MALE AND FEMALE, HE CREATED THEM:

GENDER IN THE CONTEXT OF

HUMAN EMBODIMENT

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APPROVAL SHEET

MALE AND FEMALE, HE CREATED THEM:

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To my beloved wife, Meg.

I could not have completed this project without

your love, your support, and your joy.

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PREFACE

I am grateful for and indebted to so many who played a significant role in helping me to complete this project. Hence, many thanks are in order.

To the Lord God Almighty: You have blessed Meg and me so richly in our time at Southern Seminary with a church family, friends, and all provision. You have sustained me through all of life. This work is ultimately a humble expression of my service to you. As I go forth, I will continue to walk in faithful obedience to you, for your glory.

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To the administrators at Southern Seminary who showed me kindness in life's lowest moment: Thank you for showing Christ's love and believing in me enough to encourage me to press ahead in this program. Dr. Mohler, Dr. Hall, Dr. York, and Dr. Trentham, God used your kindness to encourage faithfulness—thank you.

To my dear friends here in Louisville: Thank you for your encouragement, love, and joy during this season. Your prayers, encouragement, support, and presence in my life have constantly affirmed God's leading me to pursue this degree. I am especially grateful to Torey Teer—whose support as a fellow PhD student, friend, editor, and example has been invaluable—and to Hana Portwood—whose exceptional work running the Bookstore allowed me to dedicate my mornings to writing. Thank you all.

I have learned in writing on gender that each individual who takes up the subject is motivated by a particular burden. I greatly respect and admire those within evangelicalism who felt a particular burden to take up this topic, and I am indebted to their contribution. I have also learned that everyone who takes up the topic of gender writes in a specific context that shapes the burden, the issues, and the way forward. My burden is twofold. First, I desire for gender to be understood in such a way that in faithfulness to Scripture, the unique contributions and giftings of both male and female image bearers can be celebrated, cultivated, and used for the building up of the church and the advancement of the gospel. Second, I desire the church to have a clear understanding of gender so that it can face this contemporary moment of gender confusion with a clear direction of God's design, pointing people to the life of flourishing that the Lord offers.

Jacob Percy

Louisville, Kentucky

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Following the pronouncement of Scripture, I affirm that persons exist in two types: male and female. This affirmation is grounded in God's creative act as declared in Genesis 1:27: "So God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."[1] This presentation of humanity according to two types—male and female—persists throughout Scripture with no hesitation, qualification, or contradiction. There are, simply put, image bearers who are male and image bearers who are female. While caution should be exercised in giving blanket statements that seek to appropriate what was true of the incarnate Son to all humanity, it is nevertheless significant that when the second person of the Trinity took on flesh, he took on a human nature that did not blur the two types of humanity by being born with a male body.

Being made male or female after God's image is central to every human being's experience; a correctly ordered understanding of these two types of humanity is crucial to flourishing according to God's design and conformity to the likeness of Christ by the Holy Spirit. Given its important position linking humanity with divinity, the topic of gendered embodiment (a term to be defined in greater detail later) merits careful theological attention and reflection. Knowledge of self—what it means to be created as a gendered embodied being—is pivotal to the knowledge of God—the one who created humanity as such.[2]

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[1] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the *English Standard Version*.

[2] The connection between knowledge of self and knowledge of God has a long history within the Christian tradition. It is employed by John Calvin in the first chapter of his *Institutes* and by Augustine in his *Confessions*. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics 20–21 (London: S. C. M. Press, 1960), 1.1.1 (Battles,

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Thesis

I will argue that the best way to understand human gender[3] is in terms of common human properties and human capacities expressed by men in ways fitting to their masculinity and by women in ways fitting to their femininity.[4] This grammar is articulated by Gregg Allison, and I follow his definitions for "properties" and "capacities": properties are virtues such as love, courage, leadership, and nurturing, and capacities encapsulate rationality, cognition, volition, and emotions. This project aims to develop Allison's position further and present it as the most biblically faithful and helpful way of understanding what it means to be male and female.[5] This conception of gender sits between the two most common articulations of gender—that is, it seeks to satisfy some problematic features of "gender essentialism" and the "social construction of gender."[6] Since 1991 and the publishing of *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, gender essentialism has been the default view of conservative evangelicalism.[7] Alternatively, the social construction of gender currently occupies the

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1:35-39); St Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), book 10.

[3] Gender has become a contested term that enjoys no prevailing definition. Historically, gender has been equated with sex, but in more recent scholarship, sex and gender are treated as two distinct categories. A representative definition of how gender functions today is that it is the term that refers to the "psychological, social, and cultural aspects of being made male and female." Mark A. Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 16-17. A significant portion of the constructive part of this project will be devoted to articulating a definition of gender, so the matter will be addressed in greater detail at that point.

[4] This idea will be referred to as "common human properties and capacities" going forward.

[5] Gregg R. Allison, *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2021), 43. Allison also uses this language in his faculty address; see Gregg R. Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 23, no. 2 (Summer 2019): 157-80.

[6] Both gender essentialism and the social construction of gender will be defined in greater detail in the work that follows, with significant nuance needed to adequately articulate the range of views represented by the terms. However, a brief definition of each is appropriate for clarity. Gender essentialism is the view that gender is biologically determined, and it generally views males and females as possessing two distinct natures. The social construction of gender views gender as the product of cultural and relational forces whereby the norms, expectations, and roles of society exercise the fundamental responsibility in determining gender.

[7] The original edition of *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* was published in 1991. Its enduring significance is evident in that an updated edition was published in 2021; see John Piper

dominant position within academic discourse on gender study.[8] While these two views are incompatible, the vast distance between each position provides space for alternative conceptions of gender to be formulated that are not viewed as fitting within either category. The view defended in this project—that gender is best understood in terms of common human properties and common human capacities—is rightly viewed as similar to the position of gender essentialism but endeavors to satisfy some of the most notable critiques that have led to gender essentialism's dismissal by many.

Connected to the conception of gender in terms of common human properties and capacities is the understanding of gender as an *ontological* category. This position will also be advanced and defended in this project. Ontological, in this respect, refers to the fundamental reality of what it means to be human. Understanding gender as an ontological category means recognizing gender as a fundamental aspect of what it means to be human and seeking to define gender in a way that articulates its most basic components. Gender as ontological means that gender does not function as an aspirational category, a state that embodied beings must pursue conformity to, but as a fundamental reality of human existence that all people live out. My aim in this project is to say little to nothing about what a man or a woman *ought* to do; instead, I will articulate what a man or a woman *is* as a created, gendered, particular, and social being.[9]

These two objectives are motivated by a desire to aid and equip the church to respond to the current scrutiny surrounding gender.[10] Contemporary articulations of

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and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021).

[8] Natalie Stoljar, "Essence, Identity, and the Concept of Woman," *Philosophical Topics* 23, no. 2 (1995): 261-64.

[9] I reference the four elements of embodiment outlined by Allison; see Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," 156.

[10] In focusing on the ontology of gender I have a specific focus which does not include discussion of gender expression. I affirm the significance and importance of discussions of gender expression, but this aspect of gender is not within the scope of this project.

gender within evangelicalism do not provide adequate resources to respond to the growing gender dysphoria and transgender movement. While this project does not directly address the questions surrounding the transgender debate, it seeks to aid in that discussion by providing a conception of gender that is robustly biblical and addresses the weaknesses of gender essentialism while still wholly rejecting the social construction of gender. I intend to convince readers that the conception of gender in terms of common human properties and human capacities is *consistent* with Scripture, internally *coherent*, *defensible* against external critique, and *valuable* for contemporary discourse on gender.[11]

Methodology

While the topic of human gender can be approached from a philosophical vantage point, this study is a work of systematic theology and will therefore address gender from a theological perspective. Some have dismissed theology's ability to deal with gender, believing the subject to be relegated to the field of philosophy and gender theory and leaving the theologian only to borrow from the tools of these disciplines.[12] Following the conviction of John Webster, I assert that the theologian speaks most helpfully and can contribute to those who are in other fields and persuasions when she makes concrete theological claims with clarity and confidence.[13] As a work of systematic theology, my discussion will contain the following method and convictions: the priority

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[11] I am grateful to Torey Teer, who suggested a "consistent, defensible, and useful" framework. I have exchanged "useful" for "valuable" because I am convinced that a conception of gender that begins with the common humanity of men and women based on their shared creation of the image of God eliminates much of the frustration and divisiveness present in disagreements regarding gender. Furthermore, this conception of gender helps both men and women understand that their gendered embodiment is primarily related to their unique creation by God.

[12] Sarah Coakley outlines this issue, writing, "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." Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay "On the Trinity"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 34.

[13] This sentence summarizes the argument of John Webster in "The Human Person," in *Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 219.

of Scripture, an epistemological commitment to faith seeking understanding, consistency with the "Rule of Faith," and the value of historical theology.

God has most fully and clearly revealed himself in Scripture, making it the foundation for faith and theology. It is the norming norm and is the ultimate and final authority on all matters of faith and practice. In my theological formulation of gendered embodiment, therefore, I will strive for fidelity to Scripture, providing a synthesis of all it says concerning gender and representing it in a way that does not violate or neglect any of its teaching.

In order to treat Scripture in this way, one must approach it with the right virtues, the primary one being faith seeking understanding. As Stephen Wellum notes, "Theology does not merely repeat Scripture; it seeks to 'understand' what Scripture says in terms of application, logical implications, metaphysical entailments, and so on."[14] To move beyond the basic repetition of Scripture, a disposition of faith, the result of God's grace, is required. This posture allows for answering questions raised by Scripture, even if doing so requires the employment of extra-biblical categories, in order to faithfully represent divine revelation. Additionally, I will strive to interpret Scripture with careful attention to the church's historic teaching as expressed in the "Rule of Faith" and the historic creeds of the church (e.g., Apostles', Nicene-Constantinopolitan, Chalcedonian). In addition to fidelity to creedal confessions, I will seek to demonstrate a value for historical theology through retrieval theology, broadly defined as "resourcing contemporary systematic constructive theology by engaging historical theology."[15] This is a crucial component of theological formulation as it allows for the interpretation of Scripture in the presence of those who have gone before. I will interact with historical

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[14] Stephen J. Wellum, "Retrieval, Christology, and *Sola Scriptura*," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 23, no. 2 (Summer 2019): 36.

[15] Gavin Ortlund, *Theological Retrieval for Evangelicals: Why We Need Our Past to Have a Future* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 45.

interpretations and formulations of gender in order to maintain a strong connection to the "givens" of the Christian faith (Jude 3).

With this biblical-theological-historical approach, my dissertation can move beyond a minimal theological reading of Scripture while providing a theological formulation of gender that is most fitting concerning biblical teaching because of its coherence with the entirety of the canon and its ability to withstand the testing of an orthodox interpretation.

A Brief Sketch of the History of Gender Conception

Gender has emerged as a topic of significant interest within theological studies, primarily driven by the rapidly shifting societal landscape. For most of its usage within the English language, "sex" enjoyed a stable definition that referred to whether one was biologically male or female. However, within the last fifty years, sex has been exchanged for "gender," which continues to be defined in ever-shifting ways. Yet even though gender has become an area of the current debate, it has always been controversial. To understand the thesis that advances a view of ontological equality between males and females, it is important to understand the dominant concepts of sex/gender throughout the Western tradition. Prudence Allen employs five conceptions of sex[16] that have existed within the Western tradition; her framework outlines how men and women have been perceived in broad categories. Among these five conceptions, Allen identifies sex unity, sex polarity, and sex complementarity as the most basic.[17] Using Allen's three categories,

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[16] Given that Prudence Allen reviews theories of sex identity that go back as early as 750 BC, sex is the most appropriate word to use, as gender did not develop as something different than sex until the twentieth century.

[17] Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, vol. 1, *The Aristotelian Revolution, 750 B.C.-A.D. 1250* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 3. I only focus on these three—to the exclusion of sex neutrality and reverse sex polarity—because Allen identifies them as most basic and the excluded two are derivations of these three. Focusing on sex unity, sex polarity, and sex complementarity provides the best balance between comprehensively representing the history of conceptions of sex without going into details that are beyond the scope of this project.

I will identify the origin and development of each concept to show how they affect the landscape of gender conception today.

Development of Gender Conceptions

Allen's first theory is sex unity, the view that men and women are not significantly different and are fundamentally equal. Plato first articulated gender unity within the Greek philosophical tradition; he is considered the originator of this position. He based the affirmation of gender unity on the fact that men and women have the same nature, soul, knowledge, function, and pursuit. Plato's conclusion is supported by his metaphysical commitment to a strong body-soul dualism: the soul is a person's true nature, while the body is of relatively minor importance.[18] In his argument in *Republic*, Plato places a man's or woman's identity in his or her mind (or soul) and not his or her body. The material aspects have no role in determining the identity of man and woman in the world.[19] One of the significant issues with this view is its devaluing of the body. Plato concluded that men and women are equal by comparing the equality of the male and female soul and men and women's ability to pursue the same wisdom and virtue while completely ignoring any physical, bodily differences between men and women.

Aristotle rejected Plato's notion of sex unity and consolidated the swirling views regarding men and women into the second identified theory of sex polarity, the view that men and women are significantly different and that men are superior to women.[20] Aristotle regarded women as metaphysically inferior to men, classifying women as a privation of men, and then applied that conclusion to his thoughts on

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[18] Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, 1:86-89.

[19] Plato, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, trans. Lane Cooper (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 453.

[20] See Aristotle, "Metaphysics," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 1058. Allen identifies how the basic ideas of sex polarity were present from the beginning of the Western philosophical tradition. However, Aristotle's significance solidified the embrace and perpetuation of this concept of sex as he made specific conclusions, whereas those before him just made observations. Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, 1:77.

women's inferiority in terms of wisdom and virtue.[21] Aristotle's conception of sex

polarity is primarily based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the physiology of

sexual reproduction. Aristotle rejected the prevailing two-seed theory of his day, the view

that both the father and the mother contribute seed to reproduction. Instead, Aristotle

concluded that only the father contributed seed. He pictured sexual intercourse as a battle

between two contraries attempting to destroy one another, and he outlined five possible

outcomes when the father's seed (form) met the mother's blood (matter).[22]

The inferiority of women, according to Aristotle's conception, also extended to

their rational capacity. While men and women have the same reasoning, in women, the

higher power of reason does not possess authority over the lower irrational powers,

resulting in an inferior type of reasoning capacity. According to this theory, women are

capable of true opinion but not true knowledge. Given that Aristotle linked ethics with a

capacity to reason, on his account, women's inferior rational capacities make them

incapable of truly virtuous activity.[23] The core logic of Aristotle's argument is obliterated

with a proper understanding of the physiology of human sexual reproduction since both

father and mother contribute one half of the necessary seed. However, this biological fact

was not widely known until the seventeenth century; thus, the sex polarity theory

persisted as the dominant conception of gender throughout Western thought.[24]

The third theory of sex identity is sex complementarity, the view that women

and men are significantly different yet are equal.[25] While partial forms of this theory can

be found in the writings of some pre-Aristotelian philosophers, it did not emerge in a

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[21] Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, 1:89.

[22] Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, 1:95.

[23] Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, 1:109-12.

[24] The persistence of Aristotle's view is also attributed to the adoption of Aristotelian thought in the University of Paris, which influenced generations of thinkers, most notably Thomas Aquinas. Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, 1:413-72.

[25] Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, 1:3.

coherent form until the writing of Augustine. This concept of sex identity is founded upon the Christian belief that a person's essential identity consists of both soul and body, both of which are eternal, resulting in the eternal differentiation of men and women. This view, however, creates a tension with which philosophers struggle: How does one reconcile differentiation with equality? Augustine did not hold to this view with complete consistency or carry it to its full consequence. In fact, it is because he supported both sex polarity and sex unity that he began the new impulse for sex complementarity; yet, he held each theory in part depending on the location and orientation of the individual. Because of his affirmation of the resurrection of the body and the persisting physical differentiation between men and women as well as his understanding of the equality of male and female saints, Augustine held to sex complementarity in heaven.[26] However, he held to sex polarity with respect to earthly existence.[27]

At the time of Augustine, all three views—sex unity, sex polarity, and sex complementarity—were present without one view being dominant. Yet as Aristotle's philosophical tradition continued to spread, so did his theory of sex polarity. The first significant event that led to securing the dominance of sex polarity was the translation of Aristotle's work from Arabic into Latin, which was the precipitating event that ushered in the Aristotelian revolution in the thirteenth century. Aristotle's work had been widely adopted and preserved by the Islamic world, and this Arabic-to-Latin translation allowed Aristotle's corpus to reemerge in Western philosophical thought. This widespread adoption significantly influenced the adoption of sex polarity within the Christian tradition. Albert the Great (or Albertus Magnus) interacted with Aristotle's work and

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[26] In *The Confessions*, Augustine writes, "In the resurrection, the blemishes of the body will be gone, but the nature of the body will remain. And certainly, a woman's sex is her nature and no blemish." Augustine, *Augustine: The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), VII.17. For a detailed discussion of Augustine's view, see Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, 1:218-36.

