, and intersexuality/DSD is not a uniquely inhuman instance of this. As Cox highlights, "Intersex is simply *one* distortion of sexuality."[92] It is not a subhuman trait, in any special sense, and it is simply shortsighted for anyone to say intersex/DSD individuals are worse off than unambiguously sexed people. Instead, all of humanity is improperly functioning, all sexuality has gone awry, and all of creation needs

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[90] *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ*, 9.

[91] See Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ*, 45.

[92] Cox, *Intersex in Christ*, 58.

repair. To say this is not to impugn intersex/DSD people, but to acknowledge that it is a baseless

mistake to mark out these image bearers as uniquely inhuman. If all creation groans under sin,

then it is a myopic to envision that some individuals who do not experience a *particular*

expression of improper function as more worthy than others and to think that these others are

objects for medical curiosity and social stigma.

This brings me to the central issue: When we talk about intersex/DSD individuals in these

discussions, what are we trying to do? It is sometimes hard to avoid the feeling that we are

speculating with the detritus of shattered lives. At worst, these carry overtly ideological

motivations.[93] But is it not a mistake to think that *metaphysical inquiry*, as important as it is in its

right place, is the right tool for the church and society to care about individuals who have been

shamed and mistreated? Cornwall and DeFranza have helped the academy and the church by

bringing attention to the experience of intersex/DSD individuals, but they hastily transition to

claims about metaphysical revisions in an effort to address the harms done. There is a clear

difference, however, between discussion of properties and natures and the treatment of people

with those properties and natures. That is, it is one thing to consider what is proper function and

what is not, and it is another altogether to mistreat someone on the basis of perceived improper

function. Of course, it is often the case that the former *serves as a justification for the latter*; I am

not denying that. But the solution to this is not revising the metaphysics, especially with

questionable and poorly argued alternatives. Suppose that DeFranza and Cornwall succeed, and

we move to living in a world where there are not just two sexes. Nothing intrinsic to that success

points in the direction of justice, for it could very well be that members of two sexes abuse

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[93] Cox worries about this: Some people "are using intersex people as pawns for their political ends. Intersex persons should not be required to change the social order nor do they exist as object lessons for radical agendas. Using people in this way undermines the humanity of intersex people" (*Intersex in Christ*, 36–37).

members of a third, or of a fourth, and so on. In that case, instead of providing hope for intersex/DSD individuals who have experienced shame, such metaphysical revisions only paint a clearer target on their backs.

The solution, so I will go on to exposit in the "Redemption" section below, is working toward communities where the establishment of worth is not attributable to one's sex or gender, but to one's status in Christ. Specifically, within the church, the pursuit of justice needs to include the communal pursuit of communities of grace, where grace is fundamentally understood as the reception of all that is in Christ without consideration of the worth or social capital of the recipient. Receiving such a gift creates a community where those who have experienced shame, grief and sentiments of impurity (as so many sexually abused individuals have) are not treated according to any deficit of social capital attached to such experiences. In this community, whether one is male, female or intersex/DSD is not of consequence when it comes to *worth*. Any treatment or consideration of intersex/DSD individuals beneath such a standard is an aberration of the gift of Christ, a new legalism where acceptance in Christ is not on the basis of grace but of sex.

But is it true that we easily categorize intersex/DSD individuals into female or male? Should we simply wave away all sexed ambiguity? For some, it simply is not clear whether they are male or female. As has been emphasized throughout so much of this project, my preference is to be *epistemically restrained*, not *metaphysically revisionist*. Perhaps there are cases of intersex/DSD that produce genuinely ambiguous phenotypical and genotypical traits, such there is really no way to tell whether someone is female or male. The best course of action, I propose, is neither reckless surgery nor is it the creation of new metaphysical options. Both of these represent hasty attempts to categorize an ambiguity that the church and the world ought to live

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with; both are attempts at rapid solutions. Epistemic restraint, I recommend, is the best way forward. Instead of obeying the need to categorize the ambiguously sexed, perhaps we ought to question why such a need exists in the first place. It seems to me wiser to show patience and finds ways to help the individual to flourish despite the ambiguity. There are countless exemplars who have demonstrated profound personal flourishing in the face of various impediments to proper functioning, and a crucial component facilitating more of this is creating communities where these individuals are not suffering losses of social capital on account of their sex.

It is consistent with everything just said that there are two sexes, female and male. My encouragement of epistemic restraint regarding cases of intersex/DSD does not mean that there is no fact of the matter regarding the issue. Rather, it means that sometimes we are simply not in a position to know, and our task is not to make the world an uncomfortable place for those whose sexed ambiguity is beyond our remit. This is not resolved with metaphysics, but in the lives of communities, especially of churches who have fully appreciated the ramifications of the gift of grace. I will conclude by saying creation has remarkable relevance to a theology of gender. It is the beginning of the unfolding economy and echoes throughout it, meaning that just as we were created gendered, we cannot construe redemption so as to eliminate them. Sex and gender, like all creaturely realities, will be redeemed, sustained and perfected by the wise Architect. Anything less falls into Gnosticism. Moreover, sex and gender are good, meaning that they too have proper functions and a place within God's orderly universe. Taken together, a picture of created gender emerges where it can be properly appreciated, for it has been created by God.

6.3 Fall

When considering the ramifications of sin for gender, it is tempting to go in a variety of directions. What some see as created and good others see as fallen and distorted, leading one to

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make complex decisions about how to characterize gender in relation to the economy. For instance, some theologians see the headship of men and submission of women as categories provided at creation, while others prefer to construe such relations in terms of sinful subordination, following from humanity's fall into sin.[94] While I judge the latter alternative to be the best reading of the economy as it is presented in Scripture,[95] this question will not be the focus of this section (despite its popularity in so much of the literature). Instead, I turn my attention to what I take to be the paradigmatic instance of sinful gender expression, namely, sexual assault, especially toward women and children.[96]

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[94] For the former view, see, preeminently, Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More than 100 Disputed Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 29–44. For the latter view there are many examples, but see, perhaps surprisingly, Martin Luther: "if the woman had not been deceived by the serpent and had not sinned, she would have been the equal of Adam in all respects" (Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1–5*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. George V. Schick, vol. 1, Luther's Works (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 1958), 115).

[95] As indicated by my comment that Genesis 3:16 introduces sinful subordination that Song of Songs 7:10 reverses. There is reason to doubt the arguments provided by Grudem and others that the creation narrative teaches male headship, notably the order of creation and the designation of the woman as "helper." For both, there are substantial counterexamples that indicate the authority moves in the other direction (Cain and Abel with respect to order, the designation of God as "helper" in the Hebrew Bible). For further detail, see Cynthia Long Westfall, *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), chpt. 3; William G. Witt, *Icons of Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Theology for Women's Ordination* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020), chpt. 5.

[96] There is some dispute about the adequacy of terms like sexual violence, sexual violation, rape and sexual assault, just as there is a great amount of opaqueness regarding the nature of such actions. For instance, Linda Martín Alcoff prefers to refer to this cluster of actions as "sexual violations" on the basis of the emphasis she wishes to give to sexual agency. See Linda Martín Alcoff, *Rape and Resistance: Understanding the Complexities of Sexual Violation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 12. It is not my concern to settle that question here, and I acknowledge the complexity of causes and relations that surround sexual sin. The central point I emphasize is that these actions involve sexual acts (or acts relating to sexual expression, like kissing) where at least one individual lacks sexual agency (whether that is understood as consent or a disadvantageous power relation where their consent is forced). Sexual agency involves a positive contribution to engagement in the act consistent with their agency (again, whether that is consent or something stronger). In their book, Justin and Lindsey Holcomb rightly point out that sexual agency is lost through a variety of circumstances, such as "force, intimidation, violence, coercion, manipulation, threat, deception, or abuse of authority," a list to which more can be added (Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace: Hope and Healing for Victims of Sexual Assault* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 28). If any of these cause the sexual act (either on its own or in the complex of causes leading to it), assault is highly probable.

Sexual assault has already been brought up at several points in this study. It was discussed as a chief example for moral evaluation in the second chapter with the incidents at Pitcairn Island; the previous chapter also demonstrated it to be widespread within contemporary evangelical culture.[97] So what kind of theological attention should one give to it? While sexual assault presents a morally complex challenge to the church that ought to be resisted at various levels, theologians do have a role to play in identifying the pastoral, moral and theological dimensions involved therein, so as to promote Christian environments of healing and grace. Victims of rape have argued as much. Theologians ought to have something to say in response to a victim who asks, "What makes someone, a young man, want to have sex under *these* kinds of circumstances when he might have them otherwise? What is the nature of the desire that leads to such events? What are the beliefs necessary to generate such an action, or to think afterward that no harm was done?"[98] These are questions that require a theological response, for "[w]ithout conceptual categories that can identify unjust, pathological or problematic behaviour, there can be little comprehension of what causes and maintains violence against women."[99] Survivors are in need of support from the church, but too often they are made to feel unwelcome and unsafe. Instead of the church drawing "on the resources of [their traditions,] whether that's a particular historic emphasis, theological lens, or doctrinal viewpoint," it often provides safe harbor for

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[97] While accurate statistics for sexual assault and rape are notoriously difficult to ascertain due to the low number of actual reporting, a common statistic on the subject states that one in every six women in the United States have experienced attempted or completed rape (roughly 17 percent), and that 90 percent of victims are female. For helpful details on the statistics, see the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network's page, "Scope of the Problem: Statistics | RAINN," accessed February 23, 2021, https://www.rainn.org/statistics/scope-problem.

[98] Alcoff, *Rape and Resistance*, 7.

[99] Elaine Storkey, *Scars Across Humanity: Understanding and Overcoming Violence Against Women* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 176.

assailants to carry out their heinous deeds.[100] Ruth Everhart's work is filled with such instances. She tells the story of Melissa who, upon grieving the death of her significant other in a Christmas Eve service, was raped in the dark hallway of her church. Later, when she confides this painful experience to a Christian boyfriend, he immediately also rapes her, a fact only explicable by the fact that he saw her as worthless due to her violation.[101] The church has too often been complicit in this "most detestable crime,"[102] and if a theological evaluation of such occurrences can serve to rectify this reality and begin to shift Christian perception on the issue, it is worth undertaking.

It might come as a surprise that Augustine, whose theology of love provided the core elements of the model of gender I provided, cared deeply about rape and rape culture, and that he sought to give pastoral and theological consolation to victims while also challenging the culture that facilitated assault. As we have already seen, his *City of God* articulates a vision for the "most glorious city of God," inhabited by pilgrims guided by a primary enjoyment of God, and for the "earthly city" which "seeks dominion" even though it "is itself under the dominion of its very lust for domination [*libido dominandi*]."[103] The heavenly city is characterized by glory, while the earthly city is characterized by a desire to dominate others through the greater achievement of power, after which it *lusts*. This corresponds to the two ways Augustine envisions love in a human person, either as good and directed to God or wicked and directed to personal satisfaction and domination: "The foot of the soul is properly understood as love. When it is misshapen it is

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[100] Ruth Everhart, *The #MeToo Reckoning: Facing the Church's Complicity in Sexual Abuse and Misconduct* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 237–38.

