

CHAPTER 1

Mere Complementarianism in Nature

DURING A CONFIRMATION hearing in 2022, United States Senator Marsha Blackburn asked Supreme Court nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson to define what a woman is. Here's a transcript of their extraordinary exchange.

Blackburn: Can you provide a definition for the word woman?

Jackson: Can I provide a definition? No.

Blackburn: Yeah.

Jackson: I can't.

Blackburn: You can't?

Jackson: Mm. Not in this context. I'm not a biologist.¹

There could hardly be a better example of the confusion of our times than this dialogue. A Supreme Court nominee demurs when asked for a definition of what a woman is. Why? According to Jackson, it's because she is not a biologist—as if advanced training or degrees are required to recognize the difference between a man and woman. Imagine if this reasoning were

1. *WATCH: Sen. Marsha Blackburn Questions Jackson in Supreme Court Confirmation Hearings*, (PBS News Hour, 2022), 30:13, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WbXttwr5Umo&t=995s>.

applied consistently to other ordinary areas of our experience. Would you need to be a baker in order to recognize the bread in your pantry? Would you have to be a veterinarian to recognize a dog? Would you have to be a butcher to recognize ground beef? A consistent application of the judge's logic would be a descent into the absurd. Something has gone off-track in the judge's reasoning, but the problem isn't that the judge lacks advanced, specialized training as a biologist.

Why would a sitting judge and nominee for the highest court in the land not be able to define what a woman is? A colleague pointed out to me the irony of her not being able (or willing) to answer this question. After all, her presence in these hearings was the direct result of the President of the United States' promise to nominate a black *woman* to the Supreme Court.² Can we be sure that the President kept his promise if we can't even agree on what a woman is? Can Jackson agree that the President kept his promise? If she can, doesn't that mean that she knows what a woman is and that presumably she is one? I have a hunch that Judge Jackson knows what a woman is. She understands at some level that the fundamental difference between a man and a woman is revealed in the body's organization for reproduction. Whether she's considered things in these terms before, she probably senses that a man's reproductive capacity is ordered toward fathering, and a woman's reproductive capacity is ordered toward mothering. I suspect that she knows this at some level because it's what everyone held to be self-evident until the day before yesterday.

Jackson's claim that she's not a "biologist" suggests that the truth is still self-evident at some level. She seems to admit that

2. Michael D. Shear, "Biden Made a Campaign Pledge to Put a Black Woman on the Supreme Court," *The New York Times* (January 26, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/26/us/politics/biden-supreme-court-black-woman.html>.

biology is at least part of the answer to the question, but she demurs from endorsing that reality. The problem here is that this basic structure of reality is at odds with an ascendant ideology that says being a man or a woman is entirely disconnected from biological realities but rather is rooted in what a person thinks themselves to be at any given moment. If a biological male thinks he's a woman, then he is a woman. If a biological female thinks she's a man, then she is a man. Thinking makes it so! And it seems that Judge Jackson doesn't want to confront the underlying irrationality that has taken hold of the popular imagination.

In contrast to this, complementarianism presupposes a distinction between male and female, and this distinction is revealed in the body's organization for reproduction.³ A man

3. After sharing the first draft of the Nashville Statement with John Piper, he wrote to me in a private correspondence his reflections on the relationship between the Danvers Statement and the Nashville Statement. Even though Danvers came thirty years before Nashville, Nashville is making explicit matters that were *presumed* by the drafters of Danvers. The following is from a private email from Piper dated March 12, 2017. I quote him at length with permission:

“The burden of The Danvers Statement is very different and utterly necessary as an expansion ... to the more basic Nashville Statement. Danvers picks up where Nashville leaves off. Nashville makes the case that ‘male/female identity,’ is defined by ‘biological sex;’ and that marriage is defined as the covenant union of male and female. Danvers assumed that, and went to the next level and made the case that male and female sexual identity correspond to realities that are vastly more wonderful and significant [than] mere biologically defined ‘male/female identity.’ Danvers uses the terminology of manhood and womanhood (or masculinity and femininity) to describe the ... realities that find biblical expression in distinct and complementary roles for men and women, especially in the home and the church. Danvers tackled the difficult task of giving some definition and application to these realities of manhood and womanhood.

is a person whose body is organized to reproduce as a father. A woman is a person whose body is organized to reproduce as a mother. These differences do not make male and female contradictory to one another but complementary. The male and female *complete* their reproductive potential in sexual union and procreation.