[27] Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, 1:220.

adopted the same conclusions and logic regarding sex polarity.[28] It was mainly due to Albert that the institution where he taught, the University of Paris, officially adopted Aristotle's philosophy.[29] The University of Paris then served as the vehicle through which sex polarity was advanced throughout Europe as the dominant theory of sex.

The most significant impact of Albert and the University of Paris was the training of their most famous student, Thomas Aquinas. Like Augustine, Aquinas's view of male and female contained a mixture of theories, but his rejection of Plato's dualism led him to move completely beyond sex unity. By establishing a scale of degrees of perfection, Aquinas held that while women are always in the image of God, they reflect that image less perfectly than men.[30] With respect to the realm of grace, men and women exist in a type of sex complementarity wherein both sexes have access to salvation and are capable of theological virtue. Yet, with respect to the realm of nature, women are a less perfect image of God because God's image is connected to humanity's rational capacity, a capacity weaker in women—according to Aquinas's appropriated Aristotelian metaphysic.[31] These competing states would eventually be resolved in the resurrection as sex complementarity would prevail and both men and women would be perfected.[32]

Aquinas's adoption of sex polarity vis-à-vis the realm of nature ensured the dominance of sex polarity within the Christian philosophical tradition. Sex polarity was the view held by the leading university, advanced by the leading scholar, and adopted

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[28] Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, 1:362.

[29] Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, 1:362.

[30] Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 3 vols. (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), 1.92.1. For an expansion of this argument, see Kristin Mary Popik, *The Philosophy of Women in Thomas Aquinas* (Rome: Angelicum, 1979); Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, vol. 2, *The Early Humanist Reformation, 1250-1500* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 127-52.

[31] Thomas Aquinas, *In octo libros policorum Aristotelis*, trans. Diane Gordon (Quebec: Tremblay and Dion, 1940), Book 1, 51.

[32] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.81.3.

within the church's life. By the end of 1250, sex polarity had become the default conception of sex. While sex complementarity and sex unity continued to exist in certain streams of thought, they were always in a position of needing to justify their existence.

Even as the Protestant Reformation brought about sweeping changes within the church's life and views on critical doctrines, it did not usher in a new conception of men and women. This stasis could be due to several factors, such as the fact that sex polarity was anchored in a misunderstanding of human sexual reproduction that was yet to be corrected. A second factor may have been that even as the Reformation saw the rise of humanism, women were still largely excluded from education which meant that reevaluating sex polarity did not become a significant concern.[33] Finally, even as views on marriage changed because of the Reformation and the example of the magisterial reformers, the reformers' teaching on marriage was marked by a hierarchical relationship between men and women. Martin Bucer exemplifies this teaching by interpreting the statement "It is not good that man should be alone" (Gen 2:18) as both a rejection of Roman Catholic teaching on celibacy and an understanding that woman was made for man.[34]

Even the Protestant Reformation and its elevation of the teaching of Scripture could not dislodge Aristotle's sex polarity view from being the dominant conception of men and women within society and the church. Within society, sex polarity contributed to a view of women as intellectually inferior to men, keeping them from being educated and relegating them primarily to domestic tasks. Within the church, sex polarity was always held in tension with some form of sex complementarity, as the latter notion taught

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[33] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Viking Adult, 2004), 590-92.

[34] Herman J. Selderhuis, *Marriage and Divorce in the Thought of Martin Bucer* (Kirksville, Mo: Truman State University Press, 1999), 165-80.

that both men and women had equal access to salvation and that there would be complete complementarity in the resurrection.

The Enlightenment and Feminism

The great Enlightenment, spanning from the late seventeenth century until the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, brought a wave of scientific and philosophical discourse centered on an elevated belief in human rationality. While sex polarity was still the default conception of gender, scientific advances and the adoption of René Descartes's philosophical skepticism led to the questioning of sex polarity. The microscope allowed the observation of male sperm by Antonie van Leeuwenhoek in 1677.[35] This invention began the scientific process that falsified ancient concepts of sexual reproduction, especially that of Aristotle, leading to the eventual development of a correct view of sexual reproduction wherein both the male and the female contribute half of the seed, working in unity to bring about offspring. This development weakened many of the metaphysical presuppositions of Aristotle's sex polarity.

The Cartesian skepticism of the Enlightenment also weakened sex polarity, leading to questioning the disparity between genders. Thinkers such as François Poulain de la Barre (1647-1723)[36] and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)[37] observed the disparity between men and women within society and pointed to social conditioning as the central issue in forming sex polarity. They concluded that with equal access to education, women could contribute to society in the same way as men.

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[35] Clifford Dobell, "A Protozoological Bicentenary: Antony van Leeuwenhoek (1632-1723) and Louis Joblot (1645-1723)," *Parasitology* 15, no. 3 (September 1923): 308-19.

[36] Francois 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 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 119-200.

[37] John Stuart Mill, "The Subjection of Women," in *"On Liberty" and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 117-218.

Sex polarity and the view that women were rationally inferior to men had resulted in the exclusion of women from significant participation in public life. The movement now referred to as first-wave feminism (1848-1920) can largely be seen as an effort to overcome female exclusion from the public square by granting women rights and access within the legal system. In the United States, this movement was almost entirely synonymous with the women's suffrage movement led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Sojourner Truth. The movement largely disbanded after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1920, which guaranteed women the right to vote.

While first-wave feminism was not radical or revolutionary, the same was not true for later waves. A significant shift took place within the feminist movements with the writing of Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), who is considered the pioneer of the social construction of gender because she made an explicit distinction between sex and gender.[38] Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* provided a vocabulary for analyzing and critiquing the social structures of femininity.[39] It exerted a great emphasis on second-wave feminism (1960-1990) as feminist thinkers pushed for gender equality, viewing the current social construction of femininity as oppressive to women, and led to an active rethinking of female roles within the home and society. During this period, the social construction of gender took prominence in academic discourse and began to influence theological thought.[40] Second-wave feminism became characterized by an emphasis on

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

[39] Debra Bergoffen and Megan Burke, "Simone de Beauvoir," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified January 11, 2023, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/beauvoir/.

[40] Sally Haslanger, *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key*, Current Issues in Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

reproductive freedom and sought unlimited access to both birth control and abortions—though these features were not the case at the start of the movement.[41]

Third-wave feminism emerged in the 1990s and continued the preoccupation with reproductive freedom; it became associated with sex-positive feminism, which emphasized uninhibited sexual freedom. Judith Butler is the most influential writer of this movement, making several seismic contributions to gender studies. Her first and most influential contribution is her conception of gender as performance, the view that women must *become* in order to *be*.[42] Butler also advances the theory that "female" can no longer be considered a stable notion with a stable meaning. She holds that the traditional view of humanity as split into two sexes should be seen as a matter of social fiction.[43] As Butler's ideas moved into popular culture, third-wave feminism became characterized by emphases on individual choice and freedom and on rejecting heteronormativity, the idea that male-female sexual relationships are normal and natural.[44]

This brief historical sketch provides context for understanding the current conceptions of sex and gender. Sex/gender polarity can be summarized as the view that men and women are essentially or ontologically different, with every difference's representing a difference in value, resulting in the notion that men are essentially superior to women. In an attempt to reject the conclusion of female inferiority and rigid sex roles, feminist theories have turned their focus to dismantling such gender essentialism. Gender

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[41] Sue Ellen Browder, *Subverted: How I Helped the Sexual Revolution Hijack the Women's Movement* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2015).

[42] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1998): 519-31. I will interact with Butler's view of gender performativity in more detail in chapter 4.

[43] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), ix.

[44] Abigail Favale holds that in 2012, a fourth wave of feminism emerged as the ideas of third-wave feminism moved online. However, she also notes that the wave analogy has broken down, for given the disparate groups, it is difficult to identify distinct movements and collections of ideas. The most significant development Favale attributes to fourth wave feminism is the rejection of "woman" as referring to a biological female. Abigail Favale, *The Genesis of Gender: A Christian Theory* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2022), 59-60.

has become the primary tool used to dislodge the notion that men and women are two essentially different beings. In this context, I seek to advocate a conception of gender that emphasizes ontological equality between the sexes, common human properties and capacities, and human embodiment.

Summary of Research

As feminist ideas were incorporated into theological discussions, John Piper and Wayne Grudem responded in 1991 with *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelicalism Feminism*, in which they advocate, among other things, a view of biblical manhood and womanhood that is equated with gender essentialism. They define masculinity in terms of leadership and protection of women, and they define femininity in terms of submission to and recognition of male leadership.[45] Along with this book, the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW; formed in 1987) and the Danvers Statement (written in 1988) serve to articulate the standard conservative evangelical understanding of gender that is defined in opposition to the social construction of gender and is aligned with gender essentialism.[46] From this point on, the two poles of thought have been thoroughly established.

Kathryn Tanner represents a recent contribution to theology based upon an assumed social construction of gender. Her work *Christ the Key* argues for an expansive openness to human nature that allows for union with Christ.[47] Building upon the philosophical and metaphysical framework outlined by proponents of social constructionism, Tanner argues for a view of human nature's plasticity that extends not

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[45] John Piper, "A Vision of Biblical Complementarity," in Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 41.

[46] The Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, " Appendix 2:The Danvers Statement," in Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 569-74.

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

only to capacities but also to human bodies.[48] Her argument concludes by asserting that both human nature and theological construction are social practices, a conclusion that she claims should give theologians confidence in discussing gender.

In his dissertation "Gender as Love: A Theological Account," Fellipe do Vale seeks to overcome the bifurcation in gender theory between gender as a social construct and gender essentialism.[49] He understands gender in terms of an essence that is not reducible to biological determinism and represents how selves organize socially in relation to their sexed bodies, resulting in the cultivation of justice.[50] Do Vale appeals to Augustine's conception of human love's role in identity formation to conclude that love is a better category than desire, which Sarah Coakley proposes,[51] to understand gender and how gender acquires social meaning in society.

Patrick Schreiner's article "Man and Woman: Toward an Ontology" seeks to address some of the classification issues of gender essentialism that, articulated by Piper and Grudem, take on a highly functional tone.[52] Describing manhood and womanhood from the perspective of natural law, Schreiner concludes that the fundamental meaning of masculinity is "sonship, brotherly love, and potential for paternity," and the fundamental meaning of femininity is "daughterhood, sisterly love, and potential for maternity."[53]

In his article "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue," Jordan Steffaniak defends gender essentialism by arguing for its continued relevance in the

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

[49] Fellipe do Vale outlines the critical aspects of gender essentialism in his dissertation; see Fellipe do Vale, "Gender as Love: A Theological Account" (PhD diss., Southern Methodist University, 2021), 1.

[50] Do Vale, "Gender as Love," 119.

[51] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 34.

[52] Patrick Schreiner, "Man and Woman: Toward an Ontology," *Eikon* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2020): 68-87.

[53] Schreiner, "Man and Woman," 85.

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evangelical discussion.[54] He strives to recover gender essentialism by articulating "causal essentialism" as a form of essentialism that can withstand critique. Causal essentialism affirms that men and women are ordered to express certain virtues grounded in their biological differences. This view recognizes potential social overlap in the expression of characteristics but maintains that each sex has the potential to display those characteristics differently.

Owen Strachan represents an articulation of traditional gender essentialism.[55] As he surveys Scripture, Strachan offers a list of characteristics that are essential to masculinity and femininity, respectively. He maintains that to depart from these scripturally informed essentials is to operate in a diminished state of masculinity or femininity. Strachan calls for a recovery grounding these essentials in biological sex in order to promote the proper ordering of the home, church, and society. His view relates gender with function and seeks to define a necessary standard of gender.[56]

Significance

Gender is foundational to what it means to be human. Within evangelical thought, there are currently two broad options for understanding gender: gender essentialism and the social construction of gender. These two terms do not refer to any single view but to a constellation of positions centered around these two poles. While most conservative evangelicals hold to a form of gender essentialism, the dominant strain of thought within academic discussions of gender is to reject gender essentialism in favor of the social construction of gender. Both sides are at a stalemate and show little

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[54] Jordan L. Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue: A Defense of Gender Essentialism," *Southeastern Theological Review* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 15-35.

[55] Owen Strachan, *Reenchanting Humanity: A Theology of Mankind* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor Christian Focus, 2019).

[56] This is most clearly seen in Strachan's comment that "failure to show strength means a failure of manhood." Strachan, *Reenchanting Humanity*, 139.

movement to respond to the objections raised by their opponents. This project aims to identify each position's shortcomings and propose an alternative way of understanding human gender that is biblically faithful, internally coherent, defensible against critique, and valuable. Gregg Allison's work on human embodiment has raised the initial questions for my research and provided a framework and grammar for this discussion. This project builds upon his brief discussions of gender in order to develop a comprehensive theological formulation of gender that advances the thesis that gender is rightly understood in terms of common human properties and common human capacities. This formulation is developed with the goal to better equip the church to defend against the rise of gender dysphoria and to respond more helpfully to Christians who are questioning what it means to be male or female. This project is not an attack on gender essentialism. Still, it is an attempt to respond to some of the critiques raised against this view and to offer an alternative that I believe is more faithful to Scripture and helpful for our present cultural situatedness.

Argument

My development of a theological conception of gender will unfold as follows. In chapter 2, I will develop a biblical theology of sex and gender. This biblical theology will be used to develop a framework for evaluating and developing formulation of gender. This framework will be the standard that existing conceptions of gender will be evaluated against, and it will serve as the foundation for the formulation of the view advanced in this project.

In chapter 3, I will engage with the views that comprise the variety of positions that fall within the category of gender essentialism. I will begin by clarifying the terminology used and consider the relationship between sex and gender in essentialist viewpoints. Next, I will provide nuance to the range of presentations of gender essentialism by sorting the views into maximal, sortal, and causal forms and engaging

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with the views of specific writers in each group. I will then evaluate and critique gender essentialism and highlight why the need for an improved conception of gendered embodiment exists before finally turning briefly to a discussion on the distinction between gender and gender roles.

Continuing my survey of views on gender, in chapter 4, I will interact with the theory that gender is a social construct. To understand the emphasis of this view, I will provide a brief historical sketch that traces the development of the social construction of gender through the writings of François Poulain de la Barre, John Stuart Mill, Simone de Beauvoir, and Judith Butler, giving particular attention to the importance of Beauvoir's sex and gender disconnection in the formation of this view. I will then offer a critique of the social construction of gender to identify its weakness as a conceptual framework for understanding gendered embodiment.

In chapter 5, I will begin to construct my biblical conception of gender based on Gregg Allison's framework that there are no particular properties or capacities, outside of physiological differences, that belong exclusively to men or that belong exclusively to women. Instead, as I will demonstrate, men and women uniquely express common human traits as men and as women.[57] To support this notion, I will first develop an ontological definition of men and women supported by Scripture's teaching on the ontological equality of the sexes. Then, I will consider how the common humanity of men and women is the grounds for common human capacities and common human properties.

In chapter 6, I will consider gender in the context of embodiment, arguing that a theological understanding of embodiment is the key to understanding how my proposed conception of gender maintains Scripture's emphasis that men and women are created as

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[57] Allison, *Embodied*, 49. Allison uses the phrase "outside of reproductive capacities" as a qualifier. I have modified this phrase to "outside of physiological differences" in order to clarify that this view affirms the biological differences between men and women and does not seek to eliminate them. I am grateful to Torey Teer for making this suggestion.

two distinct types of humanity without mitigating their ontological equality. To accomplish this objective, I will first define embodiment according to Allison's framework, and then I will argue that the order of the aspects of embodiment in Allison's framework represents a fixed taxis that clarifies gender as an ontological category. I will conclude this chapter by demonstrating how gender relates to embodied particularity and sociality.

Finally, in chapter 7, I will conclude this project with a review and assessment of the proposed conception of gender. This step will include a summary of the contributions of the conception of gender, an identification of areas of further study, and a discussion of the implications of the proposed conception of gender to conversations on gender within the church.