[101] See Everhart, *The #MeToo Reckoning*, 119–25.

[102] The title of philosophical essays on the topic; *A Most Detestable Crime: New Philosophical Essays on Rape*, ed. Keith Burgess-Jackson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[103] Augustine, *de Civitate Dei*, I.prefatio. Hereafter, *de civ.*, I.pref. The English translation is from Augustine, *The City of God*, 2012.

called concupiscence or lust; when it is well formed it is called love or charity."[104] Interestingly, the first people to be called "glorious" in the *City of God* are the victims of rape who arrive in Augustine's community of Hippo after the sack of Rome, and the first people who are said to live by the *libido dominandi* or lust for domination are their rapists who sacked Rome.[105] From the outset of one of his most important works, then, Augustine identifies rape as a particularly vituperative example of sinful love and accords to its victims a particular dignity. For this reason, it will serve as our archetype for sinful gendered love.

What does Augustine have to say about the rape of these Roman Christian women? His central diagnosis of the situation is that "the crime belongs only to the man who took the woman by force and not at all to the woman who was taken by force, without her consent and against her will."[106] The raped women are guilty of absolutely nothing. They have neither lost their purity or chastity, nor have they done anything morally wrong, and whatever shame they feel is directly attributable to the wrongful act of another done to them, not something for which they are responsible. Instead, Augustine points to the assailant as exemplifying sinful love, the lust for domination. The solution, then, is not to punish a woman who is raped; instead, she is to receive no violence, whether by her own hands, by the hands of a rapist or by the destructive forces of rape culture. Instead, says Augustine, she is to be believed, consoled and supported for distinctly

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[104] Augustine, *Ennarrationes in Psalmos*, IX.15. The English translation is from Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms, 1–32*, trans. Maria Boulding, vol. III/15, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000).

[105] This is pointed out by Melanie Webb, "'Before the Eyes of Their Own God': Susanna, Rape Law, and Testimony in City of God 1.19," in *Reading Scripture as a Political Act: Essays on the Theopolitical Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Matthew A. Tapie and Daniel W. McClain (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 80. I am particularly indebted to Webb's work throughout this section, and the essays that I cite represent her groundbreaking work on Augustine's response to rape in *civ. Dei.*

[106] *de civ.*, I.19.

theological reasons, even under cultural circumstances where there is every reason not to do so.

Webb summarizes the theological project of the *City of God* as it relates to rape as follows:

> Augustine sets out to address pastorally the pressing social and ecclesial concerns in the aftermath of the sack of Rome (410 C.E.), specifically through appeal to and revision of both Roman and Roman Christian virtue traditions…He is reassuring his flock that the depredations of 410 C.E., and others like them, were not a consequence of the community's promiscuity, and especially reassuring women in the community that they need not feel the burden and shame associated with rape.[107]

Before exploring this set of claims, it is important to gain an understanding of the historical context regarding attitudes toward rape victims. In the Roman milieu of the time, including amongst its Christian leaders, it was expected that a victim of rape commit suicide. The reason for this had everything to do with the shame associated with sexual impurity, and if a victim of rape wishes to safeguard her legacy as a chaste woman, she must take her own life. Only then is her testimony corroborated with a sufficient witness, for then "death is her witness."[108] Of course, measures are only this drastic when no alternative is available, and in classical Rome, "a woman's will, or initiative, did not play any part" in defining adultery, elopement and rape, making the distinction between adultery and rape practically nonexistent. Therefore, "the only indubitable testimony that women did not in any way desire or consent to rape was suicide."[109] If a woman wanted to avoid the shame associated with the loss of purity, then, she needed to take her own life. These cultural principles of shame, purity and rape were imbedded in Roman culture and enforced by narratives of exemplars who did just this, the chief of which was Lucretia.[110] Lucretia was a dignified Roman woman who was raped by the king's

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[107] Webb, "'Before the Eyes of Their Own God,'" 57–58.

[108] Webb, "'Before the Eyes of Their Own God,'" 73.

[109] Webb, "'Before the Eyes of Their Own God,'" 58.

[110] Lucretia's story is told in Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, I.58.1–11.

son, Sextus Tarquinius. He threatened to leave the dead body of Lucretia's slave on top of her to embroil her in illicit sexual activity if she did not allow him his lust. The next day, she gathered her family about her and took her own life just after requesting revenge. Her doing so motivated the overthrow of the Tarquin dynasty and the rise of the Roman Republic in the sixth century B.C.E. Lucretia's shadow loomed large over Roman responses to rape; a woman's suicide was expected.

Amongst Christian leaders, these trends were fortified. Jerome and Ambrose both prized a woman's chastity above her life and elevated Lucretia as an exemplar of virtue.[111] Much like some segments of the contemporary church, purity was prized as a distinctly feminine virtue (even above their lives), thereby creating a culture in which its loss stripped a woman of worth and brought upon her unspeakable shame. Like the example from Everhart above illustrates, such conceptions facilitated a rape culture[112] in which the loss of purity empowers an assailant to think he can do anything he desires with an impure body. As many victims have testified, the world is filled with rape cultures, and wartime only intensifies sexual violence. Storkey reports that 90 percent of casualties in modern warfare are civilian and "of these 75 per cent are women and children."[113] She mentions the examples of the "Comfort Women" of the 1930s, young girls (often early teenagers) brought or abducted from Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, East Timor and China to Japan to provide Japanese forces with "sexual service." As many as 200,000 girls were taken and forced to have sex with as many as forty soldiers a day, facing beatings if

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[111] For their statements, see Melanie Webb, "'On Lucretia Who Slew Herself': Rape and Consolation in Augustine's *De Ciuitate Dei*," *Augustinian Studies* 44, no. 1 (2013): 37–38.

[112] A rape culture is one where definitions and stereotypes for women and men make possible, facilitate, encourage, cover up or otherwise promote rape, whether these are insufficient legal standards or commonly-held notions about gender. See Storkey, *Scars Across Humanity*, 130.

[113] Storkey, *Scars Across Humanity*, 136.

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they resisted. Such torture often drove these girls to commit suicide.[114] Though this is a

particularly odious example of sexual violence during war time, the mechanics and motivations

involved therein were not all that different from Augustine's, where the crumbling of Roman

civilization was imminent.

Augustine recognizes that the victims of rape who had killed themselves, including

Lucretia, did so out of a profound sense of shame: "when she killed herself because she had

endured an adulterer (even though she was not herself an adulteress), it was not out of love of

purity but out of the weakness of shame. What made her feel shame was the debased act of

another committed on her but not with her."[115] In a deranged Roman milieu where a woman's

social capital and worth were deeply tied to her purity, the loss of such inevitably resulted in

shame. There are cultural analogues with our day here as well. Everhart, who was repeatedly

raped for six hours at gunpoint, describes the aftermath: "I believed that being raped had

damaged me beyond repair. I struggled with feelings of *shame* and *worthlessness*."[116] She

mentions another victim who was abducted at fourteen and raped daily for nine months: "When

she described her highly publicized ordeal, she said the *shame* of rape made her feel like used

chewing gum. *Worthless*. Used up."[117] *Shame* and *worthlessness* are frequently used words to

describe the impact of gendered sin and must be taken into account in the theological reflection

at hand. The reasons why a victim of sexual assault would feel shame are complex, but they at

least involve a sense of being violated, of having had something taken away, of having bodily

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[114] Storkey, *Scars Across Humanity*, 140.

[115] *de civ.*, I.19.

[116] *The #MeToo Reckoning*, 4. Emphasis added.

[117] Everhart, *The #MeToo Reckoning*, 52. Emphasis added.

boundaries once thought stable and safe shown to be violable and penetrable. When a human

being with complex emotions, identities and memories is reduced to an object for lascivious

consumption, such denigration understandably creates a sense of worthlessness and shame. For,

so it is assumed, only someone who is worthless can be treated like this. Someone with dignity

would have been treated better.[118]

Augustine's response to rape in Rome, therefore, needed to address the issues

surrounding shame and worth. In contrast to his ecclesiological contemporaries, who thought

shame is only redeemed through suicide, he proffered a two-pronged response. First, he does not

mince words about the rapist's motivation, diagnosing it in squarely sinful terms and thereby

shifting the focus of moral evaluation onto the assailant.[119] What motivates rape, he maintains, is

nothing other than human love sinfully distorted. He compares it to the torture of Regulus, who

was forced to stand upright in a box with nails on all sides, confining him to death.[120] Rape is

less like something for which one ought to have the scorn of a culture poured upon them, and

more like the undergoing of heinous torture at the hands of wicked people. Webb concludes that

"just as no one would want to be tortured, so also no one would want to be raped. Augustine

does not understand rape primarily as a sexual encounter, but as torture and bereavement. Rape,

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[118] For a persuasive account of the relationship between rape, memory and identity, see Danielle Tumminio Hansen, "Remembering Rape in Heaven: A Constructive Proposal for Memory and the Eschatological Self," *Modern Theology* Online Early View (September 20, 2020): 1–16.

[119] Of course, discussions about the motivation for rape are as complex as the phenomenon itself. This is the central claim of Alcoff's *Rape and Resistance*, which maintains that the "idea that sex is complex but rape is not is not helpful" (9). By commending Augustine's diagnosis, I do not intend to ignore this complexity; instead, I hope to add his contribution to the growing literature on the causes of rape and assault, in an effort to strengthen its diversity and broadness, and to provide a distinctly Christian theological account. The more accounts offered, it seems to me, the better.

[120] *de civ.*, I.15.

as a result, warrants consolation—a judgment, it seems, that Augustine is the first to make."[121]

Those who tortured Regulus, just like those who raped the Roman women, were driven by the *libido dominandi*, the lust for domination. It is fundamentally a dark desire for the exercise of power over another, since "there is hardly anyone who is free of the love of wielding power or does not long for human glory," and this wielding of power is so widespread that it "creeps like a cancer."[122] Unsurprisingly, when one lives by the *libido dominandi*, one is prone to cultivate and exercise one's power to one's private ends, even to the point of crime: "anyone who wants domination and power…will generally seek to obtain what he loves by even the most blatantly criminal acts."[123] So it was with the torturers and rapists—their sinful love drove them to obtain what they sought through the exercise of domination and power, even to the point of the destruction of life.[124] They were motivated by "lustful use," had an "utterly depraved desire" and set upon their victims "with violence"—all features indicative of distorted love.[125]

There are stunning parallels here with contemporary assessments of rape, which are often said to have deep associations with the wrongful use of power for domination. Though the apothegm "Rape is not about sex, it is about power," is probably too simplistic to describe a complex reality, it has nonetheless resonated with victims to the point of carrying wide acceptance. Storkey comments, "Power inequalities…often go along with incidences of

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[121] Webb, "'On Lucretia Who Slew Herself,'" 41.

[122] *En. in Ps.*, 1.1.

[123] *de civ.*, V.19.