HOW WE CAME TO DENY MALE-FEMALE DIFFERENCE

This natural distinction between male and female is widely disputed today. It is also the animating concern of Carl Trueman's watershed book *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*. Trueman's work tells the long story of how Western man came to view his own human nature not as a gift from God but as a project of self-construction. Trueman explains,

The origins of this book lie in my curiosity about how and why a particular statement has come to be regarded as coherent and meaningful: 'I am a woman trapped in a man's body.' My grandfather died in 1994, less than thirty years ago, and yet, had he ever heard that sentence uttered in his presence, I have little doubt that he would

"The Nashville Statement does not address this level of reality that goes beyond biology and anatomy. It deals solely with 'male/female identity' rooted in 'biological sex.' Because of the more basic cultural denials of reality in the decades since Danvers, this kind of definition and defense of sexuality (such as the Nashville Statement) is needed. Danvers took for granted (with marginal exceptions) what today is widely denied—namely, that male and female exist as biologically given human sexual identities. Danvers assumed that, and built on it. Danvers argued and illustrated that the difference between men and women is more than their sexual identity as male and female. It includes realities that go beyond biological and are intended by God to find expression in complementary manhood and womanhood with implicit complementary role distinctions."

have burst out laughing and considered it a piece of incoherent gibberish. And yet today it is a sentence that many in our society regard as not only meaningful but so significant that to deny it or question it in some way is to reveal oneself as stupid, immoral, or subject to yet another irrational phobia.⁴

I don't know if Trueman's question resonates with you, but it really does with me. It rings true to the transgender moment that we seem to find ourselves in. It also provokes some obvious questions. How in the world did we get to the place that the sentence "I am a woman trapped in a man's body" even makes sense?

In 2017, *National Geographic* published an entire issue celebrating LGBT identities. The cover story included a number of glossy images of people identifying as LGBT. I will never forget turning a page to see the image of a seventeen-year-old boy posing shirtless holding his skateboard. But when I leaned in and looked a little closer, I noticed two scars right below the chest. I wasn't looking at a shirtless seventeen-year-old boy. I was looking at a shirtless seventeen-year-old girl who had just undergone a double mastectomy. And the caption said this:

Assigned female at birth, Hunter Keith, 17, has felt himself to be a boy since fifth grade. By seventh grade he told his friends; by eighth grade he told his parents. Two weeks before this photo was taken, his breasts were removed. Now he relishes skateboarding shirtless in his Michigan neighborhood.⁵

4. Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 19.

5. Robin Marantz Henig, "Rethinking Gender," *National Geographic* 231, no. 1 (January 2017): 72–73.

What happened that a young girl's parents would consent to have their minor child's healthy organs destroyed and then to pose her naked body in the pages of *National Geographic* magazine? If we could tell our grandfathers about that spectacle, they wouldn't laugh. They likely would have wept. And we should too.

One of the reasons for this spectacle is no doubt the fact that the dominant view of the self in our culture today is that of *expressive individualism*. According to philosopher Charles Taylor, expressive individualism is an understanding of the self that holds,

That each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one's own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority.⁶

This worldview holds that the purpose of life is to discover one's deepest self, to express that to the world, and then to forge that identity no matter what kind of conflicts might follow—conflicts that may cause a person to contradict what family, friends, tradition, or even religious authorities might say.⁷ Your identity—indeed even the meaning of life itself—is determined and expressed by you, the individual. It is not something given to you by God or any other external authority. It is the poem

6. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), 475. Taylor uses the terms “expressivism” and “the age of authenticity” to describe what most people now term “expressive individualism.”

7. Trevin Wax, “Expressive Individualism: What Is It?,” *The Gospel Coalition* (October 16, 2018), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/expressive-individualism-what-is-it/>. See also Yuval Levin, *The Fractured Republic: Renewing America's Social Contract in the Age of Individualism* (New York: Basic, 2016), 148.

“Invictus” taken to seed, where every individual is the master of his own identity and the captain of his own soul.⁸

Expressive individualism is the ideological air that we breathe. Indeed, Carl Trueman has observed that “we are all expressive individualists now.”⁹ This worldview has so saturated our culture that we hardly notice that it is there forming us and shaping our understanding of ourselves and of what it means to be a human being. We no longer perceive ourselves to have a common human nature. We *are* what our own subjectivity declares us to be. That means that anyone who has a male body but a female self-understanding *is* a female. The mind’s self-assertion takes precedence over the body for the expressive individualist.