CHAPTER 2

SCRIPTURE AND GENDER

The theological method for this project strives to place Scripture in a place of primacy and interpret it with a disposition of faith seeking understanding. While Scripture's teaching on gender will be critical to constructing my conception of gender, it will also provide the foundation for my critique against other conceptions of gender. This chapter will survey Scripture's teaching on gender and conclude that it emphasizes ontological equality between male and female, affirms gender binarity, celebrates the distinctions between the two genders, holds properties and capacities as expressed by both genders, and always connects gender with embodiment. First, I will offer some clarifications regarding the terms I will be utilizing throughout this chapter (and project). Second, I will explicate a biblical theology of gender by considering what Scripture says about biological sex and how it relates to gender, and then, based on Scripture's teaching on sex and gender, I will construct a framework for evaluating existing gender conceptions.

Clarifying Terms

Before surveying Scripture's teaching on sex and gender, I must clarify terminology and establish how sex and gender are related.

Sex

"Sex" refers to "the physical, biological, and anatomical dimensions of being male or female (including chromosomes, gonads, sexual anatomy, and secondary sex

characteristics)."[1] Humans are sexually dimorphic, which means that sexual reproduction occurs when the gamete (sperm) of one type of human is fused with the gamete (egg) of another type of human to produce a new organism. "Male" and "female" are the terms used to classify the respective roles humans play in reproduction; the two types of humans are distinguished from each other based on their respective reproductive structures.[2] Males and females are also distinguished based on differing levels of sex hormones contributing to their sexual dimorphism: females have higher estrogen levels, and males have higher testosterone levels.[3] These sex hormones lead to various secondary sex characteristics, such as the development of breasts and broader hips in females and more muscle mass and facial hair in males.

In summary, a person is a biological male or female based on (1) the presence or absence of a Y chromosome, (2) internal reproductive organs, (3) external sexual anatomy, and (4) the endocrine system that produces secondary sex characteristics.

Gender

Historically, "sex" and "gender" have been used interchangeably, but recent shifts in language warrant further clarification as sex and gender are now considered to refer to two different concepts.[4] While "gender" can still refer to one's biological sex, it more commonly references gender expression and identity. The most prevalent definition of gender is "the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of being male or female,"

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[1] Mark A. Yarhouse, Justin Sides, and Cassandra Page, "The Complexities of Multicultural Competence with LGBT+ Populations," in *Cultural Competence in Applied Psychology*, ed. Craig L. Frisby and William T. O'Donohue (New York: Springer, 2018), 578.

[2] These reproductive structures include internal and external structures that contribute to the reproduction capacity.

[3] I am currently describing what is typical. The level of sex hormones can fluctuate throughout one's life, and certain medical conditions can result in depressed levels of sex hormones. This is describing the normal biological functions that differentiate male and female development *in utero* and throughout biological development.

[4] For an example of this shift, see Mari Mikkola, "Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified October 25, 2017, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-gender/.

including the social characteristics (i.e., norms, roles, self-ascriptions) and abilities (i.e., performances, phenomenological features, positions) that cluster around understanding what it means to be male or female.[5]

This understanding of gender has three distinct yet related parts. First, "gender expression" is "the set of attitudes and behaviors conveyed by people, significantly influenced by their society's expectations for persons."[6] These expectations often take the form of "gender stereotypes," which represent a society's associations and expectations regarding its male and female members. Gender expression is concerned with classifying how members of each gender demonstrate their gender. Second, "gender identity" describes the psychological aspects associated with being male or female. Gender identity is a disputed category with respect to its importance to being human and relevance to understanding oneself.[7] I mention the term here not to emphasize it as a category that is deserving of ontological priority but to point out that it is a common term in the literature on gender and to recognize that how one views one's relationship to one's gender is significant.[8]

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[5] Mark Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 16-17. This definition by Yarhouse is consistent with descriptions provided by other scholars, such as Sally Anne Haslanger in *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 42-43.

[6] Gregg R. Allison, *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2021), 40.

[7] There is a movement of people who term themselves "gender critical feminists" who argue that being a woman is not an "identity"; instead, having a female body is what makes one a woman. See Janice Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1979); Sheila Jeffreys, *Gender Hurts: A Feminist Analysis of Politics of Transgenderism* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

[8] Gender identity serves as the crux of the discussion of transgenderism. Sprinkle notes that the critical question regarding the transgender conversation is this: "If someone experiences incongruence between their biological sex and their internal sense of self (gender identity), which one determines who they are—and why?" Preston Sprinkle, *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2021), 48.

Third, "gender roles" describe the social and cultural aspects of being male or female, often referred to as masculinity or femininity.[9] Gender roles interact with societal expectations for how males and females are to act in a given culture. These roles are formed when the majority of members of a particular group act a certain way, forming an impression that everyone in this group should act that way. Gender roles, in a cultural sense, are largely based on gender stereotypes. The main question associated with discussion on gender roles is whether they are a product of biology, culture, or a combination of the two.[10] Regardless of where one lands on the nature versus nurture debate regarding gender, both sides agree that gender roles are based on generalities and not absolutes—that is, the behaviors of roles are not determiners of whether one belongs to a particular group.

In sum, a distinction between sex and gender has emerged wherein sex primarily refers to biological features and gender primarily refers to social features.

The Relationship between Sex and Gender

Two main approaches can summarize the relationship between sex and gender. The "traditional coextensive" view holds that gender is linked to biological sex, making gender biologically caused rather than socially caused. In this view, there is no substantial distinction between sex and gender. While space may be made to consider

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[9] The idea of gender role was first introduced by psychologist John Money, who said, "Gender role . . . is defined as everything that one says and does to indicate that one is either male or female, or androgyn." John Money, *Sin, Science and the Sex Police: Essays on Sexology & Sexosophy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998), 347.

[10] Gender roles will be discussed in more detail later in this project. For an example of a proponent of gender roles related to nurturing, see Margaret Hartmann, "The History of Pink for Girls, Blue for Boys," Jezebel, April 10, 2011, https://jezebel.com/the-history-of-pink-for-girls-blue-for-boys-5790638. For an example of a proponent of gender roles that seem to be cross-cultural and therefore connected to nature, see J. H. Block, "Conceptions of Sex Roles: Some Cross-Cultural and Longitudinal Perspectives," *American Psychologist* 28, no. 6 (June 1973): 512-26.

gender as different from sex since gender is metaphysically grounded in biological sex, the two cannot truly be separated.[11]

The "revisionary disjunctive" view is the result of a twentieth-century move to separate sex from gender.[12] This view holds that gender is socially grounded and that societal norms determine and define gender. While this view exists on a spectrum, extreme forms hold that men and women are not defined by their biology at all but entirely by their social location.[13] Lesser forms of this position retain sex as a legitimate category yet still maintain that gender is unhinged from biology and tethered to social features.

The distinctions between these two positions can become blurred as they represent a distillation of nuanced views of their common feature. The fundamental difference between them is that the traditional coextensive view holds that gender is biologically grounded, while the revisionary disjunctive view holds that gender is socially grounded. Regardless of which view one holds, gender refers primarily to social characteristics. But the question remains: What grounds these social characteristics?

I have chosen to focus this project on the study of gender, specifically the concept of gender or how people understand and speak about gender. Abigail Favale writes, "When we talk about people, we are always talking about bodies and souls . . . . Our consideration of womanhood must include bodily sex but must also extend beyond it to consider the whole person. That's the lively tension we need to inhabit: to remain rooted in the body but not reduced to the body."[14] This statement captures my decision to

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[11] Jordan L. Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue: A Defense of Gender Essentialism," *Southeastern Theology Review* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 17.

[12] Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Fall of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 184.

[13] Mari Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice: Dehumanization and Its Role in Feminist Philosophy*, Studies in Feminist Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 21-22.

[14] Favale, *The Genesis of Gender*, 121.

focus on gender. While I affirm the traditional coextensive view that gender is metaphysically grounded in biological sex, I also affirm the need to discuss more than the biological differences between men and women. While biological differences will not be absent from the conception of gender that I will set forth in this project, I aim to give a holistic view of what it means to be an embodied male or female made in the image of God.

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Scripture's Teaching on Sex and Gender

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To understand what it means to be both male and female, created in the image of God, Scripture must serve as the starting point for evaluating and developing conceptions of gender. This biblical theology will consist of three parts. First, I will present and defend seven summary statements about the biblical teaching regarding biological sex. Second, I will present and defend four summary statements about the Bible's teaching on gender. Throughout this section, I will interact with interpretations that counter the conclusions drawn and explain why those interpretations are to be rejected. Third, I will synthesize Scripture's teaching on gender in order to construct a biblically faithful framework for evaluating existing conceptions of gender.

Scripture and Biological Sex

In what follows, I offer articulate and defend seven summary statements about the Bible's teaching on biological sex.

(1) *Scripture affirms that both male and female sexes are created in the image of God.* Genesis 1:26-27 reads, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . .' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." A proper view of the image of God includes Scripture's affirms that this fundamental reality extends to both male and female types of humanity.

(2) *The Genesis creation account affirms that human sex exists as a male and female binarity*. Genesis 2:7 describes the creation of man: "Then the Lord God formed the man out of the dust from the ground and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being." Similarly, Genesis 2:21-22 describes the creation of woman: "So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to come over the man, and he slept. God took one of his ribs and closed the flesh at that place. Then the Lord God made the rib he had taken from the man into a woman and brought her to the man." According to divine intention (Gen 1:26-27), God fashioned an image bearer according to the male type of humanity and an image bearer according to the female type of humanity, placing the two together in the garden, where they both engaged in the cultural mandate involving procreation and vocation for the cultivation of human flourishing (Gen 1:28).

God's creation of humanity as a binary was not unique but followed the pattern of binary creation narrated in Genesis 1-2. Gregg Allison provides examples of these binaries: "nothing and something, creator and creature, heaven and earth, light and darkness, dry land and water, sun and moon, good and evil, etc."[15] Yet scholars such as Megan DeFranza and Linda Tatro Herzer reject the understanding that human sex/gender was created as a binary.[16]

DeFranza argues that the binaries listed in the creation account do not represent only two exclusive options but the two endpoints of a spectrum that contains intermediate created realities that the biblical text does not explicitly state. Appealing to the creation of day and night, DeFranza argues that the intermediary realities of dawn and dusk prove that there are intermediaries between the other poles listed in the creation

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[15] Allison, *Embodied*, 43.

[16] Megan K. DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female, and Intersex in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015); Linda Tatro Herzer, *The Bible and the Transgender Experience: How Scripture Supports Gender Variance* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2016).

narrative.[17] Yet, her argument is incongruent with the way that "male and female" is used throughout Scripture. The phrase "male and female" only appears a few times in the Old Testament: in Genesis 1:27; 5:2 in relation to the creation of humans as male and female and in Genesis 6:19; 7:3, 9, 16 in relation to the animals going into the ark two by two. Given that every time "male and female" is used, it represents a fixed pair, the Old Testament affirms a male-female sex binary with no spectrum of potential variations. In the New Testament, Jesus affirms this binary in the creation of humanity as "male and female" (Matt 19:4), and Paul presents "male and female" as one of the pairs of distinctions that do not obscure access to the gospel (Gal 3:28). While Genesis 1 and 2 do not contain all of the varieties of created things, whenever Scripture mentions sexed categories of humanity, it only names male and female.[18]

Herzer takes a different approach, applying a non-binary argument to various biblical characters who do not seem to fit masculine and feminine stereotypes.[19] While Herzer may be right in pointing out that biblical characters did not always fit the gender stereotypes of their day, her view that the Bible supports a spectrum of gender requires that the expression "male and female" (Gen 1:27) refer to gender identity or gender role. However, in the context of Genesis 1, male and female are categories of biological sex, not gender identity or role; Genesis 1:27 does not highlight the social or psychological aspects of being male or female but refers to biological sex. Moreover, the command in Genesis 1:28 to be fruitful and multiply only makes sense if male and female in verse 27 refer to sex, not gender identity. Additionally, the Hebrew words used in Genesis 1:27 for male (*zakar*) and female (*neqebah*) are the same words used in Genesis 6:19; 7:9 to

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[17] DeFranza, *Sex Differences in Christian Theology*, 177.

[18] For examples of variety not mentioned in Gen 1, see rivers and marshes (Exod 7:19; Ezek 47:11), dusk and dawn (Gen 15:17; Deut 16:6), and frogs and other amphibians (Exod 8:2; Lev 11:30).

[19] For an example of what Herzer does with Jacob, see Herzer, *The Bible and the Transgender Experience*, 84.

describe the reproductive roles of the male and female animals brought onto the ark.[20] For this reason, Herzer's argument that Scripture is congruent with a non-binary view of sex or gender should be rejected. It is the clear and consistent teaching of Scripture that human beings are either male or female.

(3) *Scripture teaches that the human body is essential to humanity's image-bearing status*. The Hebrew word for "image" used in Genesis 1:27 is *tselem*, which exclusively refers to idols throughout the Old Testament. This association defines the term as a physical statue or copy of a non-physical being.[21] The creation account in Genesis 1 understands humanity as the physical copy of the non-physical Yahweh. Marc Cortez suggests that Genesis 1's mention of the image of God is "a declaration that God intended to create human persons to be physical means through which he would manifest his own divine presence in the world."[22] Further, as Richard Middleton concludes, the divine decree to create humanity in God's image should convey "visibility and bodiliness" as central to understanding what it means for humankind's being made in the image of God.[23] While to be human is to be more than a body (as Scripture teaches that humanity is comprised of both a material and an immaterial component), the term "image" highlights human physicality. This means the most fundamental statement about human nature is that human beings are bearers of God's image, a reality that emphasizes their embodied nature. Furthermore, as Genesis 1:27 makes explicit, sexed embodied human beings bear God's image as males and females.

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[20] Sprinkle critiques Herzer on similar grounds; see Sprinkle, *Embodied*, 98.

[21] Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum make a similar point regarding the relation of image to idols. See Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 200.

[22] Marc Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology: A Constructive Account of Humanity in the Light of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018), 109.

[23] J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The* Imago Dei *in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 25.

(4) *Scripture maintains the distinctions between the male and female sexes and prohibits cross-sex behavior*. This distinction is not a dominant emphasis of Scripture, but the pattern is consistent: whenever cross-sex self-presentation is mentioned in Scripture, it is always prohibited. Deuteronomy 22:5 prohibits cross-dressing: "A woman shall not wear a man's garment, nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God." This passage is not without interpretive challenges, but the principle that men and women should not seek to obscure their sex seems to have lasting relevance for followers of Jesus.

There are two main challenges to this passage. The first is whether the prohibition is still applicable today. The passage's context does not provide definitive answers. Still, the use of the generic terms *geber* ("man") and *ishah* ("woman") seems to rule out that this is a specific prohibition against cultic practices.[24] Additionally, while the New Testament does not explicitly cite or affirm this command, it does evidence a similar concern about clothing and male/female differences (1 Cor 11:2-16). Moreover, Paul prohibits same-sex relations in light of concerns about gender confusion (Rom 1:26-27; 1 Cor 6:9).

The second objection to this prohibition has to do with the translation of *keli gerber* as "man's garments" (ESV) or "men's clothing" (NIV). Herzer argues that since *gerber* often means "warrior" and that *keli* never means "clothing" in the Old Testament, the command prohibits women from dressing up in warrior's armor and has little to do with cross-dressing.[25] However, this objection does not withstand scrutiny. While the adjective *gibbor* often means *warrior*, Deuteronomy 22:5 uses the noun *geber*, which overlaps with the usual word for "man" (*zakar*).[26] Additionally, while *keli* does not

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[24] This is the reason presented by Herzer for why Deut 22:5 no longer applies; see Herzer, *The Bible and the Transgender Experience*, 37.

[25] Herzer, *The Bible, and Transgender Experience*, 34-37.

[26] See, e.g., Exod 10:7, 11; 12:37.

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typically refer to clothing, it does refer more generally to various things associated with men, such as certain ornaments, weapons, gear, and clothing.[27] So, while "the things of men" might be a more accurate translation of *keli geber*, the parallel statement in Deuteronomy 22:5—"nor a man wear women's clothing" (NIV)—specifies an article of clothing, suggesting that *keli geber* has clothing in mind. The point made in this passage goes much deeper than clothing; it is concerned with the fundamental differences between men and women—and clothing is an external expression of those differences. As P. J. Harland concludes, "The prohibition of wearing of clothes of members of the opposite sex was . . . to safeguard the division between male and female."[28] This prohibition is rooted in God's concern for diversity and order reflected within the creation account in Genesis 1-2.[29]

The New Testament also prohibits cross-sex behavior. In 1 Corinthians 6:9, the term *malak*, translated as "soft" or "effeminate," is included in a list of those who will not inherit the kingdom. Most scholars recognize *malak* as describing men who act like or identify as women, the most common way being engaging in same-sex sexual activity.[30] A similar prohibition is found in Romans 1:26-27 regarding same-sex sexual relationships; Paul grounds this prohibition in God's creational intent for males and females. Scripture's sexual differentiation between males and females (Gen 1:27) provides one reason same-sex relationships are wrong: they transgress sex distinctions.[31] These passages are more than just prohibitions of same-sex sexual activity, for they

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[27] See, e.g., Gen 24:53; Num 19:18; 1 Sam 21:5; 1 Kgs 10:21.