[124] Webb comments: "Rape…is a particularly salient facet of the damage wreaked by the libido dominandi, by which Augustine characterizes Roman society, and by extension the earthly city, in his preface to the City of God" (Melanie Webb, "Rape and Its Aftermath in Augustine's City of God" (Dissertation, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University, 2016), 3–4).

[125] *de civ.*, I.19.

rape…When sin corrupts those who have power, the effects on the powerless can be overwhelming, leaving them dehumanized and objectified…Sin eliminates love, and fuels loathing."[126] These power inequalities can manifest in a variety of ways—sometimes at the end of a weapon, sometimes through the influence of the assailant, sometimes through spiritual authority—but the key idea is that if rape and assault involve, at the very least, some violation of sexual agency, there must be *something* that makes the violation possible. That variable must exercise sufficient power to break the will of the victim, or to exercise sufficient pressure to bring them to the point of doing what the assailant wishes. After a fellow pastor kissed her against her will, Everhart recognized that leading up to it was "a larger pattern of domination and control," making the occurrence "not only sexual abuse, but abuse of power."[127] By calling it a lust for domination and power that leads to acts of violence, Augustine is naming rape in the same way these victims do. The blame for these acts falls, unequivocally, on the assailant moved by a lust for crime and power, not on the victim.

This first prong of Augustine's response has to do with the causes for rape. The second prong then turns to the consolation of the victim.[128] To offer hope, he presents these women with the love that is found in God as a contrast to hateful cupidity demonstrated by their assailants.

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[126] *Scars Across Humanity*, 128, 223.

[127] *The #MeToo Reckoning*, 91, 96.

[128] cf. *de civ.*, II.2: Augustine offers "consolation to those holy women of devout chastity whose treatment at the hands of the enemy brought the pangs of shame upon them, even though it actually left their unshaken virtue wholly intact. There is no wickedness in their life for which they could possibly need to feel ashamed, and so they should not feel ashamed of their life." Webb notes that *consolatio* is a well-established literary form of the time intended primarily for those in exile or bereavement. "To introduce the term *consolatio* is to acknowledge that the addressee has suffered a grievous loss and quite understandably, is debilitated in the effort to live stably and resiliently. As a result, words of strength from that person's community members are in order so that the recipient might be nurtured toward the pursuit of healing." Rape victims were never the object of a *consolatio*, so Augustine's choice of the term was a countercultural choice that "pleads with the living to recognize these women as dignified and chaste" and calls on these women to "choose a different way forward and take their places among the living" ("'On Lucretia Who Slew Herself,'" 55, 57).

These women, he says in no uncertain terms, "have the glory of chastity within them, the witness of conscience. They have this in the eyes of their own God, and they need nothing more."[129] The worth and status of these women is chiefly derivable from the God who sees all and tolerates no injustice, and in the eyes of this God, they are glorious. Recall that glory, in an Augustinian idiolect, is a characteristic of the heavenly city, inhabited by those people God has called, sustained and perfected. The previous citation is the first instance Augustine calls someone "glorious," and through it he is assuring these women that God sees, knows and validates them. Augustine "appropriates God to these women, and in so doing insists that God is not the property of his male readership."[130] Though their male-dominated culture attributed to them shame and worthlessness, Augustine assured them that in the eyes of the One who governs history, they are without shame and beautiful. Though they are enmeshed in a culture that works against the purposes and intents of their God, they can be assured that what is most fundamentally true about them is that they are accepted and glorious in the eyes of God.

Augustine's consolation then becomes even more specific as he looks to apply this love to the concrete situation in which these victims found themselves. While the consolation encountered in God is a powerful solace, Augustine also challenges the surrounding culture to conform their practices to God's standard. It is important to recall that this section of the *City of God* is not written *to the victims as such*; it is written to civil officials like Marcellinus, a Roman civil servant, and Volusianus, the imperial proconsul of Africa.[131] It can be said, therefore, that

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[129] *de civ.*, I.19. I have modified the translation from "in the eyes of God" to "in the eyes of *their own* God" (*habent autem coram oculis dei sui*) to highlight the fact that Augustine is emphasizing that God is, without doubt, on the side of the victim. It is one of the few times where he construes God as the possession of a human being.

[130] Webb, "'Before the Eyes of Their Own God,'" 77.

[131] cf. *de civ.*, I.pref.

"Augustine seeks to forge theological resources for stability and strength as these women choose life day by day, moment by moment, until living can once again be experienced, consistently, as a pleasure. In their living, these women are well-regarded by God, and society's leaders are to regard them similarly."[132] Since the standards set up by Roman culture informed so much of the shame these women experienced, Augustine calls this culture to recognize where significant correction is necessary. If God does not shame these women but upholds their worth, so must the society in which they live.

A crucial component of this transformation, as much in his day as in our own, is trusting in the testimony of victims. In Augustine's day, the testimony of women carried no weight, so if a woman claimed to have been raped, chances were that it would end poorly for her (perhaps even in her trial and death). Today, there is great concern about false allegations and the harm it can cause to the alleged abuser. However, while statistics are difficult to secure, it is generally acknowledged that *baseless* allegations (that is, not necessarily false but *unproven* ones) make up between two to ten percent of all charges.[133] There is, then, an acute epistemic question regarding how to address allegations of rape and the credibility one affords to a victim. Augustine's solution was to favor the testimony of the victim, and he had *distinctly theological reasons for doing so.* Recall that the reigning exemplar for situations such as these was Lucretia, who, in an attempt to secure the validity of her testimony, divided herself into "the murderess of an innocent and chaste woman" by taking her own life.[134] Instead of affirming this act, Augustine calls his readers' attention to another exemplar, one not with Roman pedigree but with *Scriptural*

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[132] Webb, "Augustine, Rape, Hermeneutics of Love," 31.

[133] According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center. See https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/Publications_NSVRC_Overview_False-Reporting.pdf.

[134] *de civ.*, I.19.

pedigree, namely, Susanna.[135] In Susanna's story, two men attempt to rape her while she is

bathing, and though she eludes them, they bring a false accusation about her for adultery, leading

to her being sentenced to death. In the narrative, the prophet Daniel intervenes and defends

Susanna's innocence, preventing the city from carrying out what Lucretia did on her own. Webb

notes: "Susanna's story is, for Augustine, a challenge to see what is hidden,"[136] which is to say,

Augustine calls upon the story of Susanna to commend the need to believe the testimony of

women. Their "witness of conscience" is sufficient to safeguard their innocence,[137] needing

neither a prophet nor a suicide, a remarkably countercultural claim in a time when women's

witness counted for nothing.[138] Because their testimony had validation in the eyes of God, it was

the duty of all others to "coordinate their vision with the vision of God."[139] In essence, Augustine

is drawing upon Scripture to enjoin the powerful men of his day to believe women and to protect

victims. Webb concludes: "For Augustine, suspicion that women want rape or are defiled by rape

is tantamount to a false testimony against those women. Augustine's insight is startling, and

counter-intuitive within a culture, like our own, that assumes that a woman's report of rape is

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[135] In the Septuagint, Susanna's story is told in the thirteenth chapter of Daniel, but by Augustine's day, she was also a fixture in Christian art. She is frequently depicted in funerary art and "is the biblical woman most commonly featured in early Christian funerary art" after Eve (Webb, "'Before the Eyes of Their Own God,'" 60). Though Augustine does not mention Susanna explicitly in *civ. Dei* I.19, there is reason to think that he deliberately echoes her story. See Webb's article for the full argument. He discusses Susanna in many other writings, including *Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum* IV.37, *De bono coniugali* VIII.8, *De sancta virginitate* 20, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* III.4 and substantially in *Sermones* 343. See Webb, "'Before the Eyes of Their Own God,'" 59 n. 7 for a full listing.

[136] "'Before the Eyes of Their Own God,'" 63.

[137] *de civ.*, I.19.

[138] Cf. Webb, "'Before the Eyes of Their Own God,'" 75.

[139] Webb, "'Before the Eyes of Their Own God,'" 79.

like a false testimony, or an attempt to cover up illicit sex."[140] For Augustine, the story of Susanna, along with the conjunction of commands not to kill (Ex. 20:13), not to bear false witness against one's neighbor (Ex. 20:16) and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Matt. 22:39) result in powerful theological impetus to believe women who are victims of rape, even in a culture providing every reason not to do so.[141]

Rape and sexual assault have served as paradigmatic cases of sinful gendered love, both for our purposes and for Augustine's in the *City of God*. In cultures where women who are assaulted suffer from the burden of shame, both as a result of the crime committed against them and the environments that judge them to have lost something that establishes their worth, Augustine offers a two-pronged response. The first prong centers the discussion of guilt and blame directly on the assailant. The ones who do the raping are the ones who ought to be ashamed of their rapacious lust, and it is they whom he puts forward as chief examples of love gone terribly awry. If sinful love is characterized by the *libido dominandi* in Augustinian theology, *they* are the ones to look at for case studies of sinful love in motion. In their grasping for power and domination, they heap guilt and shame upon themselves. The second prong is a consolation shown to the victims. They are called glorious and Augustine offers them nothing less than God himself. Even if the world heaps shame upon them, Augustine assures them that in the eyes of God, they are pure and beloved, and this establishes a worth far surpassing that secured by cultural norms. This does not, however, let society off the hook, for its members are shown to be operating by a standard distinct from God's own. By drawing on Scripture, especially the story of Susanna, Augustine calls on leaders to believe the testimony of women

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[140] Webb, "Augustine, Rape, Hermeneutics of Love," 28.

[141] All three commandments are mentioned in *de civ.*, I.20.

and to work toward justice for these victims. Though "Augustine's readership was steeped in the values of a Roman society that put the knife in the hands of women who had been raped," Augustine calls them to the justice of God.[142] But how is that justice to be enacted? For that, we turn to the next moment of the divine economy, redemption.

6.4 Redemption

Shame has accompanied gendered sin, seemingly, wherever it is found. In this chapter alone, we have witnessed how intersex/DSD individuals experience profound shame for living in a world ostensibly not made for them, and how victims of sexual abuse testify to tremendous shame on account of the harms done to them and the cultures that perceive them as lacking worth on account of some loss of purity or chastity. Gender, when it is mired in the corrosive forces of sin, seems to result in experiences of shame and general lack of worth. If that is so, then construals of the redeeming work of Christ must address these very issues, if it is to be a work that reaches in and redeems even the darkest corners of human identity. What, then is the redeeming work of Christ and how is it a resource for understanding the redemption of gender, especially those sinful manifestations that bring about the greatest senses of shame and unworthiness?[143]

Christian theology has many pathways by which to approach the redemption wrought by the incarnate Son of God, usually with reference to atonement, justification, reconciliation,

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[142] Webb, "'Before the Eyes of Their Own God,'" 66.