Carl Trueman shows that long before anyone was talking about transgenderism, people in the West were turning into expressive individualists. Under the influence of thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, and Charles Darwin, Europeans and then Americans were putting to death the belief that the world has any intrinsic meaning or “that human beings have special significance or an essence that determines how they should behave.”¹⁰ In the twentieth century, Sigmund Freud, more than any other, gave rise to the idea that human beings are essentially sexual beings and that our sexual desires (no matter what they are) define our identity as human beings.¹¹ After Marxist thinkers Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse appropriated Freud’s ideas, they diagnosed the world’s deepest problem as oppression and held traditional

8. William Ernest Henley, *Poems* (David Nutt, 1898), 119.

9. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 27.

10. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 27.

11. See chapter 4, “Sexual Orientation: Freud’s Nineteenth-Century Mistake,” in Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant, 2015), 93–112.

sexual morality as the primary instrument of that oppression.¹² That worldview shift laid the groundwork for the radical gender ideologies that emerged after the sexual revolution from the 1960s until now.

Modern feminism is no doubt a product of this milieu. In her book *The Genesis of Gender*, Abigail Favale describes the history of feminism in America with the common appeal to different “waves” that emerged throughout the twentieth century.¹³ These waves intersected with postmodern philosophy in ways that reshaped the common understanding of what it means to be a male or female. The first wave came into its own in 1910 with the movement for women’s suffrage. Nineteenth-century figures influencing this movement include Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Sojourner Truth. Stanton was a key organizer of the first women’s rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848 and a co-author of the “Declaration of Sentiments” that came out of it. This movement had ties to both the abolitionist movement and later the temperance movement (which led to thirteen years of prohibition in the early twentieth century). This first wave culminated in 1920 with the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which then guaranteed women the right to vote. First wave feminists have generally not been understood as radicals or revolutionaries but as middle-class wives and mothers, many of whom were Christians who opposed abortion.¹⁴ Favale notes, “There was

12. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 28.

13. The following description of the different “waves” of feminism follows very closely Abigail Favale, *The Genesis of Gender: A Christian Theory*, 56–61.

14. This characterization of first wave feminists is disputed. For example, Nancy Hewitt contends that the common perception of the first wave as more moderate is mistaken. She points to a number of figures within the movement who were more radical. See Nancy A. Hewitt, “Feminist Frequencies: Regenerating the Wave Metaphor,” *Feminist Studies* 38, no. 3 (2012): 658–80.

not, at this time, the idea of an all-pervasive patriarchy that needed to be continually contested.”¹⁵ This would change with the second wave.

After a long thirty-year interval, a second wave of feminism “erupted” during the 1960s.¹⁶ The forerunner of this second wave appeared in Simone de Beauvoir’s book *The Second Sex* (1949), which famously argued that

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.¹⁷

For Beauvoir, being a woman is not dictated by bodily realities. Rather, “the very concept of ‘woman’ ... is figured as an object, slave, or ‘other’ to man, and female human beings are socialized to conform to this understanding of womanhood.”¹⁸ Indeed, Beauvoir rejects the idea that female biology is destiny.¹⁹ A woman’s body may be designed for conceiving, bearing, and nurturing children, but those bodily realities need not consign a woman to the slavery of marriage and motherhood. As one commentator observes, “Beauvoir treats the body as a kind of millstone around the necks of all women that prevents them from attaining a life of freedom.”²⁰ By her own agency, a woman can reject the script of subjugation that her body and society force on her.

15. Favale, *The Genesis of Gender*, 57.

16. Favale, *The Genesis of Gender*, 57.

17. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953), 273.

18. Favale, *The Genesis of Gender*, 61.

19. Ian Buchanan, *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*, 2nd ed., Oxford Quick Reference (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2018), 54.

20. Ian Buchanan, *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*, 54.

In 1963, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) encouraged women to look for personal fulfillment beyond their traditional roles as wife and mother.²¹ Second wave feminists began to view domesticity as slavery and to consider ways that women might be freed from the obligations of marriage and motherhood so that they might have social and political equality with men. Friedan writes,

It is easy to see the concrete details that trap the suburban housewife, the continual demands on her time. But the chains that bind her in her trap are chains in her own mind and spirit. They are chains made up of mistaken ideas and misinterpreted facts, of incomplete truths and unreal choices. They are not easily seen and not easily shaken off.²²

In her book *Sexual Politics* (1970), Kate Millet gave a name to the system oppressing women—the patriarchy. The patriarchy consists of a web of social conventions designed to subjugate women to men. For Millet, the chief instrument of patriarchal oppression is the family.²³ Marriage is a social arrangement that gives a man authority over his wife and that binds women to childbearing and childcare. Thus, marriage and family constrain women's freedom and enslave them to men. If women were to be liberated, they would need to break free from the interests of men and the institutions that underwrite

21. See comments by Buchanan in *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*, 171.

22. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1963), 31.

23. Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 33: "Patriarchy's chief institution is the family. It is both a mirror of and a connection with the larger society; a patriarchal unit within a patriarchal whole. Mediating between the individual and the social structure, the family effects control and conformity where political and other authorities are insufficient."

patriarchy. Women could only be truly liberated with the end of the traditional family.²⁴

Second wave feminists, therefore, held that true liberation required that women not be constrained by the natural consequences of their own fertility—children. If men could have consequence-free sex, then women should be able to as well. Women should have a choice whether to undertake the obligations of motherhood, but those choices should not constrain their sexual freedom. In short, every woman needed an escape from her own fertility. For that reason, second wave feminists came to view both the Pill and abortion as foundational technologies underwriting their cause. Favale observes, “This alliance between feminism and the pro-abortion movement would prove long-lasting; the right to *ad libitum* abortion is now the central and immovable plank of the mainstream feminist platform.”²⁵ Women can find happiness and fulfillment by rejecting family and motherhood in pursuit of social and political equality with men, but that pursuit of happiness would require the suppression of their body’s reproductive powers—i.e., a suppression of their feminine nature.

Third wave feminism emerged in the 1990s and emphasized sexual freedom. Consent would soon become the only moral boundary on sexual relationships. Third wave feminists were “sex-positive,” which means that any consensual sex act that a woman chooses to engage in would be deemed morally good—even if the sex act involved prostitution, pornography, or sadomasochism.²⁶ Judith Butler is perhaps the most important theorist of third wave feminism. Butler argues that gender is a set of social roles that are culturally determined and applied arbitrarily to different people. Because this gender

24. Sharon James, “Mugged by Reality,” *Eikon* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 67.

25. Favale, *The Genesis of Gender*, 59.

26. Favale, *The Genesis of Gender*, 59.

assignment is fundamentally arbitrary, she argues that, “*man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one.”²⁷ Butler also argues that the very concept of biological sex “is as culturally constructed as gender ... with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all. It would make no sense, then, to define gender as the cultural interpretation of sex, if sex itself is a gendered category.”²⁸ In other words, the very idea of a *gender* binary is an arbitrary imitation of binary sex—male and female. But why should male and female bodies constrain gender in that way? As far as gender is concerned, why can’t we have man, woman, and all manner of variations in between? The gender binary is a culturally encoded script, not a natural consequence of male-female bodily differences. The existence of intersex people proves that even biological sex isn’t binary. Rather, the existence of intersex people suggests that people are male, female, or any number of variations in between.²⁹ All of this shows that even the traditional sexual binary is socially constructed.³⁰

27. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 9.

28. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 10.

29. Butler relies heavily upon the postmodern philosophy of Michel Foucault. See especially Herculine Barbin and Michel Foucault, *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*, trans. Richard McDougall (New York: Vintage Books, 2010); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

30. There is much more to third wave feminism than I have indicated here. My brief summary lays emphasis on third wave feminism’s general rejection of nature and of the social roles implied by male-female difference. For a fuller accounting of third wave feminism, see Buchanan, *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*, 482–83. See also Favale, *The Genesis of Gender*.

How did we get to the place that the sentence “*I am a woman trapped in a man’s body*” even makes sense? We got there by buying into *expressive individualism*—the idea that we *are* what we choose for ourselves to be and that we can reshape human nature by an act of human will. We got there by succumbing to postmodern feminism and the social construction of gender, which assert that masculinity and femininity have no natural connection or rootedness in male and female bodies. We got there by rejecting the idea that the body’s organization for reproduction tells us anything truthful about human nature. Rather, masculinity and femininity (or manhood and womanhood) are merely scripts that we learn from our culture and socialization. These scripts are written by the patriarchy and are designed to oppress whole classes of people. Anyone who cares about justice and equality, therefore, is morally bound to resist and deconstruct these oppressive scripts. That is how we got here in a nutshell.

THE CREATED ORDER AND NATURAL LAW

The story of the modern world is the story of Western man rejecting God’s design in creation. It is the narrative of humanity doing what it has always done—suppressing the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). Scripture itself teaches that before anyone opens a Bible for the first time, they have already seen and experienced God’s revelation. His fingerprints appear on every blade of grass, on every star burning thousands of lightyears away, and indeed on every hair of our heads. He made everything (including us!), and there is nothing that exists apart from God’s agency in creation (John 1:3). Therefore, the evidence of His handiwork is literally everywhere. This is why the Psalmist says,

¹ The heavens are telling of the glory of God;
And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

² Day to day pours forth speech,