[28] P. J. Harland, "Menswear and Womenswear: A Study of Deuteronomy 22:5," *Expository Times* 110, no. 3 (1998): 76.

[29] For a similar argument, see Sprinkle, *Embodied*, 70n15.

[30] Sprinkle, *Embodied*, 71.

[31] Kyle Harper points out that Paul is unique among ancient writers by prohibiting same-sex relationships based on male-female differences instead of power dynamics. See Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity* (2013; repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 95-99.

reaffirm that in no way does Scripture allow for the intentional disguising or obscuring of sex distinctions to act like the opposite sex. Even in the difficult passage like 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, Paul—at a minimum—maintains the sexual differentiation between men and women and appeals to creation to do so.[32]

(5) *The teaching of Jesus affirms the goodness of created sexed embodiment*. During his debate with the Pharisees in Matthew 19:3-12, Jesus cites Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 to reiterate the creation account's perspective on sexed embodiment. Jesus says, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female [Gen. 1:27], and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh [Gen. 2:24]'?" (Matt 19:4-5). This teaching by Jesus reaffirms that the creation of humanity as male and female is still normative several thousand years later. As W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison conclude, Jesus operates with the conviction that "the created order," as revealed in Genesis 1-2, is a guide to "the moral order."[33] This affirmation by Jesus is important as it defends against those who would separate the New Testament from the Old Testament or would attempt to set Jesus's teaching at odds with the law. As is true with Jesus's entire work, he did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Matt 5:17). This fulfillment is also true with his teaching on sexed embodiment: Jesus affirmed that humanity is created in the image of God as either male or female.

Furthermore, by becoming incarnate, the eternal Son affirmed the goodness of sexed embodiment. Cortez observes, "To be an image bearer, Jesus must be an embodied

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[32] For an extensive study of this passage that deals with the different interpretations, see Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "Gender and Creation in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16: A Study in Paul's Theological Method," in *Evangelium, Schriftauslegung, Kirche: Festschrift für Peter Stuhlmacher zum 65. Geburstag*, ed. Jostein Ådna, Scott J. Hafemann, and Otfried Hofius (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1997), 151-71.

[33] W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988-1997), 3:10.

being."[34] Scripture presents that Jesus is the very "image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15; cf. 2 Cor 4:4) and "the exact representation" of God's nature (Heb 1:3) as well as that all believers are being "transformed" into Christ's image (2 Cor 3:8). Scripture teaches that humanity is created in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27), yet it describes Jesus as the most complete image of God. Connected to Jesus's representation of God is the fact that God's deity dwells bodily in Jesus (Col 2:9); therefore, if Jesus did not have a body, he would not have borne God's image. Yet Jesus did not merely have a body; he had a particular sexed body—a male body. Moreover, Jesus's male embodiment does not indicate the priority of the male sex over the female sex but reveals that to be fully human is to be created with either a male or female body.[35] In taking on a male body, Jesus affirmed the goodness of sexed embodiment as taught consistently throughout Scripture.

(6) *The teaching of Paul affirms that a body is central to personhood*. In 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, Paul refers to the body using the Greek word *soma* eight times and emphasizes that it is both good and essential to personhood. It is likely that in the context of the Corinthian church, some believers held to a hard dualism—a view that considers the body and soul as ontologically distinct aspects and usually prioritizes the soul over the body—concluding that the body is not morally significant. Paul emphatically rejects this position: "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies" (1 Cor 6:19-20). This passage is paradigmatic for Paul as he identifies the person with the body.[36]

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[34] Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology*, 197.

[35] For an extended discussion of how Jesus's masculinity relates to maleness and femaleness, see Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology*, 190-211. Aspects of Cortez's arguments will be included in my discussion of gender essentialism.

[36] Paul is consistent in identifying the person with the body and does so in places such as Rom 6:12-14 ("Do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies . . . for sin will have no dominion over you") and Rom 12:1 ("offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God"). See also Rom 8:11; 2 Cor 4:10-12; Eph 5:28-29.

Paul argues against sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians 6:12, using this anthropological principle to support his argument. Since it is impossible to separate a person from one's embodiment, the sexed body should avoid sexual union with any other sexed body that is not that of one's spouse. If one does sin in a sexually embodied way, then Paul concludes that he has "sinned against his own body" (1 Cor 6:18). From this teaching, two conclusions can be drawn about sexed embodiment. First, to be a person is to *be* a body, not just a soul that has a body.[37] Second, what one does with one's body is morally significant. As people live inseparable from their sexed embodiment, what they do with their sexed bodies matters. To sin with the body is to sin as a person.

(7) *Scripture teaches that the sexual differentiation between men and women will likely remain after the resurrection*. The reason for qualifying this statement with "likely" is that there is a great deal of ambiguity in Scripture about what resurrected bodies will be like. Therefore, there is more uncertainty than certainty. Even with this uncertainty, it is still important to address the condition of resurrected bodies because the resurrection is fundamental to Christian ethics.[38] Humanity's future reality provides the moral basis for ethical imperatives shaping the present. Paul uses this principle in 1 Corinthians 6:14-15: "And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!" The moral emphasis on believers' abstaining from sexual immorality is grounded in their union with the resurrected Christ. Scripture teaches the resurrection of Christ, the resurrection of all humankind in Christ, and the renewal of all creation.

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[37] For a more in-depth conversation on the relationship between personhood and the body, see Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 70.

[38] For an extended discussion of the relationship between the resurrection of Christ and Christian ethics, see Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

The conclusion that sexed embodiment will likely be part of humanity's resurrected bodies is based on the reality of current sexed embodiment: sexed human embodiment was a part of God's pre-fall creation (Gen 1:26-27; 2:18-24), and it is a central part of what it means to be a person created in the image of God. Since Scripture nowhere says that sex differences will be done away with in the resurrection, it seems most fitting to conclude that sex differences *will* be part of resurrected bodies.

Christ's and Paul's teaching on resurrected bodies support this conclusion. First, the Son took on a male body in the incarnation, which showed sexed embodiment to be a significant part of personhood and to likely persist in the resurrection. In his resurrection, Jesus maintained his particularities, including the presence of the wounds from the cross (John 20:27) and his secondary sex features (i.e., he was identified as a man because he looked like a man; Luke 24:13-35); hence, it is reasonable to conclude that the entirety of his sexed embodiment remained after his resurrection. Furthermore, Jesus is the model of all human resurrection. As John writes, "When Christ appears, we will be like him" (1 John 3:2). Similarly, Paul writes, "He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies" (Rom 8:11). Just as human "mortal bodies" currently are male and female, Paul's continuity between raised bodies and mortal bodies suggests that raised bodies will also be male and female.

Second, in Paul's most detailed description of resurrected bodies (1 Cor 15:35-58), he frequently references Genesis 1-3 and affirms the goodness of human bodies. In this passage, Paul does contrast earthly human bodies and heavenly bodies. Still, the differences between the two types of bodies are not described in terms of sex but in terms of corruptible earthly bodies and incorruptible resurrected bodies. Again, the understanding that sexed embodiment is significant to human personhood suggests that sexed differentiation will be part of the resurrected state.

These seven statements summarize Scripture's teaching on biological sex:

1. Scripture affirms that both male and female sexes are created in the image of God.

2. The Genesis creation account affirms that human sex exists as a male and female binarity.

3. Scripture teaches that the human body is essential to humanity's image-bearing status.

4. Scripture maintains the distinctions between the male and female sexes and prohibits cross-sex behavior.

5. The teaching of Jesus affirms the goodness of created sexed embodiment.

6. The teaching of Paul affirms that a body is central to personhood.

7. Scripture teaches that the sexual differentiation between men and women will likely remain after the resurrection.

With these seven summary statements, I can conclude that humanity's sexed embodiment is essential in determining human personhood. The binary sexed differentiation of humankind as created either female or male is part of the goodness of God's creation as both sexed image bearers reflect God's likeness. Since binarity is part of the goodness of God's creation, human beings should never try to obscure or subvert their sexed embodiment but should receive this particularity with joy. Scripture also affirms the goodness of sexed embodiment in that God the Son took on a sexed body in the incarnation, being born as a man.

Scripture and Gender

Before I summarize and defend Scripture's teaching on gender, I must consider whether Scripture even recognizes gender as a category.[39] As stated in the introduction of this chapter, gender as a concept distinct from biological sex is a relatively recent invention. It is unlikely that the biblical authors were aware of the contemporary categories of gender expression and identity. However, Scripture does speak to more than just biological sex; it also discusses the social features of what it means to be male and female. For this reason, I believe that Scripture addresses sex and gender and can inform

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[39] I use "gender" to refer to the "psychological, social, and cultural aspects of being male and female." Affirming the traditional coextensive view, I view gender and biological sex as inextricably linked while allowing for both terms to refer to something different about human personhood. Sex refers to biology, whereas gender refers to the expression of biological sex.

discussions about both. Scripture does not employ the distinct and precisely defined definitions or terminology used in the current discussion. Still, theology as faith seeking understanding provides tools to address the current discussion on gender. In what follows, therefore, I articulate and defend four summary statements about Scripture's teaching on gender.

(1) *Gender is an important aspect of human embodiment, as everything one does is done as a gendered being*. In Scripture, gender is an embodied reality; therefore, sex and gender are always connected. The maleness and femaleness that describe the two types of humanity in Genesis 1:27 are related to their bodily creation. Adam is formed from the dust of the earth and given a physical form by God, and then the spirit or breath of God provides the animating force to grant life (Gen 2:7).[40] Adam's material and immaterial aspects are both necessary to bring about life and make him human.[41] In the same way, Eve is formed from the physical material of Adam's rib and animated by God's bringing her to life. The distinction here between Adam's maleness and Eve's femaleness is not due to differences in their immaterial aspect provided by God but in their physical created form. As the rest of Scripture unfolds, nowhere is this pattern contradicted, as gender is always a reality connected to sexed embodied distinctions between male and female. Since Scripture never contradicts this reality or states otherwise, I conclude that gender is an aspect of having a body and that the immaterial aspects of humanity, such as a soul, are agendered.[42] This later point is true of God and

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[40] Some take God's breath in Gen 2:7 to be the impartation of a soul. I, however, take this to refer to God's animating Adam's body with life. For a more detailed discussion, see Peter Gentry, "Sexuality: On Being Human and Promoting Social Justice," *Christian Psychology* 8, no. 1 (2014): 49-57. For an extended discussion on God's breath see Peter Paul Gesting III, "Breath of Life: A Biblical Understanding of the Human–Animal Distinction and a Critique of Contemporary Theological Anthropology" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022).

[41] For a brief summary on the different views concerning the relationship between the material (body) and the immaterial (soul), see Sprinkle, *Embodied*, 144-45.

[42] This affirmation raises questions about whether gender will be maintained during the intermediate state. Given the lack of biblical data regarding the intermediate state, I do not believe Scripture speaks clearly to this question. In agreement with Gregg Allison, I affirm that since we are

angels, both of whom are spiritual beings who have no physical body. It is only in the incarnation when God the Son takes on human form and has a human body that the male gender is ascribed to him. Before the incarnation, his identity as the Son is expressed in terms of his relatedness to the Father rather than in terms of gender.

(2) *Biological sex and gender are inextricably related, and in no way does Scripture present gender as disconnected from biology*. Equality between men and women in image-bearing status results in an ontological equality between the genders that does not result in sameness. God created males and females as possessing a uniformity in purpose, constitution, kind, blessing, mandate, and need for relationship yet as also possessing a distinction in formation and type.[43] This substantial created uniformity highlights that there is deep ontological equality between male and female genders from the beginning. Both are made in the image of God (Gen 1:27); therefore, both are given the same responsibility and privilege (Gen 1:28). Regarding their constitution, both men and women have been created from physical materials and have received their life as a gift from God. The creation of Eve from the rib of Adam emphasizes this constitutional sameness, for Eve is undeniably "of the same stuff" and created on the same day of creation as Adam (Gen 1:31). Genesis 1:26-27 also emphasizes that males and females are of the same kind which follows the creation of all of the other plants and animals according to their kind (Gen 1:12, 21, 25) and highlights the uniformity of males and females in the same kind—humanity. Male and female were both blessed by God and given the same mandate to be fruitful, to multiply and fill the earth, to subdue the earth,

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embodied in the present and will be embodied for eternity, we should not let the temporary, abnormal intermediate state have an oversized influence on theological anthropology. Allison, *Embodied*, 32. By "agendered," I mean without gender. Given psychosomatic unity (i.e., the unity of the immaterial and material aspects of humanity), it is conceivable that the soul could be considered gendered because of its connection to a gendered body. Yet, the body is what determines gender, not the soul. I will address the sexed-soul theory in chapter 6.

[43] Gracilynn Joy Hanson, "Establishing a Framework for Female-Gendered Embodiment in a Redemptive Context" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 42-47. In chapter 5, I will interact with the full extent of Gracilynn's argument.

and to have dominion over the rest of creation (Gen 1:28), and both genders are indispensable for fulfilling this divine mandate. Lastly, both males and females were created with a need for relationships: only after the woman's creation did God declare that all that he had made was "very good" (Gen 2:18-25).

While the creation narrative certainly highlights the uniformity of males and females, it also underscores the distinctions between men and women. Adam and Eve were formed distinctly: God first formed Adam from the dust of the ground in one act of creation, then he formed Eve from the rib of Adam in a distinct act of creation. In both cases, creation is of God; Adam did not participate or consent in the creation of woman. Both man and woman were formed of the same elements—physical material and immateriality provided by God—and after the same model—the image of God.[44] Humanity is one kind with two types: male and female. This difference in type emphasizes the fundamental reality that gender is distinct.

(3) *While the move to consider gender as a distinct concept from biological sex is recent, Scripture's discussion of biological sex and the social features of maleness and femaleness allows conclusions about gender to be drawn from Scripture*. Scripture never blurs the distinctions between men and women while revealing that both men and women participate in God's redemptive plan. In Scripture, there are never actions undertaken by humans whose gender is something other than male or female; instead, people act as gendered embodied persons who are always either male or female. Scripture is consistent that human gender exists as a binary, just as biological sex exists as a binary. One is either a male or a female; there is no blending or alternative option available.

This affirmation does not mean that all people depicted in Scripture act in ways corresponding to cultural stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. Modern stereotypes of masculinity and femininity are confronted by the actions of biblical characters,

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[44] Hanson, "Framework for Female-Gendered Embodiment," 43-46.

revealing that these stereotypes come more from culture than from the Bible. For example, Scripture offers a dynamic picture of King David: he severs the head of Goliath (1 Sam 17:42-53), plays the harp with incredible skill (1 Sam 16:14-23), kills a lion with his hands (1 Sam 17:34-36), and writes poetry about nature, beauty, despair, and God. By most Western standards for masculinity, David's life is a mixture of both masculine and feminine actions.

Similarly, women characters do not fully align with Western standards for femininity. Jael kills an enemy general with a tent peg (Judg 4:21), Lydia is the proprietor of a successful textile business (Acts 16:14-15), and the three women named Mary fearlessly stand at the foot of the cross during Jesus's crucifixion while his male disciples scatter (John 19:25). These women do not fit a generic female stereotype. Moreover, biblical characters do not just challenge modern stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, as there are instances in Scripture where their actions challenge the current stereotypes of their day, with Jesus as the clearest example. Within Roman society, any male who cried in public, showed care for women, abstained from sexual intercourse, honored those of the lower class, and cared for those who were marginalized was not considered a masculine man;[45] yet, the life of Christ confronts these stereotypes for masculinity. "He washes feet, touches sick people, shows compassion to sinful women, loves children, and more."[46] Therefore, to rightly understand how Scripture does not blur the distinction between male and female genders, it is crucial to go beyond stereotypes.

The affirmation that Scripture never blurs the distinction between males and females highlights the equality of both genders while maintaining their distinction. According to Scripture, both men and women actively participate in God's redemptive plan. In the protoevangelium (Gen 3:15), God reveals that the serpent's head would be

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[45] Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 137-76.