[143] There is an interesting question, first raised by Rosemary Radford Ruether, regarding whether a savior such a Jesus, who is masculine, is *able* to save women. Feminist theologians who have argued that he cannot have tended to point out that, in some way, that Christ is masculine in his human nature renders him unfit to be a savior to all humankind, including women. The dénouement of their arguments is that Christ is disqualified from performing his soteriological task in virtue of his masculinity. I attempt to address this concern elsewhere; see Fellipe do Vale, "Can a Male Savior Save Women? The Metaphysics of Gender and Christ's Ability to Save," *Philosophia Christi* 21, no. 2 (2019): 309–24. In this section, I will assume that a masculine savior *can* save women, for my greater interest is in *how* he has done so.

ransom, propitiation or some other cluster of concepts. There is an interesting question about how these terms are related, as well as what their basic properties are.[144] Here, I will focus on just one biblical concept and its ability to foster and encourage redeemed moral agency. That concept is *grace*, and though hardly anyone will demur that this is a rather important concept to Christianity, there is considerable ambiguity about just what it means when it is invoked Scripturally and theologically.

Recently, the work of John Barclay has shone a light on these obscurities through an influential proposal for what it is that Scripture (specifically Paul) meant by "grace." Barclay observes that the English word translated as "grace," *charis*, was hardly theologically specific in its original usage. "Grace" simply meant "gift" or "benefaction," meaning that Scripture is not conjuring up unique terminology. Where Paul *is* unique, maintains Barclay, is in the way he and other biblical authors choose to *perfect* the concept, or emphasize a particular dimension of it to the utmost, and in the way he identifies the gift with a person, or better, with the work performed by a person. That person is, of course, Jesus Christ, and the emphasis Paul places with respect to the gift of Christ is its *incongruity*, or the fact that it is a gift given without regard for the worth of the recipient. The gift of Christ, moreover, creates a community characterized by the gift they have commonly received. Though this community has not received the gift of Christ on the basis of their worth, their reception results in a transformation whereby they are conformed into

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[144] Colin Gunton's work brought attention to the polyvalence of Christian theological language about soteriology, preferring to approach the various images for atonement as metaphors. See Colin E. Gunton, *Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (New York: T&T Clark, 2003). Recent literature on atonement has proliferated in various directions. For a sample of the varying views, see Eleonore Stump, *Atonement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); William Lane Craig, *Atonement and the Death of Christ: An Exegetical, Historical, and Philosophical Exploration* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020); Oliver D. Crisp, *Approaching the Atonement: The Reconciling Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020). Stump is a good representative of Roman Catholic approaches, while Craig defends the position typically associated with classical Protestantism, penal substitution. For an Eastern Orthodox account, see Khaled Anatolios, *Deification through the Cross: An Eastern Christian Theology of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020).

congruity with it. The chief attribute of this community's interaction with one another is that no

one is treated as having any worth other than that given to them by Christ and the union they all

share with him. Barclay summarizes:

> Paul…had an unusual, creative, and socially radical understanding of the grace of God, arising from *the Gift:* Christ. Whereas good gifts were (and still are) normally thought to be distributed best to fitting or worthy recipients, Paul took the Christ-gift, the ultimate gift of God to the world, to be given without regard to worth, and in the absence of worth—an unconditioned or incongruous gift that did not match the worth of its recipients but created it…In fact, it was in the formation and the practices of these communities that the grace of God was evidenced. Moral and social transformation was not an optional extra in Paul's understanding of grace but its necessary expression, because the gift of God in Christ brought into question the whole value system of the ancient world and took place in relationships, not just in the heart. Grace, it turns out, is not an idea or a thing but a radical, divine dynamic.[145]

If the redemption offered by Christ is, at its fundamental level, distinguished by *grace*, and if

grace in Scripture is a gift given without regard to the worth of the recipient but creative of that

worth, then we have a fecund resource for social transformation that addresses the central

element of gendered sin, namely, the feelings of shame and worthlessness felt by many. Grace is

a gift given *specifically to those lacking worth*, and it recasts and rejects what it is to be worthy.

The resultant communities are called to realign their standards of worth and shame so as to

conform to the one true standard, namely, the gift of Christ. All those who in the eyes of the

world are made to feel ashamed and worthless find solace in Jesus, whose gift lifts them out of

their shame and establishes their worth. The gospel's *equalizing* power, then, lies in the fact that

all standards of human worth are cast aside in favor of the *surpassing* worth given in Christ,

which opens a door for victims of gendered sin to find a hope for healing.

Barclay's proposal begins with an observation that while grace was ubiquitous in the

ancient world, it was highly diverse in its emphases, and his chosen language to reflect that is the

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[145] John M.G. Barclay, *Paul and the Power of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), xvii–xviii.

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"perfection" of grace. For Barclay, to perfect a concept is "to draw out a concept to its endpoint or extreme, whether for definitional clarity or for rhetorical or ideological advantage."[146] So, to perfect a concept is to highlight and maximize some aspect of it and therefore to treat it as an ideal instance of the thing of which it is a concept. So, a "perfect storm" is one where some aspect of the storm (say, its wind speed and rain volume) is highlighted and maximized, such that if we wanted to look for an ideal storm, we would look for one with lots of wind speed and rain volume. According to an extensive anthropological survey of the way gifts functioned in antiquity,[147] Barclay concludes that there are least six ways that the concept "grace" can be perfected: (1) Superabundance, or excessiveness in terms of scale, significance or duration; (2) Singularity, or "the notion that the giver's *sole and exclusive* mode of operation is benevolence or goodness"; (3) Priority, or the fact that the gift always precedes the initiative of the recipient; (4) Incongruity, or the feature of being "given without condition, that is, *without regard to the worth of the recipient*"; (5) Efficacy, or the ability of a gift to achieve "what it was designed to do"; (6) Non-circularity, or the freedom of obligation for any return.[148] Grace may be perfected in any or all of these dimensions, at the discretion of the one employing the concept. Additionally, while grace's perfections can be disaggregated into these six angles, the presence of one perfection does not entail the presence of any other. This helps makes sense of the various controversies surrounding grace, whether it is in a discussion of Second Temple Jewish texts or in the Pelagian controversy. Pelagius, for instance, perfected the priority and superabundance of grace, whereas Augustine perfected its incongruity and efficacy alongside its priority. This

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[146] John M.G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 67.

[147] See Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, chapter one.

[148] All of the definitions given in (1)–(6) come from Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 70–74.

means that "Augustine did not believe in grace *more* than Pelagius; he simply believed in it

differently."[149] Simply using the word "grace," therefore, is inadequate, for the particular

perfections of grace in the presence of a theologian's views must be identified.

For Paul, Barclay argues, the chief perfection of grace is its *incongruity*.[150] "The gospel,"

maintain Barclay, "stands or falls with the incongruity of grace."[151] A gift given incongruously is

one that does not take into account the worth, value or social capital of the recipient, something

that would have been radically countercultural in Paul's day. Philosophers such as Seneca, in his

treatise *de Beneficiis*, advised that gifts be given discriminately, for they establish social bonds,

and binding oneself through a gift to a recipient who will disappoint runs the risk of

embarrassment.[152] Paul, however, disregarded conventional wisdom and prized the incongruity

of the divine gift. Barclay summarizes,

> Paul's theology…is significantly shaped by his conviction, and experience, of the Christ-gift, as the definitive act of divine beneficence, given *without regard to worth*. By its misfit with human criteria of value, including the "righteousness" defined by the Torah, the Christ-event has recalibrated all systems of worth, creating communities that operate in ways significantly at odds with both Jewish and non-Jewish traditions of value. The incongruous gift has subverted previous measurements of symbolic capital, establishing its own criteria of value and honor that are no longer beholden to the authority of the Torah. The Christ-event *as gift* is thus the foundation of Paul's Gentile mission, in which Paul resists attempts to reinstitute preconstituted hierarchies of ethnic or social worth, and forms alternative communities that take their bearings from this singular event.[153]

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[149] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 77. See 85–97 and *Paul and the Power of Grace*, 19–21 for Barclay's treatment of Augustine and Pelagius.

[150] Incongruity is the "central," "trademark," "chief" and "primary" perfection of grace, not its exclusive perfection (*Paul and the Gift*, 454, 545, 557, 569, respectively). Barclay is clear that "[o]ther 'perfections' grace…may be present, but they seem less prominent" in Paul (*Paul and the Power of Grace*, 73).

[151] *Paul and the Power of Grace*, 47.

[152] Cf. Barclay, *Paul and the Power of Grace*, 8.

[153] *Paul and the Gift*, 350.

We shall turn to the creation of communities in a moment, but the main point to grasp at present is Paul's radical commitment to the disestablishment of *any* criteria of worth as a basis for receiving the Christ-gift. The most obvious criterion that had to be reconsidered in Paul's day was Torah observance as a standard of fit for divine blessing, and though Paul had no intentions to disregard Torah, he nevertheless opposed its use *as a means of discriminating who receives grace and who does not* (see Gal. 2:16, 5:1). Of course, this "does not mean that the Law is evil or misleading, only that it is inadequate as a basis of worth."[154] Though the law figures chiefly in Paul, the value of Barclay's contribution is that it is not just law observance but *any* criterion of worth that is challenged by Paul's perfecting of incongruity. Since "the good news distinguishes divine from human norms" altogether, the incongruity of grace refers not just to worth acquired by Torah observance, but any worth at all, whether it is based on social status, ethnicity, gender, ancestry, education or economic status.[155] So: "*every practice* is equally insignificant as a criterion for the favor of God," the Christ event brings into question "*every* pre-existent classification of worth" and because "Paul radicalizes grace as an incongruous gift, he discounts this and all other forms of human worth, so that 'works' (specific or general) represents a form of worth now considered inconsequential in comparison with the sole value of 'being found in Christ' (Phil 3:6–9)."[156] In construing grace as perfectly incongruous, Paul is therefore discrediting any criterion of worth, whether it is that acquired through Torah observance (good as that may be) or through some other means like gender (good as that also may be).

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[154] Barclay, *Paul and the Power of Grace*, 65. On Torah observance, see further *Paul and the Gift*, 374, 378, 383 and 452.

[155] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 356. See also *Paul and the Power of Grace*, 7.

[156] Barclay*, Paul and the Gift*, 546, 567 and *Paul and the Power of Grace*, 140.

Barclay's preferred means of describing incongruity is as a denial of social, cultural or symbolic "capital."[157] Grant Macaskill, who adopts Barclay's proposal and advances it in his own directions, describes such a notion as follows:

> there is such a thing as symbolic or social capital, which is associated with perception of our status not just with God but also with the various communities in which we live and operate. It is not as straightforward as a credit sheet, since some of the elements cannot be easily quantified, but within a given community, it will say whether you are an insider or an outsider and where you might rank within the group. It will affect how others treat you and how you benefit from these interactions. Someone who has high levels of social capital will enjoy the favor (and perhaps the favors) of others, as these people look to benefit from that capital by association.[158]

There were many forms of social capital or deficit in the ancient world in which Paul wrote—men were seen as better than women, to be educated is better than to be uneducated—and this created a complex system of honor in Roman society,[159] but the dynamic at play should be familiar to anyone who has spent any time in a playground, a middle school or a church. The possession of certain traits—one's gender, one's disability, one's race—are taken either to augment or to diminish one's worth in the eyes of one's community, distinguishing between the haves and the have-nots. Whether derived from observance of the law or from the car one drives, the cultural capital one possesses locates one in their communities' hierarchy of worth. Paul's radical claim, however, is that *in Christ, there is no social capital other than that found through union with him*: "By trusting in Christ, believers know themselves to live only as Christ lives in them…and they find their only worth in him."[160]

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[157] Cf. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 357, 363, 383 and *Paul and the Power of Grace*, 72 for such language.