[46] Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology*, 203.

crushed through the seed of the woman. The genealogy of Christ provides a helpful shorthand to illustrate this point further, as Matthew's Gospel contains both men and women (Matt 1:1-17). This story culminates with the angelic blessing to Mary that it will be through her conception and birth of Jesus that all of God's redemptive promises will be fulfilled (Luke 1:26-33). Then, after Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension, his male and female disciples engage in proclaiming the gospel message and fulfilling the Great Commission.[47] While maintaining their female distinctives, women play an essential role in God's redemptive plan, as do men, who retain their male distinctives.

(4) *Gender, like biological sex, is always connected with the state of being embodied. Even though gender is conceptionally distinct from biological sex, it is never distinct from the body.* Scripture teaches that human properties and capacities are expressible by males and females. This affirmation views properties as Christian virtues and the fruit of the Spirit and understands capacities as relating to intellectual, volitional, emotional, and moral abilities. In Scripture, both properties and capacities are always expressed by gendered embodied humans; therefore, gender influences the expression of these properties and capacities. However, the properties and capacities themselves are not gendered and, therefore, are expressible by both male and female persons.[48] For example, Jesus addresses both men and women in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7), giving no qualifications for how male image bearers are to employ these ethical teachings differently from female image bearers. Instead, Christ calls both genders to this standard. The same is true of the fruit of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control all result from both male and female believers'

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[47] See Rom 16:1-16 for an example of where Paul commends both male and female followers of Jesus for their gospel work.

[48] This emphasis that properties and capacities are not gendered will be a significant feature of my construction of a conception of gender and will be developed in greater detail.

receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23).[49] There is no gendered list of

properties contained within Scripture. Both men and women are called to display these

Christian virtues and allow the Holy Spirit to produce these traits in their life. This

discussion says nothing about roles for men and women in specific situations such as

within the church or marriage; it is only making the point that these properties are

expressible by both genders.[50]

Again, Scripture nowhere teaches that men or women have different

intellectual, volitional, emotional, or moral capacities; instead, it sees both as having

equal ability to express these human capacities. Jesus's teaching of both women and men

throughout his earthly ministry illustrates that both genders have the common intellectual

capacity necessary to understand his teaching. In the specific example of Martha, Jesus

commends her decision to learn from him as good and in no way qualifies her ability to

grasp his teaching intellectually (Luke 10:38-42). Moreover, Scripture does not imply

that men possess an intellectual ability superior to that of women. On the contrary, it

confronts this mistaken idea by emphasizing that men and women alike enjoy equal

access to salvation in Christ and actively participate in God's redemptive plan.

Scripture contains hardly any gender-specific commands without considering

gender roles, which is a different category than properties and capacities. While in certain

places Scripture addresses only a single gender, that same address usually applies to the

other gender elsewhere. Titus 2:3-5 provides an example of this point: "Older women

likewise are to be reverent in behavior, nor slanders or slaves to much wine. They are to

teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to

be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind and submissive to their own husbands,

that the word of God may not be reviled." Here, Paul gives ten commands to older

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[49] See Acts 1:14, which affirms the presence of women with the apostles. This same group is present in Acts 2:4 when *all* are filled with the Holy Spirit.

[50] Roles will be addressed in chapter 6.

women, but at least eight of them are expected of men as well. Six are listed in Titus 2:2. Hence, both men and women are to be reverent, abstain from slander and much wine, teach what is good, love their spouse and children, be self-controlled and pure, and be kind. While Titus 2:3-5 addresses commands to women, they are not *female-only* commands but *Christian* commands—they represent goldy virtues that all who strive to be Christ-like should emulate. The two instructions that apply specifically to women are submission to one's husband and working at home. First, the exhortation to submit to one's husband is a command for how women are to behave in the specific role of a wife. Since both men and women are called to submit elsewhere in Scripture (Eph 5:22; 1 Pet 3:1), submission is a Christian virtue, not a feminine one. However, Scripture never commands husbands to submit to their wives, so there is a unique place for the Christian virtue of submission to be displayed by wives in the context of marriage. Second, the exhortation to work at home is not a prohibition on women's working outside the house but a call for women to be attentive to their role as wives and mothers. This exhortation is likely a correction of the behavior of the Ephesian widows (referenced in 1 Tim 5:13), who were lazy and ran from house to house.[51] In both cases, these commands regarding submission to one's husband and busyness in the home are directed to women in specific roles, namely those of wife and mother.

When Scripture considers properties and capacities, it deals with them in terms of what is common to humanity and, therefore, equally expressible by both males and females. While there may be specific passages that address one gender, when one considers the entirety of Scripture, it is evident that these commands or examples show that properties and capacities are displayed equally by both men and women—always expressed by men as men and by women as women. For example, when a man shows

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[51] For further discussion, see William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2016), 411.

self-sacrifice, he displays the common property of self-sacrifice in a distinctly masculine way in that he, as a gendered embodied male, is the one acting. In the same way, when a woman listens and understands the teaching of Jesus, she demonstrates her intellectual capacity, which is common to both men and women, in a specifically female way because she is a gendered embodied female exhibiting this capacity.

These four statements summarize Scripture's teaching on gender:

1. Gender is an important aspect of human embodiment, as everything one does is done as a gendered being.

2. Biological sex and gender are inextricably related, and in no way does Scripture present gender as disconnected from biology.

3. While the move to consider gender as a distinct concept from biological sex is recent, Scripture's discussion of biological sex and the social features of maleness and femaleness allows conclusions about gender to be drawn from Scripture.

4. Gender, like biological sex, is always connected with the state of being embodied. Even though gender is conceptionally distinct from biological sex, it is never distinct from the body.

According to Scripture, since both males and females are created in the image of God, they possess ontological equality and are active participants in God's redemptive plan. Extending this ontological equality, Scripture affirms that both male and female persons have equal access to all human properties and capacities while maintaining that this equality does not blur the distinctions between genders.

While modern questions concerning gender might require additional answers from Scripture, these statements summarize Scripture's teaching and provide the foundation for evaluating conceptions of gender.

**Framework for Evaluating
Conceptions of Gender**

Since Scripture is the ultimate authority and norming norm on all matters of faith and practice, all theological conceptions of gender should strive for alignment with Scripture's teaching on gender. The purpose of surveying Scripture's teaching is to

formulate five criteria that all conceptions of gender should include in order to be faithful to Scripture. These criteria will be employed to evaluate existing conceptions of gender and to serve as the guiderails for developing my conception of gender in this project.

The five criteria are as follows:

(1) *All conceptions of gender must be grounded in human embodiment*. Scripture has no category for gender that is disconnected from human embodiment. Human persons are gendered because they are embodied; therefore, all conceptions of gender should insist on being connected to humanity's physical form. If femaleness and maleness are disconnected from the body, then there are no other grounds for gender than stereotypes.[52] Since these stereotypes often exclude individuals (e.g., biological females who do not have stereotypical female interests) who seem deserving of inclusion or may include individuals (e.g., biological males who express stereotypically female interests) who seem like they should be excluded, stereotypes are insufficient to provide the level of nuance needed for defining gender. Only gender connected to human embodiment allows a conception of gender to affirm both the equality and the distinction between maleness and femaleness; therefore, gender connected to human embodiment must be a stated or implied feature of any gender concept.

(2) *All conceptions of gender must recognize the ontological equality between males and females*. Genesis 1:27 affirms that God created both male and female in his image. This fundamental reality of human creation cannot be neglected in any conception of gender. Regardless of one's position on the meaning of the image of God, Genesis 1:27 clearly articulates that the image is something that both men and women possess. Nowhere in the creation narrative does Scripture qualify or limit the ability of one gender or the other to represent God's image. In addition, the creation of the first man and first woman further emphasizes the ontological equality between the genders: each was

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[52] Favale makes a similar point; see Favale, *Genesis of Gender*, 158.

created by God, in his image, from immaterial material, and each was completely passive, playing no role in his or her own creation or the creation of the other. Because of these two creational realities, males and females enjoy ontological equality.

(3) *All conceptions of gender must acknowledge and celebrate the distinctions between males and females*. While male and female are two ontologically similar types, they are not identical but represent two distinct types of humanity. While the biblical narrative lists the creations of birds and animals, it does not highlight the reality that these creatures possess male sex and female sex (Gen 1:20-25). However, Scripture takes great care to show how both men and women are created with perfect equality while also exhibiting complementary distinction (1:26-31; see also 2:20-25). This distinction between male and female is a celebrated good throughout Scripture. It was not good for man to be alone, so God created woman, the celebrated creation, to ensure the created goodness of humankind (Gen 2:18-25).

Additionally, the creation mandate in Genesis 1:28 for humankind to be fruitful and multiply and subdue the earth is only possible if both men and women exist. As Scripture unfolds, both men and women participate in God's redemptive plan, with both genders playing a significant part. Therefore, conceptions of gender that are faithful to Scripture must seek to value and celebrate each gender equally while acknowledging the distinction between the two.

(4) *All conceptions of gender must affirm a male-female gender binary*. While older conceptions of gender may fail to make this point explicit, all conceptions of gender that are biblically faithful must affirm, whether implicitly or explicitly, that Scripture only has two categories for human gender—male and female. While some might challenge this position with the category of intersex, even intersex affirms that there is a binary because even people with intersex conditions have either male, female, or both sex organs. While intersex individuals may be atypical, they do not have any newly created sex organs. When one discusses intersex, it is most accurate to say that some people

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exhibit a combination of the only two biological sexes.[53] The binary of sex grounds the binary of gender given the connection between the two within human persons. While a view that disconnects gender from the body and relies too heavily on gender stereotypes may try to assign male and female characteristics to a single person, when gender is connected to embodiment, it will necessarily hold to a gender binary.

(5) *All conceptions of gender must affirm that human properties and capacities are expressible by both males and females*. When Scripture considers properties and capacities, it deals with them in terms of what is common to humanity and, therefore, equally expressible by both males and females. This affirmation does not prohibit discussing specific properties or capacities more typically associated with one gender. Still, it does deny excluding either gender from any property or stating that either gender has an ontologically superior capacity or inferior capacity in relation to the other. For example, it is not a violation of this affirmation to state that females typically demonstrate a greater ability of the property to nurture. However, it would violate this principle to say that only females nurture, thereby limiting this property from being applied to any male. Females and males will display this property differently, but the difference in how this property is displayed does not result in a fundamentally different property.

Similarly, this statement would reject all views that hold that females, according to their nature, have a diminished rational capacity or that males, according to their nature, have a diminished emotional capacity. This statement also affirms that all virtues and Christian ethical teachings are seen as applicable to both genders as both men and women pursue conformity to the likeness of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. While this affirmation may be presented with different nuances or qualifications, the

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[53] For a more detailed discussion on intersex, see Sprinkle, *Embodied*, 113-26.

fundamental reality that properties and capacities are expressible by both genders must be affirmed.

To summarize, for a conception of gender to be identified as biblical (i.e., faithful to the teachings of Scripture), it must have these five components:

1. Be grounded in human embodiment.

2. Recognize the ontological equality between males and females.

3. Acknowledge and celebrate the distinctions between males and females.

4. Affirm a male-female gender binary.

5. Affirm that human properties and capacities are expressible by both males and females.

These five components will serve as the criteria for critiquing existing conceptions of gender, namely forms of gender essentialism and the social construction of gender. They will then serve as the grounds to develop an alternative conception of gender.

Conclusion

While sex and gender have traditionally been used interchangeably, contemporary usage has distinguished their definitions, using "sex" to refer to the physical, biological, and anatomical dimensions of being male of female (i.e., biological sex) and "gender" to refer to the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of being male and female. While some conceptions of gender detach sex and gender, the view advocated in this project fits in the category of views labeled the "traditional coextensive" view, which holds that gender and biological sex are inextricably linked.

Following the theological method of this project, this chapter summarized Scripture's teaching on biological sex and gender to provide a framework for evaluating contemporary conceptions of gender.

Scripture's teaching on sex is summarized with these seven statements:

1. Scripture affirms that both male and female sexes are created in the image of God.

2. The Genesis creation account affirms that human sex exists as a male and female binarity.

3. Scripture teaches that the human body is essential to humanity's image-bearing status.

4. Scripture maintains the distinctions between the male and female sexes and prohibits cross-sex behavior.

5. The teaching of Jesus affirms the goodness of created sexed embodiment.

6. The teaching of Paul affirms that a body is central to personhood.

7. Scripture teaches that the sexual differentiation between men and women will likely remain after the resurrection.

While Scripture does not use the term "gender" or speak of male and female in the direct way that gender is typically defined, theology as faith seeking understanding provides tools to address the current discussion on gender. Scripture's teaching on gender is summarized with these four statements:

1. Gender is an important aspect of human embodiment, as everything one does is done as a gendered being.

2. Biological sex and gender are inextricably related, and in no way does Scripture present gender as disconnected from biology.

3. While the move to consider gender as a distinct concept from biological sex is recent, Scripture's discussion of biological sex and the social features of maleness and femaleness allows conclusions about gender to be drawn from Scripture.

4. Gender, like biological sex, is always connected with the state of being embodied. Even though gender is conceptionally distinct from biological sex, it is never distinct from the body.

Finally, for any conception of gender to be considered biblical, it must have these five components—derived from Scripture's teaching on gender:

1. Be grounded in human embodiment.

2. Recognize the ontological equality between males and females.

3. Acknowledge and celebrate the distinctions between males and females.

4. Affirm a male-female gender binary.

5. Affirm that human properties and capacities are expressible by both males and females.

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Having established this framework for a biblical conception of gender, I proceed to evaluate contemporary conceptions of gender essentialism (chap. 3) and the social construction of gender (chap. 4).

CHAPTER 3

EVALUATING GENDER ESSENTIALISM

Genesis 1:27 affirms that both men and women are created in the image of God and, by extension, that gender is part of God's good creation. Broadly, evangelicals continue to affirm the dual reality that men and women are distinct and that this distinction is a part of God's good creation.[1] However, there is a divergence of opinions about what accounts for the distinctions between men and women, and gender essentialism attempts [or has attempted to] to identify and categorize these distinctions. This chapter will compare contemporary expressions of evangelical gender essentialism to the framework developed in chapter 2, ultimately finding gender essentialism wanting, for it does not provide a conception of gender that is consistent with the whole of Scripture's teaching on gender.

This chapter will proceed with the following approach. First, I will provide a brief history of the philosophical view of essentialism and its application to gender. Then, I will survey and evaluate different forms of gender essentialism—maximal, sortal, causal, and agnostic essentialism. Finally, given that gender essentialism is often connected to gender roles, I will discuss the difference between gender and roles, demonstrating why gender roles do not need to be dependent upon the distinction between men and women.

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[1] For clarity on defining "evangelicalism," see B. Hindmarsh, "Evangelicalism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Daniel J. Trier and Walter A. Elwell, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 291-92.

Historical Development of Gender Essentialism

Gender essentialism is the application of the philosophical concept of essentialism to gender. I will now trace the historical development of gender essentialism by identifying what essentialism is and how it has been applied to gender.

What Is Essentialism?

Essentialism is the view that objects have sets of attributes or characteristics that are necessary to their identity.[2] Essentialism holds that all things have two categories of attributes: (1) *essential* attributes, which are those attributes that an object could not be without and still maintain its identity (i.e., attributes necessary to an object's identity), and (2) *accidental* attributes, which are those attributes that an object could be without and still maintain its identity (i.e., attributes contingent to an object's identity).[3]

Essentialism as a distinct philosophical tradition emerged with the writings of Aristotle (384-322 BC). Aristotelian essentialism builds from two of Aristotle's other philosophical contributions: hylomorphism and metaphysics. First, hylomorphism is the view that all physical beings are composed of matter and immaterial form. Matter is that out of which something is made, and form represents the shape of the physical being. For example, in the creation of a bronze statue, the bronze metal is the matter that loses the form of a lump or ingot of bronze and takes on the form of a sculpture.[4] Second, metaphysics is the study of the fundamental nature of reality and seeks to determine the first principles of being, identity, causality, necessity, and possibility.[5] The combination

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[2] Richard L. Cartwright, "Some Remarks on Essentialism," *Journal of Philosophy* 65, no. 20 (October 1968): 615-26.

[3] For an extended discussion on defining essential attributes, see Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 175-80.

[4] Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2018), 194-95.

[5] S. Marc Cohen and C. D. C. Reeve, "Aristotle's Metaphysics," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2021 ed.), last modified November 21, 2020, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/aristotle-metaphysics/.

of these two concepts motivates the question behind essentialism: What is the fundamental matter that things in a category must have in common and without which they cannot be members of that category? In other words, What is a thing in its essence? For example, when seeking to answer the question What is man? Aristotle defines man as a *rational animal*, for he considers rationality to be the essential attribute that distinguishes man from other animals.[6] Diana Fuss clarifies that essentialism is a commitment to "a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the 'whatness' of a given entity."[7]

Essentialism and Gender

Gender essentialism is concerned with determining what fixed or innate qualities are intrinsic to being male or female. As long as there has been a desire to classify maleness and femaleness, people have applied essentialism to gender, seeking to describe or define what properties are essential attributes for males and females, respectively. Once these properties are articulated, they then ground the "ought" for how men and women behave and fit within society; therefore, the attributes identified are of significant consequence. While necessarily simplistic, the following sketch will be divided into pre-Enlightenment views, post-Enlightenment views, and views within the church, a bridge to evangelicalism, and evangelicalism in the present.

Pre-Enlightenment

When one surveys Western culture's understanding of what characteristics have been selected as essential for defining men and women, it becomes evident that theories of human reproduction exerted significant influence, with no idea's being more influential than that of the Greek physician Galen (AD 129-216). Galen taught that men

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[6] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2019), 75.

[7] Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 2013), xi.

and women had the same sexual anatomy, with females' having the same sex organs as men, only contained within their bodies.[8] Galen connected this view to humoral theory, a system of medicine detailing the supposed chemical systems that regulate the workings of the human body and behavior.[9] This theory led Galen to conclude that male sex organs were external because they possessed hotter humors by nature and that female sex organs were internal because they possessed cooler humors by nature.

Based upon this understanding of sexual anatomy and human reproduction, historian Thomas Laqueur traces a view he terms a one-sex theory as the default approach to understanding men and women throughout this period.[10] This one-sex theory describes the belief that since men and women had the same sexual organs, just positioned differently, men and women were seen to be two distinct forms of the same essential sex. Men were viewed as the superior form of humanity, given that their sex organs were external due to their greater heat. Women were viewed as the inferior form of humanity, given that their sex organs were internal due to their greater coolness. In many ways, this conclusion resulted in a lack of discussion on the differences between men and women—since they were merely seen as representing different ends of the spectrum of the one human sex and thusly placed in competition with one another. Laqueur holds that a one-sex theory remained the dominant theory until the eighteenth century and the introduction of a two-sex theory of humanity, which viewed men and women as distinct sexes.[11]

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[8] Adrian Thatcher, *God, Sex, and Gender: An Introduction* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 8.

[9] Faith Lagay, "The Legacy of Humoral Medicine," *AMA Journal of Ethics* 4, no. 7 (July 2002): 206-8.

[10] Thomas J. Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 3. As an example of the endurance of this view, Renaissance anatomist and physician Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564) represented women's sex organs as versions of men's in all three of his influential works on human anatomy (Laqueur, 81).

[11] Not all historians agree with Laqueur's timeframe. For example, Michael Stolberg saw the emergence of a two-sex theory in the sixteenth century. See Michael Stolberg, "A Woman Down to Her

Just as incorrect theories of anatomy and reproduction affected the view of men and women before the Enlightenment, the movement towards a more accurate understanding of anatomy is central to shifting views of gender during the post-Enlightenment period. While these advances came slowly over time, the result was a scientific view that men and women represented two distinct sexes. Yet, even as these scientific advances were made, the idea that women were inferior to men, especially intellectually, persisted.[12] The essentialism of this period can be best understood in terms of biological essentialism, where the differences in the biology of males and females are the grounds for emphasizing the significant distinction between the genders. While specific traits are not regularly listed, the logic of this position is that since men and women are biologically different, there is justification to extend the standard practice of male superiority.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) represents the understanding of this age in his writing on men and women within society. While Rousseau is most known for his essays on human individuality and the elevation of reason, he also held that humanity was "radically sexed."[13] In *Emile, or On Education*, Rousseau makes a clear distinction between men and women in terms of their sexual differences and advocates that women are to be trained for different roles than men.[14] He believed that women should be trained

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Bones: The Anatomy of Sexual Differences in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries," *Isis* 94, no. 2 (June 2003): 274-99. For other critiques of Laqueur's position, see Helen King, *The One-Sex Body on Trial: The Classical and Early Modern Evidence* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Joan Cadden, *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[12] As mentioned in chapter 1, this view is traced back to Aristotle and was reinvigorated through the writing of Thomas Aquinas.

[13] Rousseau's most influential political works were *A Discourse on Inequality* (1754) and *The Social Contract* (1762). His views on gender are most prevalent in his *Emile, or On Education* (1762). Penny Weiss refers to Rousseau's view of society as "radically sexed"; see Penny A. Weiss, "Rousseau, Antifeminism, and Women's Nature," *Political Theory* 15, no. 1 (February 1987): 81-89.

[14] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 362-66.

for the demands of family life, focusing on the private rather than public aspects of society, which went hand in hand with his idea of a natural hierarchy's existing in the family based on sexual differences between men and women. For Rousseau, these different roles between men and women exist not because of the rational inferiority of women—as Aristotle taught—but because these roles are the proper way the biological differences between men and women should be worked out in society.[15] In Rousseau's framework, the role differences between men and women resulted from their being trained for different tasks throughout their lives based upon their biological differences.

While every writer on the topic of gender has slight variations, most theories in this era fit the category of biological essentialism—the view that the differences between male and female roles are grounded in their biological differences. This position was the dominant essentialist view and the one challenged by feminist writers beginning with Mary Wollstonecraft in her work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subject* (1792).[16] Gender essentialism and discussion of roles are not synonymous, but given that writers frequently do not articulate the metaphysical grounding for their imperatives, the imperatives—or roles—provide insight into their essentialist commitments.

In the Church

Within the early church, a tension existed between the classical Greek concepts of gender, which held women as inherently inferior to men, and the teaching of Scripture, which called for an end to the hostility between genders as they have been made one in Christ (Gal 3:28). Two primary responses to this tension emerged to deal with this

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[15] Weiss, "Rousseau, Antifeminism, and Women's Nature," 87-88.

[16] Wollstonecraft is recognized as the earliest feminist in Western history. Most of early feminist critiques were against the social treatment of women in society. The critique of biological essentialism becomes more prominent in the feminist writings of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

tension. The first response was asceticism, the practice of fully departing from society to embrace the teachings of Scripture. This locational asceticism was often combined with sexual asceticism, where one abstained from sexual relations. In abstaining from sexual relationships, ascetic Christians adopted the "oneness" between men and women found in Christ, as both men and women prioritized Christian discipleship over their reproductive roles.[17]

The second response embraced within the early church was to counsel conformity to the Greco-Roman household codes, which resulted in an ambivalence towards the tension that existed between Greco-Roman conceptions of gender and Scripture. This ambivalence perpetuated the spread of considering men and women as opposites.[18] While there were protests and resistance to this position at certain times, sex polarity remained the dominant view. As Prudence Allen summarizes, during this period, "the differentiation of the sexes, with the superiority of man over woman, was viewed as divinely ordained. It argued that God created women as different from and unequal to men."[19] Augustine was influential in providing the sex polarity of the Greco-Roman philosophers with a religious justification as he argued that women were inferior to men because they represented the temporal orientation of being a helpmate to man for the temporal activity of generation. Therefore, a woman was not properly thought of as innately bearing the image of God but as doing so only when she is joined to a man in his spiritual orientation.[20]

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[17] Linda M. Maloney, "The Argument for Women's Difference in Classical Philosophy and Early Christianity," in *The Special Nature of Women?*, ed. Anne Carr and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (London: SCM Press, 1991), 46-48.

[18] See Prudence Allen's notion of sex polarity in *The Concept of Woman*, vol. 1, *The Aristotelian Revolution, 750 B.C.-A.D. 1250* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 3.

[19] Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, 1:247.

[20] Augustine, *The Trinity*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, vol. 5 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, pt. 1, *Books*, 2nd ed. (Brooklyn: New City Press, 2015), 193-94.

Scholastic theology perpetuated this conception of gender, viewing women as distinct and opposite from men and bearing a lesser level of the image of God. Thomas Aquinas viewed men and women as ontologically unequal. Influenced heavily by Aristotle, he viewed women as defective males who, *in utero*, possessed some condition deemed unsatisfactory for their full development into males. However, while this distinction was made between men and women regarding their physicality and intellectual abilities, women were considered equal to men in the realm of salvation by the grace of Christ.[21] Here within the church, the same issues that plagued the philosophical tradition were present, as incorrect theories of sexual reproduction led to biological essentialism and the correlation of male superiority and female inferiority. Given the prominence of Thomas Aquinas and the University of Paris, this gender conception gained wide acceptance within the academy, continuing the spread of sex polarity and biological essentialism throughout Europe.[22]

This view was primarily left unchanged throughout the Reformation as the magisterial reformers did not devote much space in their writings to anthropology and gender. While the Greek philosophical tradition influenced their views, it was only because these ideas had become so prevalent within the culture and not because they directly interacted with the Greek philosophical tradition as Aquinas did. Most of the discussion concerning men and women in this period was found in the context of defining the image of God. For example, John Calvin viewed that when it comes to internal spiritual affairs, women fully and equally represent the image of God and are required to reflect the same level of holiness as men. However, when it comes to external affairs, women do not reflect the glory of God to the same degree as men since they were created

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[21] Ruth Edwards, *The Case for Women's Ministry*, Biblical Foundations in Theology (London: SPCK, 1989), 89-90.

[22] For a summary of the adoption of Aristotle into the curriculum of the University of Paris, see Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, 1:417-40.

as helpers and are subject to their husbands.[23] Calvin combined some of the elements found in Augustine—mainly, that women equally image God in spiritual terms—with the hierarchical understanding of gender roles, resulting in two separate abilities for displaying God's image. While this distinction is in some ways biological essentialism, it classifies men and women more so on the features of their creation as revealed in Genesis 2:7, 21-22.

Bridge to Evangelicalism

The move towards modernity brought about two societal trends that explain the rise of feminism in the early part of the nineteenth century and set the context for evangelicalism's reaction to second-wave feminism in the late twentieth century. First, modernity ushered in the scientific revolution (1453-1687), which is identified with the spread of rational-scientific methods of observation, the accumulation of capital, the development of technological expertise, and its application to social and economic organization. This period is also associated with the greater social control of women. Many traditional spheres of independence for women were marginalized as civil society and the factory industry provoked a split between public and private realms. The industrial complex replaced the domestic economy, and the institutionalization of medicine replaced the accumulated wisdom of midwives, all culminating in pushing women to a more marginal role within society. At the same time as the scientific revolution, the philosophical and political movements of the Enlightenment and the democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century provided a vocabulary for humanism and civil rights.[24] Therefore, this period resulted in a greater marginalization of women while also containing the philosophical seeds of the women's emancipation movement.

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[23] Nico Vorster, "John Calvin on the Status and Role of Women in Church and Society," *Journal of Theological Studies* 68, no. 1 (April 2017): 191.

[24] Sally Alexander, "Women, Class and Sexual Differences in the 1830s and 1840s: Some Reflections on the Writing of a Feminist History," *History Workshop* no. 17 (Spring 1984): 125-49. I will

First-wave feminism (1848-1920) has two distinct movements, building on the Enlightenment philosophy and vocabulary of human rights and equality. Early first-wave feminism (late eighteenth century-early nineteenth century) was mainly fueled by the fervor of the French Revolution and the elevation of human rights. In response to the ideas of rights advocated by Edmund Burke (*Reflection on the French Revolution*, 1790) and Thomas Paine (*The Rights of Man*, 1791), Mary Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) to advocate for extending these same "basic" human rights to women as well. This advocation for the rights of women developed into later first-wave feminism (late nineteenth century-early twentieth century) and the women's suffrage movement, which championed equal political rights for women. In the United States, this movement was led by leaders like Susan B. Anthony and Fredrick Douglas and resulted in the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, which guaranteed women the right to vote. This movement mostly consisted of middle-class Christian women and largely disbanded after achieving the right to vote.

Second-wave feminism (1960-1990) had a much more radical shift defined by an anti-patriarchal cultural movement that sought to eliminate all sexism denying women employment opportunities and that championed reproductive freedom through birth control and abortion. Driven by the ideas of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), which defined women as "other" and advocated the necessity of female transcendence by women's becoming like men, and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which rejected traditional female roles, the movement took a variety of forms to advocate the need to eliminate role distinctions between men and women. In the 1970s, aspects of this movement were adopted by some evangelical Christians who used biblical arguments to create an evangelical feminism which contended that there should

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address these philosophical ideas in greater detail in the next chapter when I provide the historical development of the social construction of gender.

not be any significant difference between men and women. This movement developed the view known as egalitarianism, which holds that men and women are equal in nature, relationships, and roles. As Gregg Allison explains, "With respect to the home, husbands and wives share equal authority and submit to each other. In the church, qualified men and qualified women may hold the office of elder/pastor. In society, men and women alike lead governments and companies. Moreover, these equalities come in various combinations."[25] Early figures in this movement include Letha Scanzoni, Nancy Hardesty, Paul Jewett, E. Margaret Howe, Gilbert Bilezikian, and Gretchen Gaebelein Hull.[26] While these authors reject specific roles for men and women, they differ from secular feminists because they do not reject Scripture's authority and truthfulness and therefore use biblical arguments to support their position.

As the ideas of evangelical feminism began to find greater receptivity within the church, other leaders within evangelicalism responded by defining the position of complementarianism. To summarize Allison's definition, complementarianism holds that men and women are created in God's image, enjoy equal access to salvation through Jesus Christ, and receive the same Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts; however, men and women are different in terms of roles and relationships. In the home, the husbands lead, while wives submit to them. In the church, the role of elder/pastor is reserved for

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[25] Gregg R. Allison, *The Church: An Introduction*, Short Studies in Systematic Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 135.

[26] John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., preface to *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 13. The current egalitarian movement is represented by the organization Christians for Biblical Equality (www.cbeinternational.org). For examples of writings that advocate egalitarian positions by the individuals Piper and Grudem name, see Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women's Liberation* (Nashville: Word, 1975); Paul K. Jewett, *The Ordination of Women: An Essay on the Office of Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981); Jewett, *Man as Male and Female: A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); E. Margaret Howe, *Women & Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says about a Woman's Place in Church and Family*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006); Gretchen Gaebelein Hull, *Equal to Serve: Women and Men Working Together Revealing the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998).

qualified men only.[27] To articulate and define this position, John Piper and Wayne Grudem edited *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (1991) and founded the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (1987), which published the Danvers Statement (1988) to define their position.[28]

The Danvers Statement and the publication of *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* sparked a new emphasis within evangelicalism to define masculinity and femininity and to answer the question What is a man and a woman? This shift marked the adoption of gender essentialism as the standard approach to discussing gender, as the descriptions of manhood and womanhood that gender essentialism provided connected biblical roles with the nature of men and women.

Evangelicalism in the Present

In his recent article, Jordan Steffaniak surveys notable evangelical authors—including John Piper, Ray Ortlund Jr., Owen Strachan, and Patrick Schreiner—and presents the following as representing conservative evangelical views on masculinity and femininity, respectively: (1) biological males are biologically ordered to be achievers, creators, and protectors; (2) biological females are biologically ordered to be nurturers, receivers, and sustainers.[29]

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[27] Gregg Allison offers this definition of the distinctives of complementarianism in Allison, *The Church*, 132-35. In *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, no succinct definition is provided, but Piper and Grudem provide a description of why the term complementarian was chosen (see Piper and Grudem, preface to *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 14), and Piper offers a general description of the position (see Piper, "A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 63-65). In the preface (p. 15), Piper and Grudem point out that the nineteen authors who contributed to *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* might have different emphases but are held together by their support of the Danvers Statement published by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood in 1988. See The Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, "Appendix 2: The Danvers Statement," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 569-74.

[28] The Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, "Our History," accessed October 20, 2022, https://cbmw.org/about/history/.

[29] Jordan L. Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue: A Defense of Gender Essentialism," *Southeastern Theological Review* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 20.

This summary does not represent the view of any one individual but is an amalgamation of several common themes found within evangelical discussions of gender: certain gender norms are essential based on one's biological sex. In attempting to define what a male is and what a female is, evangelical Christians continue to look to roles and functions that they believe are necessary for or essential to defining one as male or female; such views are therefore categorized as gender essentialism. As stated above, gender essentialism holds to a traditional coextensive position, where biological sex and gender are linked. So according to gender essentialism, while male and female correspond to biological generalities (e.g., genitalia, chromosomes, hormone production), the terms also correspond to certain qualities (e.g., aggressiveness, nurturing) and behaviors (e.g., roughhousing, playing with dolls), and this correspondence stands because these qualities and behaviors are in some way essential to each gender.[30]

Evangelical Gender Essentialism

Discussions involving gender essentialism require a great deal of precision. The need for precision is increased as many evangelicals who seek to express views on gender theologically do not label their views as gender essentialism and because, as Steffaniak clarifies, views of gender essentialism exist on a spectrum.[31] Instead of critiquing gender essentialism broadly, in what follows, I will specifically engage with four categories of gender essentialism: maximal essentialism, sortal essentialism, causal essentialism, and agnostic essentialism. I will present each view and then evaluate it against the framework for a biblical conception of gender developed in chapter 2.