[158] Grant Macaskill, *Living in Union with Christ: Paul's Gospel and Christian Moral Identity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 48–49.

[159] See Carlin A. Barton, *Roman Honor: The Fire in the Bones* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

[160] Barclay, *Paul and Power of Grace*, 49.

Paul makes this abundantly clear in his letters, perhaps nowhere more than in his epistle to the Galatians. He begins by declaring, "Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or I am trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ. For I want you to know that the good news announced by me is not in accord with human norms" (Gal. 1:10–11).[161] Paul is making clear that his mission, and the message of grace that characterizes it, does not aim to please people by meeting their standards of worth, nor does it operate on the same basis. It brings with it a measurement of its own, distinct even from an angelic utterance (Gal. 1:8). Barclay notes that Gal. 1:11 "signals a relation of misfit, even contradiction, between 'the good news' and the typical structures of human thought and behavior," making Paul's mission successful only on its own terms.[162] Thus, when Paul encounters leaders of esteem, he disregards their capital, for "what they actually were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality" (Gal. 2:6). The "only thing" that mattered for Paul was the free reception of the Spirit (Gal. 3:2) and the faith and love such a reception engenders: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6).[163] Paul is clear that upon having received the gift of grace, an experience that utterly transformed what he found to be valuable in his life (see Gal. 1:13–2:14 for Paul's autobiographic attestation), he could not count anything else as a ground for worth: "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor

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[161] I am following Barclay's translation of 1:11 here, as he takes κατὰ ἄνθρωπον to refer not to origin but to human norms, as in Gal. 3:15, Rom. 3:5, 1 Cor. 15:32. See *Paul and the Gift*, 355 for discussion.

[162] *Paul and the Power of Grace*, 42.

[163] This is a crucial verse for Barclay's interpretation over against, say, New Perspective on Paul readings. That Paul says *both* circumcision *and* uncircumcision do not count (as opposed to only one or other) means that he is casting the net of worth as widely as possible. It could not have been only national or ethnic allegiance.

uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!" (Gal. 6:14–15, clearly referencing

2:20). To Paul, Christ's gift does not take into account any system of human worth or congruity,

leaving no room for acclaim or boasting.

Turning briefly to Paul's other letters, these themes recur. Romans 6:23 distinguishes

salvation as a *gift* in contradistinction to a *wage*, which would take into account some

qualification. 1 Cor. 1:18–29 describes the choice of God to bestow the gift of Christ on the

foolish, not to the wise. In the face of debilitation, Paul witnesses to an experience where God

tells him that grace is sufficient, for divine power *perfects* his weakness (2 Cor. 8–9, 12:9). The

clearest expression of Paul's radical commitment to the incongruity of grace, to my mind, is

found in Phil. 3:4–11. Here Paul confesses he had "reason for confidence in the flesh" (v. 4),

reasons specific to the symbolic capital of his community like ethnic identity, Jewish upbringing,

Pharisaic allegiance and even *blamelessness* with regard to the law (vv. 5–6). In terms of cultural

capital, Paul has "more." Yet, though he had much capital "gain," he has come "to regard" all of

them "as loss because of Christ" (v. 7). Paul was a possessor of great cultural capital, but the

reception of Christ's gift renders all of his capital as worthless in comparison to knowing Christ.

The possession of such a gift leads him to regard *everything* that gave him social worth as

lacking true value (v. 8). Above all, Paul wants to be "found in him," for the value brought

through association with this gift far surpasses that given by anything else, even other religious

practices.[164] Barclay comments that in Paul's "new value system, there is one thing, and one

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[164] There are powerful resonances here with what theologians call "union with Christ," a massively important Pauline soteriological theme. For biblical treatments, see Grant Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2012). For theological treatments, see J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); Michael J. Thate, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Constantine R. Campbell, eds., *"In Christ" in Paul: Explorations in Paul's Theology of Union and Participation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018).

thing only, that is always of value, in every circumstance, for everyone. Whatever else may be

useful or of relative value (in certain contexts and for certain purposes), it cannot be placed in the

same category of worth as Christ."[165] Though Paul had surpassing and excessive reason to cash

in on the cultural credit he had accrued through his various identities and practices, that he was

given Christ without regard to any of these (even his spotless record with regard to the Torah)

relativizes their value so much that he has come to regard them as "rubbish."

While Barclay is clear that the primary perfection of grace in Paul is *incongruity*, he is

equally clear that Paul does *not* perfect grace's *non-circularity*, for Paul clearly believed that

recipients of grace were called to offer a return both to God as giver and to the community

created by the gift.[166] The upshot is that those who have received grace are now called to live

together in a community characterized by the very peculiarities of the gift of Christ. Thus

Barclay:

> The Christ-gift thus enters into human relations, by the operation of the Spirit, equipping
> new patterns of social relationship where people are no longer treated by reference to the
> old hierarchies of worth (which have been bypassed by the gift of Christ), nor by
> competitive jostling for honor. These are communities that stand at odds with normal
> configurations, as they are released from the typical criteria by which worth is
> differentially distributed and acclaimed.[167]

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[165] Barclay, *Paul and the Power of Grace*, 120.

[166] See *Paul and the Gift*, 51 and 63 for the circularity of grace. Interestingly, this allows Barclay to circumvent objections found in thinkers like Jacques Derrida that perfect gifts cannot require a return. This is indeed one way to perfect gift giving, but it is certainly not the only one, and there is nothing in the commitment to incongruity that requires a commitment to non-circularity.

[167] *Paul and the Power of Grace*, 70. See also 60: "Paul is driven by the good news of Jesus Christ to found new communities, social experiments on the urban landscape, where old values are superseded and new relationships created. He is convinced that this is not just a human invention, a product of skill or cultural innovation. What he sees at work is, rather, a divine activity that creates new human agents, a phenomenon as fruitful and miraculous as the birth of Isaac [Galatians 4:28]. Because this derives from *elsewhere*, all kinds of new possibilities emerge on the human stage."

Those who have received the gift of Christ have received something that did not take into account how worthy they were or how much shame they bore; as a result, the communities formed by the reception of this gift must live in the same way. They are called to be a "community that marches to a different step"[168] than the surrounding world, a group of people amongst whom Paul expects "the grace of God in Christ to cascade through the life of communities, such that the grace received is passed forward by believers and shared among them."[169] In other words, the perfections of the gift define the core features of the communities it forms. The primary way the incongruity of grace takes root in the life of a community, for Paul, is through *love*, for "[i]n disregarding previous criteria of distinction, the Christ-event has released a new creative energy, a quality of social commitment sourced in the Spirit and summarized as 'love.'"[170] Through our exploration of an Augustinian theology of love, we have already seen that love both motivates moral living and is foundational to defining the virtues. We can now see that this is a deeply biblical insight, and that love is the name for a community shaped by grace. "Above all," Paul commends the church in Colossae, "clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col. 3:14).

Paul regularly informs his churches that God has sent the Spirit into the hearts of believers (Gal. 4:6) and that through this indwelling they are enabled to live lives of love (Rom. 5:5). We have already seen that, for Paul, the "only thing that counts is faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6), a key statement that bridges the incongruity of social capital ("the only thing

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[168] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 439.

[169] Barclay, *Paul and the Power of Grace*, 125.

[170] Barclay, *Paul and the Power of Grace*, 63. Cf. *Paul and the Gift*, 430: "The prime expression of this life is love…the commitment to others that forms the foundation of community." For further elaboration on the central role of love in Pauline ethics, see Richard B. Hays, "Christology and Ethics in Galatians: The Law of Christ," in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 49 no. 2 (1987): 268–290.

that counts") with the Christian moral life ("faith working through love"). Paul is so committed to this ideal that he believes it to fulfill the law, a fulfillment whose basic feature is that "through love" all members of a community "become slaves to one another" as they bear one another's burdens (Gal. 5:13–14; 6:2). Their love for one another must be genuine (Rom. 12:9), and the test for genuine love is the quality of the harmony with which they live alongside one another (Rom. 12:16). They are called to give deference to the weak and to withhold judgment (Rom. 14:4), for they must not humiliate those who have no capital or wealth of their own (1 Cor. 11:22). In one of his most powerful statements of this principle, Paul calls the church in Corinth to view themselves as a mutually inter-dependent body, no member of which can be dismissed or cut off. While there are parts of a human body that are more attractive (a smile, beautiful hair) and others that receive no esteem (feet, the excretory system), a body cannot dispense with any of them without significant loss. The normal standards of worth and attraction must be rejected for a principle where the vile and weak are valued all the more: "the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect" (1 Cor. 12:22–23). Lesser members receive greater honor so that "members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with in; if one member is honored, all rejoice with it" (vv. 25–26). Paul is defining a community whose features cannot easily map on to worldly criteria for measurement, for respect and honor should, intuitively, attach themselves to the respectable and honorable. But not so in a community where such considerations of capital have been done away with; the equalizing power of grace has made the body of Christ only more tightly knit, to the point that all worth comes from the same source: attachment to Christ.

Barclay is clear that there are normative implications derived from these considerations, especially for a contemporary age with contemporary issues. "Paul's theology of grace," he contends, "is, in fact, a rich resource for Christians in challenging racism, gender prejudice, and all forms of negative stereotype."[171] Because "grace is not given differentially with regard to gender, or with regard to age, wealth, status, or race" so that "we may regard everyone as accorded the same worth in that single act of unconditioned grace," it follows that "any discrimination, any inequality in treatment, any attribution of secondary status is an affront to the good news of the grace of God in Christ."[172] In the Christian community, there are powerful normative reasons to abandon all attributions of worth on the basis of social capital. This is what *formed* the Christian communion, and it is how God continues to *treat* its constituents. Churches are filled with people who had no means to acquire an entrance ticket and who are looking for refuge from the multiform sins that have made them ashamed and broken—or at least churches ought to be. Paul calls for an end to esteem given on any basis other than union with Christ. Those experiencing shame are to be lifted up in the love of the community, for in this orbit shame does not correspond to worth or its lack, for all are in possession of the same worth.[173]

This also means that worth is not accrued on the basis of whether one has been raped or whether one is ambiguously sexed (or any other form of worth attaching itself to sex and gender). Recall that one of the most pressing challenges for those who have experienced sexual

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[171] *Paul and the Power of Grace*, 152.

[172] Barclay, *Paul and the Power of Grace*, 153. For Barclay's more explicit treatment of Paul's theology of grace in relation to contemporary questions such as slavery and ethnicity, see John M.G. Barclay, "What Makes Paul Challenging Today?," in *The New Cambridge Companion to St. Paul*, ed. Bruce W. Longenecker (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 299–318.

[173] Echoing the promise of Isaiah 28:16, Paul is confident that no one who has trusted Christ will be put to shame (see Rom. 9:33 and 10:11), for in God's eyes, shame attaches to those who are wise apart from grace and who boast in their own worth (1 Cor. 2:28–29).

trauma of one kind or another is the burden of shame, especially shame felt by a failure to meet a culture's standards of worthiness or by a capital deficit associated with their experienced trauma. Our theologies of redemption must speak to these particular expressions of gendered sin, and in the theology of grace outlined above, I suggest, we have found such a resource. We have received Christ without regard to our worth, and whatever shame we have felt on the basis of some worthlessness was not taken into consideration. Victims of rape feel great amounts of shame and worthlessness, but here Paul says that this is no obstacle to their access to God. God *specializes* in giving gifts to people such as them, and Christ has been given precisely to those with no worth to speak of. Moreover, any church that has exacerbated the shame felt by victims of assault or others are "not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel," as Paul once alleged Peter with doing (Gal. 2:14). By reestablishing patterns of worth that have been counted as nothing in Christ, they are not only doing unspeakable damage to the victim, they are also falling back into a form of legalism they often claim to specialize in avoiding.

The young woman who was raped for the second time because she told her Christian boyfriend that she had been raped once before was treated as though she were worthless. Her boyfriend measured her against a standard of worth exterior to that of the gospel, and having found her wanting, concluded that she was worthless and could be treated as such. This is patently at odds with the gospel of Christ. In fact, Barclay's work has shown that the gospel stands in direct condemnation of such behavior. In a genuinely Christian community, worth can only be seen as a correlative of the gift of Christ. While Paul does not entirely abandon his prior categories (more on those below), he no longer grants them the ability to accrue social capital. In the Christian community, the most worthless, despised and rejected occupy the same plane as the

wealthiest, most renowned and attractive. Both enjoy the same quality of union with Christ.

Another Scriptural author, James, grants us a clear image of how this might look:

> My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor (Jas. 2:1–6).

One can easily substitute the illustration of the poor person with the person who has been raped, who is ambiguously sexed or something else. The point is that, in the community created by Christ's gift, acting on such demarcations of worth is beneath the calling of the church.[174]

There is one final question to be considered with respect to this vision of reconciliation, namely, does it count as cultivating *justice*? This is a broad and complex question, and the literature on justice is massive and diverse. For our purposes, it is enough to consider one leading account put forward by Nicholas Wolterstorff. Wolterstorff's view is that "justice is constituted of rights: a society is just insofar as its members enjoy the goods to which they have a right."[175] Justice is constituted by rights, which he sees as normative social relationships where the right-bearer claims the obligation of another to do or refrain from doing something that brings about a good, specifically *life-goods*, which are states of affairs that contribute to a person's living a flourishing life. Human beings have a right to this flourishing, and what grounds this right are not social contracts or divine commands, but the worth bestowed upon human beings on account

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[174] For a powerful attempt to apply this insight to a the question of disabilities in the church, see Grant Macaskill, *Autism and the Church: Bible, Theology, and Community* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019).

[175] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), xii.

of their being loved by God. That humanity is loved by God grounds its worth, thereby identifying the flourishing life comprised by those life-goods to which one has a right. When human persons enjoy this flourishing life by enjoying their rights, ultimately, they enjoy justice.

There is an intimate connection in Wolterstorff's theory of justice between *rights* and *obligations*. In fact, he argues that they are co-implicative, such that if one obtains, so does the other. He calls this the "Principle of Correlatives": "If Y belongs to the sort of entity that can have rights, then X has an obligation toward Y to do or refrain from doing A if and only if Y has a right against X to X's doing or refraining from doing A."[176] This is a rather complex way of claiming that rights *just are* the obligations others have to do something or refraining from doing something to you. From the other perspective, if others have an obligation to bring about or refrain from bringing about certain states of affairs in your life, then you have a right to them. So, if Maria has an obligation to pay Marcus back for $5 borrowed, then Marcus has a right to be paid back by Maria. And if Marcus has a right to $5 from Maria, then Maria has an obligation to pay Marcus back $5. Human beings, argues Wolterstorff, have rights primarily to "states of affairs," particularly to those states of affairs that are conducive to a flourishing life.[177]

But what grounds the obligations of others to bring about or refrain from bringing about those goods that enable one's life to flourish, those goods to which one has a right and which constitute justice? Wolterstorff rejects views that couch these obligations in terms of duties,[178]

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[176] Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 8. Cf. 34.

[177] Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 137. Cf. 145. Wolterstorff considers utilitarianism and eudaimonism as potential frameworks for states of affairs to which one has rights, rejecting them both. See, *Justice*, 176–178, 209, 212 and 217–18. He concludes that only a conception of flourishing, what he calls "eirenéism," ably identifies the life-goods to which human beings have rights (see 222).

[178] Such views include divine command theories and social contract theories, which Wolterstorff alleges presuppose "the normative context of a standing obligation on our part to obey," but the normativity in question cannot be explained by the theory under investigation (*Justice*, 281, cf. 271–6).

opting instead to ground these obligations to flourishing life-goods in the *worth* of the persons involved.[179] He argues that the worth of a person consists of some status, property or relation possessed either by means of some capacity that is inherently worthy or by means of worth bestowed upon them (say, by Christ).[180] He claims that worth is bestowed upon human beings, for only then can it be said that all and only human beings possess it. In particular, the worth bestowed derives from the fact that God loves human beings and has associated closely with them.[181] Wolterstorff's account of justice, then, can be summarized as follows. Justice is constituted by rights, which are the states of affairs one must enjoy (or refrain from being subjected to) in order to flourish. If someone has a right to a life-good that brings about her flourishing, then others around her have an obligation to bring about that life-good or refrain from bringing about a situation where she fails to have it. The grounding of this obligation is found in her worth, a bestowed trait she possesses in virtue of being loved by God. If she enjoys all of the goods proportionate to her worth to which she has a right, then she is inhabiting a just state of affairs. If she is failing to enjoy some good related to her flourishing, or if something in her life impedes her flourishing because she is not treated proportionately to her worth, then she is living in injustice.

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[179] Cf. Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 242.

[180] Cf. Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 320. He considers inherent worth views like that of Kant (who proposes that rationality grounds worth) but rejects them on the basis of the fact that they preclude entire classes of human beings who have worth but fail to possess the capacity in question, like the elderly, the disabled, infants and the comatose (cf. 333, 349).

[181] "From these reflections I conclude that if God loves a human being with the love of attachment, that love bestows great worth on that human being; other creatures, if they knew about that love, would be envious. And I conclude that if God loves, in the mode of attachment, each and every human being equally and permanently, then natural human rights inhere in the worth bestowed on human beings by that love. Natural human rights are what respect for that worth requires" (Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 360). In his companion volume, Wolterstorff clarifies this love relation as the possession of the image of God. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love*, Emory University Studies in Law and Religion (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 83, 154–55.

I think Wolterstorff is broadly correct.[182] Put simply, a person enjoys justice when she is treated in ways proportionate to her worth and a person does justice when she fulfills her obligations to others in proportion to their worth. Keeping in mind Barclay's theology of grace, we can see that this question of worth is defined by the reception of the gift of Christ. Worth is not measured by any kind of social capital, but solely by the worth bestowed by having been gifted Jesus himself. This is great worth indeed, and justice is brought about when persons are treated in proportion to the worth defined by that tremendous gift. The establishment of alternative systems of worth—whether they are indexed to sexuality, ethnicity, race, gender, wealth, education or anything else—can now be seen not just as damaging, but also as unsuitable substitutes for Christ. Christians who live by grace are called to recalibrate their systems of worth to no other standard than association with Christ. And when others are treated in proportion to *that* worth, and when Christians come together to help others overcome the impediments they experience to being treated according to their worth, then justice flowers in the world. This is powerful motivation to help others heal from their shame and to affirm the genuine worth they possess in virtue of Jesus. The words of Christ—"just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40)—therefore exemplify the justice of the redeemed community. The least of these—those who have no

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[182] There are, however, some complications regarding justice within an Augustinian theology of love. I cannot devote space to it here, but one way to understand the broad claim is that for Augustine, all that has been said regarding justice may be *necessary* for justice, but it is hardly sufficient, for without love *for God*, one cannot live justly. Thus he says that "true justice is found where the one supreme God rules an obedient city, so that there is no sacrifice but to him alone, and where, in consequence, the soul rules the body in all who belong to that city and obey God, and reason faithfully rules the vices in lawful order. Consequently, just as a single just person lives by the faith that works through love, so does the whole company and people of the just" (*de civ.*, XIX.23; the English translation comes from Augustine, *The City of God*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. William Babcock, vol. I/7, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012)). Without love for God, faith and true worship, so it seems, one cannot live justly. This would *add* further necessary conditions for justice, so it seems to me, not *contradict* any of those set forward by Wolterstorff. For further discussion, see Robert Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

worth—are treated as members of the family in virtue of the union they share with Christ, for feeding them is an act of justice not just to them, but *to Christ*. Sexual assault victims who carry with them their shame are treated as supremely worthy, for that is what is due them. Their worth is not in their abuse; it is in their being loved by God. Justice demands no less.

Does this mean, however, that categories like gender must be done away with because they do not inform worth? If nothing else matters than our union with Christ, should we hope to become non-gendered beings? It is to that question we will turn in our final section, consummation. In what does our hope lie, if our worth is no longer tied to our social identities?

6.5 Consummation

Conspicuously missing from my analysis of grace in the previous section is a verse that many have taken to be central to the theology of gender, especially as it pertains to the consummation of Christian hope. That verse is Galatians 3:28: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." This verse directly undergirds or indirectly lends credibility to an idea that has been gaining widespread acceptance in theology, namely, that our eschatological hopes consist in the removal of our sexes and genders. In the section on creation, we have seen how this is employed by Cornwall and DeFranza in different but common ways—redemption is complete when we really are no longer just male or female. Other theologians, such as Sarah Coakley[183] and Linn Tonstad[184] have put forward views according to which resurrected bodies are not

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[183] Sarah Coakley, "The Eschatological Body: Gender, Transformation and God," in *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 153–67. See the discussion in the previous chapter for greater detail on her views.

[184] See Linn Marie Tonstad, *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude*, Gender, Theology and Spirituality (New York: Routledge, 2016), 246, 269–75. See also my substantial review of her argument in *The Journal of Analytic Theology*, vol. 6 (2018): 710–715.

gendered, and the trend in the scholarship seems to be heading in that direction. Is this how Gal. 3:28 and a broader eschatology of gender is best understood?