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[30] See Marc Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology: A Constructive Account of Humanity in the Light of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018), 203.

[31] Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue," 26-33.

Maximal Essentialism

Maximal essentialism posits that whatever properties an object has are essential and that it is no longer the same object if it loses any property.[32] Given the extreme nature of this position, it is unlikely to find anyone who holds to a fully maximalist view. For clarity, Steffaniak distinguishes between global maximal essentialism, where every property is essential, and local maximal essentialism, where each traditional gender feature is essential.[33]

While Owen Strachan does not employ gender essentialist terminology in his work *Reenchanting Humanity: A Theology of Mankind*, many of his statements are consistent with local maximal essentialism.[34] In fairness to Strachan, I should mention that he would likely maintain that all *scriptural* gender features are essential, rather than merely stereotypical features, and that these features are required to avoid gender confusion. Nevertheless, Strachan's approach to defining masculinity and femininity revolves around lists of specific traits and actions.

Strachan understands masculinity as grounded in a male's toughness, assertiveness, physical fortitude, bravery, and provision for the home. These five traits are essential traits in his framework since "failure to show strength means a failure of manhood."[35] Strachan understands femininity as significantly connected to a female's being a wife and a mother—and he does not clearly distinguish between married and unmarried women. His view of femininity includes the following specific actions that a woman is called to: sacrifice free time, intellectual and vocational interests, and goals in order to care for little children; make healthy and tasty meals for loved ones; organize,

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[32] Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue," 22.

[33] Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue," 26-27.

[34] Owen Strachan, *Reenchanting Humanity: A Theology of Mankind* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2019). Steffaniak also places Strachan in this category; see Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue," 27.

[35] Strachan, *Reenchanting Humanity*, 139.

manage, and clean a home; express support and love for her husband as he works hard to provide; and teach her progeny the Word of God in all of its fullness.[36] Strachan summarizes his view of masculinity and femininity under the heading "Being Men and Women of God at All Times," calling men to be leaders, protectors, and providers and calling women to follow a godly husband, nurture life, and care for the home.[37]

Strachan's view represents the scriptural and philosophical issues with maximal gender essentialism. The highly specific list of gender norms for men and women contains social practices that go beyond Scripture and exclude others that are contained within. For example, Strachan includes preparing tasty meals on his list when defining femininity. Nowhere does Scripture say that females must necessarily cook the meals while males evade this role due to their biology. The closest a biblical passage comes to supporting this statement is Paul's instruction in Titus 2:5 that older women should teach younger women to work at home. However, nowhere does Scripture claim that any domestic task is essential to females or inessential to males. Additionally, Strachan lists bravery as a characteristic of masculinity, but this characteristic seems to ignore Scripture's examples of female bravery, such as the Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah, who defied the decree of Pharoah and allowed the male children to live in (Exod 1:15-17) and Mary, who responded with brave faith to the angelic announcement of her miraculous conception (Luke 1:38) to name a few.[38]

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[36] Strachan, *Reenchanting Humanity*, 158.

[37] Strachan, *Reenchanting Humanity*, 160.

[38] A potential objection to this line of reasoning is that 1 Cor 16:13 contains the charge to "act like men" in some English translations. Strachan takes this verse to imply that men are to be models of courage in the Christian community; see Strachan, *Reenchanting Humanity*, 165. The ESV, KJV, and NASB render the Greek word *andrizomai* as "act like men," whereas the CSB, NIV, NKJV, and RSV render *andrizomai* as "be courageous." This is the only use of *andrizomai* in the Greek New Testament, but there is lexical evidence to support "the act of demonstrating courage" as a proper translation. See Michael H. Burer and Jeffrey E. Millar, *A New Reader's Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 331. Additionally, the context of 1 Cor 16:13 further supports translating *andrizomai* as "courageous." First, 1 Corinthians was written to the church at Corinth, which contained both men and women. Given this fact, a male-specific command would need some prior qualifications, but none is given. Second, in 16:14, Paul addresses both the brothers *and the sisters* in the church without indicating a departure from the intended audience of verse 13. Finally, as Gordon Fee highlights in his commentary on

Compared to the framework for a biblical conception of gender outlined in chapter 2, maximal essentialism has two issues. First, it needs to clarify the ontological equality of men and women. Strachan's understanding of the relationship between men and women is grounded in his interpretation of Genesis 2:19-22: "In the very formation of the woman, it was to be clear that her life, her constitution, her nature, was rooted in and derived from the life, constitution, and nature of the man."[39] Strachan emphasizes that the woman's nature is not constituted as *parallel to* man's nature but *derived from* man's nature. This emphasis leads to a certain conclusion about the relationship between men and women generally within the created order—namely, that male headship extends beyond the church and home to include society as well. While Strachan does affirm the image of God as an ontological category, his view seems to evidence an imbalance in terms of ontological equality in that man derives his ontological identity directly from God, whereas woman derives her ontological identity from man.[40]

Second, maximal gender essentialism fails to affirm that human capacities and properties are equally expresable by both genders. Instead, this view holds specific actions and characteristics as being associated with either maleness or femaleness, resulting in the traits themselves representing and defining the genders. Again, this emphasis is inconsistent with the scriptural data where properties and capacities are not gender specific.

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1 Corinthians, Paul appears to be referencing Ps 31:24, which says, "Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord!" See Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 914-15. In Ps 31:24, there are no variations within the English translations considered above—all render this verse as some form of being strong, being courageous, or taking heart. This supports the view that Paul is not seeking to say anything about gender in 1 Cor 16:13 but that he is exhorting the Corinthians to courageous living. Translations that render this verse "act like men" are suboptimal translations, and building a case for gender essentialism on this verse is unstable, given the differences in translation.

[39] Strachan, *Reenchanting Humanity*, 135-36.

[40] Bruce Ware presents a similar idea, maintaining that the male (Adam) was made in the image of God in an unmediated fashion, while the woman (Eve) was created in a mediated fashion. See Bruce A. Ware, "Male and Female Complementarity and the Image of God," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 14-23.

Two philosophical challenges also face maximal gender essentialism. First, the specificity of what is presented as essential needs to be revised compared to the generality of masculinity and femininity. This position does not address the reality that men and women can perform the same specific acts in their own way. For example, a husband might stay home with his children while his wife travels. Even as the male performs the traditional female responsibility of caretaker, doing so does not require that he violate his masculine identity or express a feminine identity. Instead, he can exercise his own God-given abilities to nurture children in a way consistent with his masculinity. The same is true with women who exercise courage without violating their femininity.

Second, to stress that every gender feature is essential is simply implausible. Furthermore, if gender essentialism requires that all of these roles and performances are essential for masculinity or femininity, then both categories become fluid as none of these social actions is fundamentally necessary to identity. There is a difference between the *claim* that males and females are essentially biologically ordered for particular social features and a *form* of biological determinism where the traits and features make the distinctions. Maximal gender essentialism puts forth a list of functions that men and women must perform in order to be defined as men or women. Failure to conform to these external standards results in being labeled as in a diminished state of masculinity or femininity. In sum, maximal gender essentialism holds to a strong biological determinism that cannot withstand philosophical scrutiny.

Sortal Essentialism

Sortal essentialism requires an object to be of the same kind of thing, and whatever kind a thing is, it cannot change without becoming a different kind of object.[41] This view holds that to be a male, one must possess certain masculine properties and that

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[41] Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue," 22.

to be a female, one must possess certain feminine properties. This view is distinguished from maximal essentialism because it does not require every traditional or scriptural feature of gender to be essential; instead, it establishes criteria that constitute which type of gender one is. Joshua Farris summarizes this position: "The descriptive content of what makes one male or female is a natural property essentially instantiated by each individual"[42]—in other words, which things are essential to describing masculinity and femininity.

John Piper's view in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* represents a sortal essentialism as he proposes specific capacities that constitute masculinity and certain capacities that constitute femininity.[43] Piper holds that women *must* nurture, receive male headship, and respond to it, while men *must* achieve, create, and protect.[44] The issue with this view is that both men and women perform the various characteristics listed in Scripture.[45] Patrick Schreiner's recent article provides four main critiques against Piper's description of masculinity and femininity.[46] Schreiner notes that the Danvers Statement does not define masculinity and femininity but offers the following descriptions:

> At the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways appropriate to a man's differing relationships.
>
> At the heart of mature femininity is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to a woman's differing relationships.[47]

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[42] Joshua Farris, *An Introduction to Theological Anthropology: Humans, Both Creaturely and Divine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 224.

[43] Piper, "A Vision of Biblical Complementarity," 41.

[44] Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue," 28.

[45] Patrick Schreiner, "Man and Woman: Toward an Ontology," *Eikon* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2020): 80-81.

[46] Schreiner, "Man and Woman," 78-82.

[47] Piper, "A Vision of Biblical Complementarity," 41.

Schreiner's fourfold critiques of this description are as follows: (1) the description is oppositional in its construction;[48] (2) the description is too atomistic in its wording;[49] (3) the description contradicts Scripture's testimony that the given descriptors (lead, provide, protect vs. affirm, receive, nurture) are embodied by both genders but differently; (4) the description is not comprehensive enough.[50] Schreiner attempts to overcome these problematic features and move to a more comprehensive framework.[51] Instead of providing another critique of Piper's work, I will instead evaluate Schreiner's construction, which represents two major trends within evangelical discussions on gender: (1) the employment of potentiality to define masculinity and femininity and (2) the use of natural law arguments.

Schreiner's objective is to construct an ontological definition of man and woman using arguments from natural law, which he defines as "the revelation of God's will through creation." Schreiner identifies that natural law communicates through (1) conscience (i.e., something that beckons us towards the right awareness of moral basics), (2) universal design (i.e., "the design of the universe which points to a universal Designer"), (3) our design (by which he seems to mean human design), and (4) natural consequences (i.e., natural penalties for breaking natural law).[52] The logic of natural law

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[48] Schreiner argues that Piper's framework appears to "teach that masculinity and femininity don't exist unless in relation to the other." By claiming that Piper's framework is oppositional in its construction, Schreiner critiques the view, capitalizing on the differentness rather than the sameness between men and women. Schreiner, "Man and Woman," 78.

[49] Schreiner critiques Piper's framework for moving right to traits: "Too often, it is easy to break down groups to individuals and individuals into traits and then to universalize them." Schreiner, "Man and Woman," 80.

[50] Schreiner critiques Piper's framework for failing to get to the underlying differences of masculinity. He claims that Piper focuses on the "fruit rather than the root." Schreiner, "Man and Woman," 81.

[51] Schreiner, "Man and Woman," 82.

[52] Schreiner, "Man and Woman," 70-71. Schreiner provides biblical support for natural law in referencing Rom 2:14-15. Still, J. Budziszewski identifies these four witnesses to natural law in J. Budziszewski, *What We Can't Not Know: A Guide* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011). Joe Rigney gives three witnesses to God's design: (1) nature, (2) Scripture, and (3) culture. He says that culture expresses personality in a particular time and place. Joe Rigney, "What Makes a Man—or a Woman? Lost

is that it allows one to know the nature of men and women because that nature is embedded into the order of things. Thus, natural law indicates that "the difference between men and women is not invented or constructed, but simply recognized. It lies in the nature of things."[53]

Building upon the work of J. Budziszewski, Schreiner proposes the following: "The fundamental meaning of masculinity is *sonship, brotherly love*, and potentiality for paternity. The fundamental meaning of femininity is *daughterhood, sisterly love*, and potentiality toward maternity."[54] While these definitions arise from biology, they are not intended to be merely biological, as the potential for paternity and the potential for maternity are described both in the spiritual sense (i.e., spiritual fathers and mothers within the church) and the natural sense (i.e., biological or adopted parents).[55] Additionally, the term "potentiality" is used to indicate that paternity and maternity do not need to be actualized to inform the nature of men and women. The significant improvement Schreiner sees in adding the two traits related to "potentiality" to Budziszewski's view is that doing so expands the discussion past the marriage relationship not only to align itself with Scripture's teaching on marriage but also to include the "most common biblical idiom given to Christians: *familial*."[56] All of these

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Voices on a Vital Question," Desiring God (blog), September 9, 2020, https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-makes-a-man-or-a-woman.

[53] J. Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2014), 50.

[54] Schreiner, "Man and Woman," 85. Schreiner notes that Budziszewski provides "the most succinct and useful definition" of masculinity and femininity based on biology and sociology in his book *On the Meaning of Sex* (see pp. 35-65). Budziszewski states that the fundamental meaning of masculinity is potentiality towards paternity, and the fundamental meaning of womanhood is potentiality towards maternity. Budziszewski seems to be influenced by the work of Pope John Paul II, who wrote "The mystery of femininity manifests and reveals itself in its full depth through motherhood . . . . [T]he mystery of man's masculinity, that is, the generative and 'paternal' meaning of his body." John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 210-11, 217.

[55] Schreiner, "Man and Woman," 75.

[56] Schreiner, "Man and Woman," 85

relations are then set within the context of the virtue of love, which Schreiner sees as undergirding the interactions within each of these relationships so that they are properly ordered.

Schreiner is right to point out that the standard description of gender where men lead, provide, and protect; women affirm, receive, and nurture has structural weaknesses resulting from its inability to explain why these traits only apply to one gender and not the other when each can display them.[57] However, Schreiner's definition and its representation of a sortal gender essentialism are not without their own problems. First, Schreiner's definition moves past gender to define men and women in the context of their relationships with others, that is, their roles. His definition does not define men and women as they are but in the context of their relationships with parents, other men and women, and potential offspring. While it is true that fundamental biological differences between men and women exist (e.g., only men have the potential for paternity and only women have the potential for maternity), it is unclear what Schreiner's definition adds to the discussion of ontological definitions of gender. These terms reduce the discussion to the biological differences between male and female without providing further content.[58]

Second, the move towards defining men and women in terms of potentiality grounded in natural law utilized by Schreiner and others raises some potential issues. First, in putting forward some form of *potentiality* concerning paternity or maternity, this approach orients masculinity and femininity towards the *telos* of expressing a certain role: fatherhood or motherhood. This *telos* is contrasted with the view of gender that I will develop later in this project, which orients both masculinity and femininity towards the *telos* of Christoconformity—a more foundational end than any role. Second, it is

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[57] Schreiner, "Man and Woman," 86.

[58] Steffaniak levels a similar critique; see Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue," 29.

questionable how defining the fundamental meaning of masculinity as sonship, brotherly love, and potentiality towards paternity as well as defining the fundamental meaning of femininity as daughterhood, sisterly love, and potentiality towards maternity moves beyond the differences present in the terms masculinity and femininity themselves. To respond that masculinity is sonship or the potential for paternity, for instance, begs the follow-up question What is paternity or sonship as contrasted with maternity or daughterhood? While this view attempts to move towards an ontological definition of man and woman, its starting point in natural law complicates this move. By starting with what can be learned from nature, natural law definitions will always start with function, role, or traits and work to infer which of these things are grounded in nature. As Schreiner notes, natural law still requires interpretation.[59] While I affirm that ontological definitions will confirm what is observable within consciences, design, and natural consequences, the history of moving from observations about men and women to conclusions about their fundamental nature should provide caution at this point. As Allen summarizes, the predominant approach of starting with natural observation and moving towards nature has been to overstate the differences between the genders and conclude that male and female are opposite and unequal.[60] While Schreiner and others using both Scripture and natural law do not draw this conclusion, the point remains that moving from observation of nature to conclusions about nature is largely dependent upon the presuppositions of the interpreter.

Finally, forms of sortal essentialism do not supply compelling answers to the question of why both genders can fulfill the same virtues in the different ways. Schreiner writes, "Men and women reflect the same human nature with equal fidelity and dignity

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[59] Schreiner, "Man and Woman," 71n7.