According to a recent development in biblical studies, the answer is an emphatic "yes." For the "apocalyptic school" of Pauline interpretation, Gal. 3:28 plays a central governing role in eschatological anthropology, and the particular understanding of this text put forward by some of their most prominent adherents requires that the traits with which we were created (especially gender) are actually replaced by the traits provided by Christ. Thus Beverly Gaventa: "The gospel claims all that a human is; the gospel becomes the locus of human identity; the gospel *replaces* the old cosmos."[185] On some readings of Paul's apocalyptic theology, Gal. 3:28 (and other texts) teach that we are no longer bound by created traits, for in Christ there is only new creation. The chief proponent of this view is Douglas Campbell, for whom Gal. 3:28 is central.[186]

For Campbell, the incarnate Christ (and not the pre-incarnate Son) is central to creation, so much so that "we must reconceptualize the very category of creation *itself* to be faithful to these truths."[187] That means that Christ *in his human nature* is the true revelation of what it

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[185] Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "The Singularity of the Gospel Revisited," in *Galatians and Christian Theology: Justification, the Gospel, and Ethics in Paul's Letter*, ed. Mark W. Elliott, Scott Hafemann, N.T. Wright and John Frederick (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 188. Emphasis added. See also Jonathan A. Linebaugh, "'The Speech of the Dead': Identifying the No Longer and Now Living 'I' of Galatians 2.20," *New Testament Studies* 66, no. 1 (2020): 104: "is (or are) the I as created and fallen and recreated the same?...According to Paul, the self does not survive salvation—the old ἄνθρωπος dies."

[186] I cannot adequately account for the fullness of Campbell's theology here (much less for the entire apocalyptic school of Pauline interpretation). For my reading of it, I depend upon Grant Macaskill, "Review Article: The Deliverance of God," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 34, no. 2 (2011): 150–161; Grant Macaskill, "History, Providence and the Apocalyptic Paul," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 70, no. 4 (2017): 409–426; Joshua W. Jipp, "Douglas Campbell's Apocalyptic, Rhetorical Paul: A Review Article," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 32, no. 2 (2010): 183–197; Joel Thomas Chopp, "Unearthing Paul's Ethics: Douglas Campbell on Creation, Redemption, and the Christian Moral Life," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 11, no. 2 (2017): 259–276; Thomas McCall, "Crucified with Christ: The *Ego* and the *Omega*," *Journal of Analytic Theology* 8 (August 2020): 1–25. For a broader treatment of Campbell in particular, see Chris Tilling, ed., *Beyond Old and New Perspectives on Paul: Reflections on the Work of Douglas Campbell* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014).

[187] Douglas A. Campbell, *Pauline Dogmatics: The Triumph of God's Love* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 576.

means to be a creature, meaning that all of the traits attributable to the original creation depicted in Genesis must be relegated to a level lower than true creation. Only what is "in Christ" is truly a creature, and so it will be when we are raised again: "The structures of the new resurrected creation are in fact the indelible structures of creation, period; these are the same thing. And other things that we might previously have thought of as created are in fact temporary ordering structures and not part of God's enduring perfect creation at all."[188] Campbell's claim is stronger, in fact; it is not as if some features with which humanity was equipped in Genesis are retained while others are not, but *everything* related to being a creature in Genesis is put to death with Christ: "The reason for Paul's complete and universal negation seems to lie in the event he presupposes, namely, the execution of Christ. Death is a total negation. Moreover, Christ in all his humanity died, *therefore humanity as created has been executed in him*."[189] Christ's work "displaces" all previously created categories,[190] such that redeemed, eschatological life is inconsistent with that life depicted in Eden.[191] As Joel Chopp has concluded of Campbell's work, "Paul's ethics must be unearthed: stripped of all their vestiges of the doctrine of creation so that the abolition of binary categories found in Gal 3:28 may do its work."[192]

Campbell is clear that gender is one of those abolished categories. If categories that are not in Christ are abolished, and there is "no male and female" in Christ, then gender must be abolished in the consummation of our hopes. Thus Campbell: "gender distinctions *must* be

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[188] Campbell, *Pauline Dogmatics*, 584.

[189] Douglas A. Campbell, *The Quest for Paul's Gospel: A Suggested Strategy* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 102. Emphasis added.

[190] Campbell, *The Quest for Paul's Gospel*, 100.

[191] See further, Campbell, *The Quest for Paul's Gospel*, 118, 120–24.

[192] Chopp, "Unearthing Paul's Ethics," 265.

deemed transcended for those in Christ."[193] For Campbell, gender is indeed a created trait, if by

that we mean an aspect of the narrative in Genesis that is not in Christ and is only present for the

time being. When we are raised again, then we will know what it truly means to be a creature,

namely, to be in Christ. And in Christ, there are no genders, strictly speaking. Maleness and

femaleness, womanhood and manhood, were all created but have now been shown to be part of

"an interim ordering structure" which will be done away when God in Christ is all in all (see 1

Cor. 15:28).[194]

Campbell is to be commended for a robustly Christological doctrine of creation and for

his consistent employment of Galatians 3:28. There are, however, highly problematic features of

his proposal. First, from what we have seen about the doctrine of creation, it is fairly clearly

Gnostic. Recall that the core identifier of a Gnostic view of creation is one that construes the

divine economy in such a way that makes creation incompatible with redemption. We are

redeemed *from* creation; creation is not restored within redemption. Though Campbell is aware

of the charge of Gnosticism,[195] he does not do enough to show that he has provided a narrative of

creation, fall, redemption and consummation whose internal stages are consistent with one

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[193] Campbell, *The Quest for Paul's Gospel*, 102. See further, Douglas A. Campbell, "The Logic of Eschatology: The Implications of Paul's Gospel for Gender as Suggested by Galatians 3.28 in Context," in *The Gospel and Gender: A Trinitarian Engagement with Being Male and Female in Christ*, ed. Douglas A. Campbell (New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 58–81.

[194] Campbell, *Pauline Dogmatics,* 603.

[195] Often the charge is that he is defending Marcionism, but for reasons that parallel what makes Gnosticism problematic. See, for instance, Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 173 and 465 n. 41. Though Campbell has attempted to address these charges, the trouble is that he does not have an adequate comprehension of the details of Gnosticism in order to show that he is not guilty of it. For Campbell, Gnostics "view the resurrection as applying only to a part of the person, usually the soul or spirit" (*Pauline Dogmatics*, 148). That is true, but hardly complete. He misses the *economic* or *narrative* component of Gnosticism, and it is precisely this feature of which his position runs afoul. This is true of another one of his attempts to rebut the charge of Gnosticism, where Gnostics merely impugn the "goodness of creation in some radical sense" ("Apocalyptic Epistemology: The Sine Qua Non of Valid Pauline Interpretation," in *Paul and the Apocalyptic Imagination*, ed. Ben C. Blackwell, John K. Goodrich and Jason Maston (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 84). Once again, there is no mention of the economic incompatibility.

another. The consummation of our hope, in his reading of Gal. 3:28, abrogates old categories, creating a disjunction between creation and consummation. The new heavens and earth, so it seems, are not the old heavens and earth.

If this is not the best way to understand Gal. 3:28 and the eschatological hope for gender, then what is? The trouble in answering this question is that it seems to sit patently outside of our epistemic capacities. While there are some details of the eschaton we can be sure about, such as the numerical identity of our current bodies with our eschatological bodies, there is a great deal that we simply cannot know due to our finitude and fallenness. Nevertheless, Irenaeus and Augustine have provided some basic guidelines for theological reflection on the particulars of our eschatological bodies. Both are committed to the principle that God's intentions for creation were not thwarted with the introduction of sin and that what we hope for is not the erasure of created categories *but their purification from sin*. It is hard to see what life will be like when it is divulged from the poison of sin, but we can be assured that it exceeds expectation and perfects creation. There is strong continuity between life now and life as it will be, the main difference consisting in the permanent absence of all sin. As such, we can be assured that the best way to understand consummated genders is to claim that we will finally know what it means to be women and men without sin.[196]

What, then, does it mean to say that in Christ there is no more male and female? Paul ends the verse with an allusion to believers' common union with Christ as what grounds his declaration: "for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are

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[196] I have attempted to make a case for the view that we retain our genders in the resurrection in Fellipe do Vale, "Cappadocian or Augustinian? Adjudicating Debates on Gender in the Resurrection," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 21, no. 2 (2019): 182–98. Aspects of the argument I make here are made more fully in that article.

Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:28–29). The mention of union and

inheritance of Abraham ought to remind us of Paul's overarching theme in Galatians: the

incongruity of grace. That all believers are one is a function of the common gift they have

received, a gift that was given without regard to worth that creates communities of justice that do

not operate with regard to worldly worth. Barclay reads the passage as saying that the

"differences between these categories are not eradicated. Neither ethnic nor gender identity could

be simply removed…Paul and Peter remained Jews (2:15; cf. Titus, a 'Greek,' 2:3), and Paul

was still identifiably masculine and free." So what changes? "What is altered, however, is the

evaluative freight carried by these labels, the encoded distinctions of superiority and

inferiority."[197] Or again, as Bruce Hansen concludes in his monograph on Pauline verses like this

one: "Paul has demoted all cultural indices apart from those based on participation in Christ and

refuses not their preservation but their use as bases of exclusion and judgment."[198] What

categorizes these communities also implicates the identities possessed by its members.

Individuals receive the gift of Christ *as* women and men, and grace does not require the erasure

of natural human traits with which God created them. But grace also *redeems* and *perfects* these

traits, no longer allowing them to possess the importance they currently hold in classifying

human beings and their worth. At the consummation of Christ's work, humanity *is* gendered, but

gender no longer serves as a metric with which to measure the worth, esteem or quality of a

person. In addition, those for whom gender identity is complicated, a cause for shame or a vessel

for memories that are painful will know what it means to have the evils they have experienced

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[197] *Paul and the Gift*, 397.

[198] Bruce Hansen, *"All of You Are One": The Social Vision of Gal 3.28, 1 Cor 12.13 and Col 3.11*, Library of New Testament Studies (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 105.

defeated.[199] Gender is not erased, but reclassified. Macaskill summarizes well: Gender is still present but "enclosed within a larger reality that constitutes a more basic identity, shared by all participants: you are all one in Christ. One can imagine Paul saying this in a room filled with a mixture of people (some of whom may be tacitly evaluating and judging others) and pointing at each person: a Jew, a Greek, a slave, a free person [a man or a woman]. The differences are not obliterated, but they are no longer considered to be the most basic elements of identity."[200] For those whose gender identity is not a matter of difficulty, this is good news insofar as they will not need to derive their worth from their femininity or masculinity. For those whose gender identity is a matter of difficulty, this is promise that their tears will be wiped away and that God will restore to them all that has been lost (Rev. 21:4, 1 Pet. 5:10). Neither will be made to live in a world where sex and gender are of ultimate importance, for that which is truly of ultimate importance—union with Christ—will be made complete. Put simply: consummated gender is gender free from injustice.

The affirmation that we will be raised gendered, though with genders that carry different evaluative freight, is also an aid to our pursuit of justice during the *saeculum*.[201] Augustine, when he famously maintained (against prevailing opinion) that women will be raised *as women*, was motivated by the nature of Christians' eschatological hope for justice. He maintains that "both sexes will rise again," for "all faults will be removed from those bodies, but their nature will be preserved." Since the "female sex is not a fault but rather a matter of nature," there is every

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[199] On the defeat of evil and the persistence of identity, even the darkest aspects of identity, see Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[200] Macaskill, *Living in Union with Christ*, 56.

[201] For a more detailed elaboration of this argument, see do Vale, "Cappadocian or Augustinian?" 192–98.

reason to believe that God will not remove femininity from humanity when God restores creation to its intended glory. For God "both created what was not and freed what he created from corruption." Those who maintain that women will not be raised as women fail to understand that "[t]he woman…is just as much God's creation as is the man."[202] It is no sin or deficit to be a woman, and it is the business of the resurrection to perfect what is good and to remove what is evil. Our genders, on Augustine's understanding, belong in the first category.

But he does recognize that until we reach that state, the world will be filled with misery and injustice, and to combat these things we need moral action fueled by eschatological imagination. Margaret Miles states this well: Augustine "imagined resurrection by citing at length—and then subtracting—the painful and negative features of present bodily life, retaining its goodness and beauty."[203] For this reason, she maintains, "It is only when we understand his vision of the completion and perfection of human life that we grasp accurately his pervasive sense of the wrongness of present life."[204] Because Augustine envisioned the Christian life as a pilgrimage, he knew that pilgrims derive their strength—as well as their sense of what is abnormal and arduous about the pilgrimage—from their perception of their destination. Thus, glimpsing perfect justice allows one to adjudicate the injustices of the world, just as knowing what is truly beautiful enables one rightly to perceive what is ugly about the world. Through this strategy of contrasts, Augustine was able to address what he called "the miseries of the world."

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[202] *de civ.*, XXII.17.

[203] Margaret R. Miles, "Sex and the City (of God): Is Sex Forfeited or Fulfilled in Augustine's Resurrection of the Body?," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73, no. 2 (June 2005): 316.

[204] Margaret R. Miles, "From Rape to Resurrection: Sin, Sexual Difference, and Politics," in *Augustine's City of God: A Critical Guide*, ed. James Wetzel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 86.

In the three places in the *City of God* where Augustine mentions the "miseries of the world" and the injustices that accompany them, he points to a future hope where all that is lost will be restored. First, in I.29 he confesses that though "in this life" Christians are "schooled for eternity" as they endure evils, they are consoled by a hope not based on "anything falterable or unreliable," the promise of God's very presence. Or again, when he inquires about "all the grinding evils with which human society abounds here in this mortal condition," he reminds his readers that the happiness of this life "is found to be sheer misery when compared to the happiness we call ultimate."[205] Finally, though he confesses that "[t]his life is so wretched that it is like a sort of hell" and that "nothing delivers us from it but the grace of Christ the savior, our God and our Lord," we assured that upon our resurrection, we will enter into the blessed rest of God where no evil remains: "How marvelous that felicity will be, where there will be no evil, where no good will be hidden from sight, where all our time will be given to praising God, who will be all in all!"[206] This is no appeal to escapism, where the faithful are removed from the earth in an effort to make a clean getaway; Augustine is committed to the view that it is only *sin* that is removed from creation. Instead, he points to the earth and calls those who are actively suffering to see how it can better, how the things they see and experience are not the way they are supposed to be.[207] Eschatology is meant to provide a normative counterbalance to the sordidness of worldly sorrow, claims Augustine, calling us to imagine how what we see with our eyes are but tawdry representations of what they will be like in the fullness of glory.

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[205] *de civ.*, XIX.5, 10.

[206] *de civ.*, XXII.22, 30.

[207] To borrow the title from Cornelius Plantinga's famous work, *Not the Way It is Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

So it is with the consummation of gender. To maintain that gender must be eliminated for the injustices and sins embroiling it to be made right is a Pyrrhic victory, a consolation achieved at too great a cost to be of value to the consoled. Augustine invites us to imagine what these good but broken things like our genders will be like when they are filled with the light of Christ. What's more, having caught a glimpse of this, we are called to embody it now. Because "love cannot exist without hope nor hope without love, nor can either exist without faith," our hope shapes our moral action now.[208] Eschatology, by informing us of the ways the world has gone awry, allows and empowers us to live in ways consistent with the way it was meant to be.

This, then, is how eschatology shapes gender. It does not abolish gender in an effort to remedy the influences of sin. Because "we are all one in Christ" (Gal. 3:28), we await a world where we are gendered in ways that do not define our worth. In the new heaven and earth, mysterious as they remain, we will be women and men who know perfect justice in accordance to our worth. No longer will one's gender be a burden, nor will one's gender serve as a target for violence done to that individual. Instead, we will know the glory and felicity of Christ through our sexes and genders. As we imagine a just world, we conform our lives now in anticipation. "And we all," claims Paul, "with unveiled faces are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor. 4:18). So it is with our genders; as we perceive what glorified genders will be like, we are transformed accordingly.

6.6 Conclusion

Through this disquisition into gender's place within the divine economy, much has been covered. Because human beings are narratively-indexed, having the properties they do in virtue

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[208] Augustine, *Enchiridion*, I.8. English translation from Augustine, *The Augustine Catechism: The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Charity*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Bruce Harbert, vol. I, The Augustine Series (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999).

of the place they occupy within the divine economy, it was important to see how gender is created, fallen, redeemed and perfected in God's engagement with the world. In creation, two features of God's act of creating the world were highlighted. First, all things have a proper function, defining what it means for it to be "very good." Second, the state of creation was always intended to be the first stage of an internally consistent economy (so as to avoid Gnosticism). Gender, therefore, is tied to sexed bodies that themselves have proper functions, a fact that helped us to understand intersexuality/DSD. Gender, moreover, is also fallen, the paradigmatic instance of which is sexual assault. Just as fallen love takes the form of the *libido dominandi*, we saw that gendered sin also looks to dominate others from a place of twisted power. Yet, grace is sufficient even here. Though victims of sexual assault experience great amounts of shame on the basis of their senses of worthlessness, the gospel proclaims that it is precisely those with no worth to speak of that Jesus has come to redeem. The gift of God is not given on the basis of perceived worth but is given precisely to sinners who lack any worth before God. The father pours forth the Spirit, who forges the love of God in the hearts of the faithful, thereby beginning a process of reciprocity whereby they live lives characterized by the gift. The communities who have been created by grace are communities where sinful standards of worth are not observed, but each is treated in proportion to the worth bestowed upon them by having received grace. This, ultimately, is a just society. As these pilgrims venture forth toward the consummation of their hopes, they realize that God is not taking the world away from them but taking sin away from the world. The world we now see will one day be seen rightly, purged from all that twists and warps it. On that day, we will see what it means to be men and women in their proper light; not as bases for discrimination, violence or abuse, but as glorious.

CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

The question, "What is gender?" is deceptively simple to ask and, as the foregoing discussion has shown, remarkably complex to answer. What kinds of considerations ought to be in play? Should one prize the hard facts of biology or the equally ubiquitous forces of society? How does one bridge the traits about human bodies and the patterns of human gendered behavior one sees virtually every day? I have attempted to provide a theological model of gender that answered such questions, while also avoiding the pitfalls often ensnaring theologians who have attempted this task. Two bifurcations dominate the field. First, one is faced with two apparently exclusive options about gender's basic properties: either it is a social construct (if we are to take seriously the social dimensions involved) or it is a biological essence (if we are to be true to the bodies with which we are created). Second, there is a division of approach about which tools are best suited for accomplishing the task of accounting for gender. Either theologians take gender as a serious object of investigation (but forfeit the recognizable tools and virtues of theology) or one upholds a commitment to the tools and virtues of theology (but excludes gender and other complexities of being human from genuine theological investigation). On both accounts, theology is ill-suited for conducting an inquiry into gender. Much of the burden of the present project has been to assert these bifurcations as false dichotomies, both through assertion and demonstration.

I do not think that gender is a social construct, despite the wide popularity of the view in virtually all discussions of which gender is the topic. This is because it cannot allow for cross-cultural commonalities amongst gender kinds, for all theories of social construction agree that constructs are always context-specific. This means that a major commitment of feminist theory and theology (namely, that gender kinds are stable categories, so that we can speak of women and men without fission into specific cultures and times) is undercut. It also means that gender is morally unevaluable, for the norms that govern good and bad instances of women and men are themselves context-specific. Even though I reject the social construction of gender, I do not accept its perceived antithesis, biological essentialism. Instead, I proposed four theses for a workable ontology of gender, theses that take into account the central tenets of essentialism (like the stability of gender kinds) and the main motivations of the social constructionist position (the restraint of epistemic access to gender kinds and the importance of social identities). These were theologically-motivated, insofar as they were suggested through theological exegesis, but spoke directly to what many call the "gender controversy."

My main claim is that we can understand gender as love. Or, in less arcane terms, gender is the appropriation of social goods, an appropriation which occurs when certain goods are loved in virtue of the possession of a sexed body. Loving is that relation to objects that shapes identities. Through loving, we bring the beloved into ourselves and incorporate them into our stories. Those gendered goods we love, then, form our gender identities. But this is not just any love, for the particular account of love favored throughout has been the one put forward by Saint Augustine. For Augustine, love has its source and end in God, who is love. The social goods we are called to love are to be loved as gifts from the Creator, according to the specifications set forth by the Giver, and in a right order. Therefore, gender is matter of moral evaluation, or better

yet, a matter of Christian discipleship. Those same forces that shape us into godliness are the same forces that tell us who we are as gendered selves.

Because gender is a matter of Christian discipleship, it must be seen within the divine economy, that grand narrative of divine action according to which God is creating, redeeming, sustaining and perfecting creatures. Our gendered loves are always indexed to this narrative, and I attempted to illustrate how this is so through salient examples like sexual assault. God has not left humanity on its own when it comes, for the One "who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ" (Phi. 1:6). So, the church need not feel abandoned, lost or in panic when it is faced with what seems like the ever-changing landscape that gender inhabits. Instead, the same promises made by God apply. Because God "will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory," we may rest in knowing that our genders do not fall outside of that scope (Phi. 3:21). Instead, the One who reigns over all Creation and has promised to redeem it by purging it of all sin is the One who will redeem gender.

The task we now face is not a new task. It is a task of loving rightly. The church that is well-trained in robust love is the church that is well-equipped to face the challenges faced by this century's issues and the next. Yet, this is far from easy and our dependence upon the Holy Spirit does not end. So, prayer and transformation are non-negotiable, for we are called to be women and men *in Christ*. The words of the collect for the third Sunday of Lent, therefore, are apposite for thinking about gender just as much as they are for any other part of our discipleship:

> Heavenly Father, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you: Look with compassion upon the heartfelt desires of your servants, and purify our disordered affections, that we may behold your eternal glory in the face of Christ Jesus; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

These are the words of gendered pilgrims making voyage to their homeland, yearning for a day when the redemption of the body is complete. It endures hardship with praise, grief with comfort, shame with divine honor, and as it does so, it is assured of a coming day when all tears are wiped away. Gender has caused many tears. But God will one day show the church what it means to be, finally, women and men in glory.

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