[60] Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, 1:3.

but reflect different aspects of it."[61] Schreiner still maintains that there are different

aspects of human nature reflected by men and by women, but his definition does not

clarify the distinction in the natural kind of gender. Furthermore, he seems to contradict

himself when he states that both men and women will instantiate the same virtue of love

while inflecting them in different ways. Are men and women reflecting different aspects

of human nature, or do they reflect the same nature in different ways? Schreiner seems to

affirm that men and women reflect various aspects of human nature, but he does not

clarify which gender reflects which aspects.[62] As Schreiner notes, other forms of sortal

essentialism that hold to a leading, providing, and protecting versus an affirming,

submitting, and nurturing paradigm do not have satisfactory answers to this question

either. Even if one holds the view that gender is the source of rich inductive knowledge

that allows inference from a subset of properties to conclude the remainder of the

properties, how can one be confident that one has inferred correctly or moved far enough

from the physical to the natural differences within gender?[63]

Despite these issues with Schreiner's sortal essentialism, descriptions of men

and women underscoring the potentiality for paternity and the potentiality for maternity

prove helpful in the context of the transgender debate. For example, in the case of a man

who has transitioned to being a woman, the complete absence of the potentiality for

maternity should indicate that something less than a full transition has taken place.

Similarly, in case of a woman who has transitioned to being a man, the potential for

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[61] Schreiner, "Man and Woman," 83.

[62] I will adopt the latter view—that men and women reflect the same nature in different ways—in my discussion of common human properties and common human capacities expressed by men in ways fitting to their maleness and by women in ways fitting to their femaleness.

[63] Alexander Bird does pose in his writing on essences that it is appropriate to infer from subsets of properties to the remainder of properties; see Alexander Bird, "Essence and Natural Kinds," in *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics*, ed. Robin Le Poidevin, Routledge Philosophy Companions (New York: Routledge, 2009), 502. Farris makes a similar point; see Farris, *An Introduction to Theological Anthropology*, 226. I agree that one can know something by moving from traits to nature; however, I maintain that the direction from nature to traits is superior.

paternity is also absent. In 1930, the Danish artist named Einar Wegener underwent the first attempt to change one's biological sex through surgery. Transfixed by the idea of becoming a "complete woman," Wegener sought out Magnus Hirschfeld of the German Institute for Sex Research. For Wegener, merely appearing as a woman was not enough; he desired the ability to adopt the procreational potentiality of a woman. Wegner underwent four surgeries, with the fourth one's involving the implantation of a uterus and resulting in his death.[64] Compare Wegener's transition to that of Christine Jorgenson, born George William Jorgensen, who became the first trans celebrity when he began his medical transition in the 1950s. Jorgensen's transition employed synthetic cross-sex hormones, which allowed him to adopt the secondary sex characteristics of a woman. This hormonal transition left Jorgensen sterilized, yet he did not attempt to pursue a female's reproductive potentiality.[65] Abigail Favale's analysis is correct and cautionary: as society separated reproductive potential from the definition of what it meant to be a "real" woman, something critical was lost in understanding the whole goodness of what it means to be created in the image of God as female.[66]

While Schreiner's work is commendable for moving the conversation of gender in a positive direction, ultimately, I believe it still does not move the conversation far enough. Sortal essentialism is not untrue, but it does fail to contribute the framework necessary to provide an ontological definition of men and women.

Causal Essentialism

Causal essentialism does not require particular social characteristics to be displayed; it only requires an essential causal explanation for these characteristics as

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[64] Niels Hoyer, ed., *Man into Woman: An Authentic Record of a Change of Sex* (New York: Dutton, 1933).

[65] Abigail Favale, *The Genesis of Gender: A Christian Theory* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2022), 86.

[66] Favale, *The Genesis of Gender*, 85-114.

expressed by males or females.[67] Steffaniak presents this view of gender essentialism as the best alternative to other forms of gender essentialism. He explains this position thus: "Men are *ordered* to certain virtues and women to others—or at least ordered to certain expressions of them."[68] This position maintains that men and women display the same social characteristics but have the potential to show them differently. For example, both men and women can display nurturing; still, given female biology, women will display nurturing through breastfeeding in a way that goes beyond the nurturing capacity of a father. Thus, Steffaniak redefines masculinity and femininity as follows: "It is not that they are ordered to cause specific traits but that they are ordered to *primarily* cause specific traits."[69] Men and women can pursue all of the same virtues; still, their biological differences will determine different levels of their *capability* and *potential* to display particular virtues.

Steffaniak has proposed a thoughtful form of gender essentialism that addresses many difficulties in the other forms. The strength of this position is that it allows both men and women to express the same virtues, since the virtues themselves are not gendered, and that it does not define masculinity and femininity in terms of strict social characteristics, which accounts for the variety of expressions found within the sexes. This position grounds the differences between men and women in terms of their being created differently. In defending this position, Steffaniak acknowledges that some might argue that this form of gender essentialism may not fulfill the gender essentialism desired by many conservative evangelicals, yet he counters, arguing that the form of gender essentialism that evangelicals often desire is philosophically unfeasible and

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[67] Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue," 31.

[68] Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue," 31.

[69] Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue," 32.

biblically problematic.[70] While this form of gender essentialism is less problematic than other forms, it is not without issue.

Steffaniak holds that all men and women can exhibit the same virtues, and he lists the fruit of the Spirit as an example. However, he holds that men and women will have different levels of capability and potentiality to display them. This view allows for the equal expression of all virtues, but in reality, it creates subcategories within the virtues. For example, within the virtue of goodness exists a distinction between male and female goodness. Given that both men and women receive the same Holy Spirit, it seems more congruent to expect that they would have the same capability and potentiality to express the fruit of the Spirit. Any actual difference in the ability to demonstrate the virtues seems more likely to be grounded in differences in the level of individual Christian maturity rather than in gender. While the fruit of the Spirit will always be expressed by gendered embodied persons, it is unclear why gender would qualify men and women's capability and potentiality to express these virtues. Furthermore, the understanding that men and women have different capabilities to express certain virtues has the potential danger of further entrenching the notion of inferiority/superiority.

To conclude, Steffaniak has improved upon the current standard within evangelicalism by refusing to put men and women on opposite sides of a scale of extremes, with each only physically capable of pursuing certain virtues. However, there remains a need to clarify or revise how men and women can exhibit the same virtues while displaying them differently.

Agnostic Essentialism

Agnostic essentialism holds that while it might be the case that gender is grounded in biological sex, it is incredibly challenging—if not impossible—to know how

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[70] Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue," 32.

these biological realities relate to gender differences. Marc Cortez proposes this view, stating, "We might still have good reasons for affirming at least a chastened form of gender essentialism as an *ontological* commitment while seriously questioning or even rejecting the application of gender essentialism as an *epistemological* commitment."[71] This view affirms that embodied sexuality is the ontological ground for at least some aspects of gender while simultaneously demonstrating that the pervasive significance of culture is such that there is no epistemological basis for confident assertions about the relationship between the two genders. The phrase "pervasive significance of culture" highlights how culture shapes the actions, attitudes, and norms associated with maleness and femaleness. Given the observable reality that not all cultures view masculinity and femininity in the same way, Cortez emphasizes the epistemological limitations in knowing how embodied sexuality connects to gender expression for defining a universal description of how gender differences are grounded in sex.

Cortez develops this view to respond to different critiques of gender essentialism, noting that essentialism is consistently held to be false by gender theorists.[72] Agnostic essentialism attempts to provide a form of essentialism that avoids the most common critiques while maintaining that maleness and femaleness have determinable theological significance.[73] Any claims about gender that agnostic essentialism makes are seen to be merely provisional and subject to revision. In this way, agnostic essentialism maintains the theological significance of the body by acknowledging the embodied nature

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[71] Marc Cortez, "Reimagining Gender Apophatically" (lecture presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Providence, RI, November 17, 2020).

[72] E.g., Judith Lorber and Susan A. Farrell, eds., *The Social Construction of Gender* (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE, 1991); Nancy Bonvillain, *Women and Men: Cultural Constructs of Gender*, 4th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2006); Tracy Ore, *The Social Construction of Difference and Inequality: Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality*, 6th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2013).

[73] Cortez develops this point through interacting with the work of Nancy Dallavalle; see Nancy A. Dallavalle, "Neither Idolatry nor Iconoclasm: A Critical Essentialism for Catholic Feminist Theology," *Horizons* 25, no. 1 (1998): 30.

of gender differences while precluding confident assertations about the biological grounds of particular gender differences.

While Cortez presents agnostic essentialism as a thought experiment, it is not easy to determine if it has any practical value. This approach follows a form of apophatic reasoning that begins with what cannot be said about the relationship between embodied sex and gender and concludes that nothing that can be said with confidence. It is questionable if this approach provides more than a caution to avoid overstatement in other forms of gender essentialism. Even as Cortez is motivated by addressing common critiques against essentialism, this view fails to contribute anything constructive.[74] Even if it is impossible to know the full extent of the influence of embodied sex on gender, it seems that even provisional statements would offer some determinacy even while recognizing the need for possible correction and further development.[75]

Evaluating Gender Essentialism

In conclusion, no form of gender essentialism can satisfy all five components of the framework for a biblical conception of gender: (1) be grounded in human embodiment; (2) recognize the ontological equality between males and females; (3) acknowledge and celebrate the distinctions between males and females; (4) affirm a male-female gender binary; (5) affirm that human properties and capacities are expressible by both males and females.

The significant strengths of gender essentialism are that it (1) grounds gender in embodiment, (3) acknowledges and celebrates the distinctions between males and females, and (4) affirms a male-female gender binary. However, some forms of gender essentialism do not go far enough to (2) recognize the ontological equality between males

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[74] Cortez develops four main categories of critiques against gender essentialism, which will be discussed in detail in chapter 4. See Cortez, "Reimagining Gender Apophatically."

[75] Dallavalle makes this point in "Neither Idolatry nor Iconoclasm," 23-24.

and females. While all forms acknowledge that God created both men and women as good, forms of gender essentialism that set masculinity and femininity on opposing sides of specific properties and capacities have the potential to undermine this ontological equality in detrimental ways. Finally, the major issue with gender essentialism is that it fails to (5) affirm that human properties and capacities are expressible by both males and females. Instead, gender essentialism holds that some properties and capacities are exclusively associated with masculinity and others are exclusively associated with femininity. While the forms of gender essentialism expressed by Schreiner and Steffaniak identify the issues with prior forms of essentialism and work to address how both genders can fulfill the same virtues in different ways, neither goes far enough. Steffaniak comes the closest, and with adjustments to his presentation of virtues to eliminate the wording of "capability" and "potentiality," his view of causal gender essentialism would satisfy all five biblical affirmations of gender. However, I believe there is a more robust way to represent Scripture's teaching on gender than merely making this modification to casual gender essentialism—but that discussion will have to wait for chapter 5.

Relationship between Gender and Roles

Before I conclude this discussion on gender essentialism, it would be helpful to discuss the relationship between gender and gender roles. Again, "gender" is the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of being male or female, including the social characteristics (i.e., norms, roles, self-ascriptions) and abilities (i.e., performances, phenomenological features, positions) that cluster around understanding what it means to be male or female.[76] Included in this definition is a reference to roles as a part of what forms the social characteristics that are associated with each gender. It is common within evangelical circles for the discussion of gender roles to serve as a replacement for

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[76] Mark Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 16-17.

discussing gender itself.[77] This is because common definitions of gender categorize men and women in terms of their gender roles, which are grounded in the nature of men and women. Since Scripture does not explicitly define the nature of men and women but does provide roles for Christians to perform within both the church and the home, the impulse to move from roles to conclusions about nature is understandable. But is such a move necessary, helpful, or correct? Stated another way, do complementarian commitments require that the differences in roles between men and women within the church and between husbands and wives within the home be grounded in a fundamental difference in the natures of men and women? The standard answer for those holding complementarian convictions would be a resounding "Yes": gender roles are grounded in the created order and display evidence of the difference in the natures of men and women.

This desire to see gender roles grounded in a distinction in the natures of the two genders is likely why evangelical authors hold to some form of gender essentialism, for they seek to articulate what exactly *is* the difference between men's nature and women's nature. Whether authors conclude that men are ordered to achieve, create, and protect while women are ordered to nurture, receive, and sustain or that men are ordered towards a potentiality for paternity while women are ordered towards a potentiality for maternity, the result is that gender essentialism is extended beyond what is philosophically feasible or biblically warranted.[78] These descriptions of masculinity and femininity result in either the gendering of virtues and traits—which does not account for why both men and women can perform both—or the orienting of masculinity and femininity towards the *telos* of expressing a certain role. Since each of these options is

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[77] The discussion on complementarianism is almost entirely rules-based. This environment is why Gregg Allision felt he needed to emphatically state in his faculty lecture on gender embodment, "Please note that I've said nothing—absolutely nothing—about roles and authority." Gregg R. Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 23, no. 2 (2019): 166.

[78] Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue," 19-20, 32.

problematic, complementarians should reconsider whether gender roles *must* be grounded in natural differences between men and women.[79]

The fear of proponents of gender essentialism seems to be that if gender roles are not grounded in differences between the natures of men and women, then there is no way to limit any behavior according to differences in gender. However, as Cortez argues, gender essentialism is not required to maintain a complementarian framework because it is entirely possible for God to "stipulate norms for human life irrespective of underlying biological realities."[80] As Cortez illustrates, Scripture contains examples of God's doing just that. For example, when God chose to set the tribe of Levi apart from the other eleven tribes to serve in the special role of priests in the temple, this decision was not based on any natural qualities this tribe had that made it different from the other tribes; there was nothing about the Levites that made them more naturally ordered for this role (Deut 10:8; 18:1-8). Instead, this decision was based on God's divine decree. Hence, God can and does stipulate norms irrespective of underlying biological realities.[81]

First Timothy 2:12-14 is one of the main passages to which complementarians look in order to inform their understanding that the office of elder is only to be held by qualified men.[82] To still be normative today, Paul's command in 1 Timothy 2:12 ("I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet") does not need to be connected to gender essentialism or grounded in men and

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[79] This statement does not deny that there are differences between men and women. As stated in chapter 2, for any concept of gender to be understood as biblical, it must acknowledge and celebrate the differences between men and women. The statement above merely attempts to separate complementarian discussions of gender roles from an over-reliance on problematic forms of gender essentialism. The statement above is also not a denial that masculine and feminine roles are part of the created order. Those roles represent a part of God's created order but are based on God's divine decree rather than the differences in the natures of men and women.

[80] Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology*, 209.

[81] Steffaniak also affirms Cortez's argument; see Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue," 34.

[82] Douglas Moo, "What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority over Men?," in Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 233-52.

women having different natures. One might object to this point, arguing that Paul grounds this command in the created order: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve" (1 Tim 2:13). This verse is important in considering why Paul's prohibition is not limited to the specific context of Ephesus, where Timothy ministered, but is still operative today. However, it is important not to extend the logic of verse 13 too far. Paul's appeal to creation is not an appeal to a difference in *created nature* between men and women but a reference to *the order of creation*.[83] Eve's creation as the second human does not convey an ontological fact about women. Rather, it is simply a historical fact, which, in turn, means that Paul's prohibition is not grounded in natural differences between men and women (i.e., ontology) but is redemptive-historical. The prohibition on women's holding the office of elder, wherein they would teach and exercise authority, is not a result of any ontological difference between men and women; instead, it should be understood as a norm stipulated by God that remains operative beyond the specific context of Timothy's ministry because it is a part of God's redemptive-historical plan.[84]

This discussion demonstrates that gender essentialism is not necessary for grounding a complementarian understanding of the norms and roles God has prescribed for men and women in the church and for husbands and wives within the home. This understanding will hopefully allow Christians with complementarian convictions to move away from forms of gender essentialism that do not view common human properties and capacities as equally expressible by men and women or that undermine the ontological

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[83] Referring to 1 Tim 2:13-14's reference to the creation of man and woman, Moo writes that "a statement about the nature of women *per se* would move the discussion away from the central issue, and it would have a serious and strange implication." Moo, "What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority over Men?," 247.

[84] This conclusion should not be confused with theological volunteerism or divine command theory. Rather, the conclusion emphasizes that the distinction between men and women with reference to holding church office is (1) not a result of men and women having different natures but (2) grounded in God's design, which reflects God's character. This is not an arbitrary or reversible structure but relates to God's revelation of himself to his people as Father and as Son.

equality of the two genders by seeing men and women as possessing different—even competing—natures.

Conclusion

This project aims to develop a conception of gender that is solidly biblical. It attempts to understand gender in ways that Scripture warrants and are consistent with the totality of its teaching. The current standard conception of gender within conservative evangelicalism is some form of gender essentialism. In order to highlight the issues with contemporary forms of gender essentialism, I provided a historical sketch of the development of the view, interacted with four forms of gender essentialism, and concluded with a discussion on gender and gender roles.

First, the historical sketch of the development of gender essentialism began with Aristotle's creation of essentialism as a tool for metaphysical analysis. A survey of pre-Enlightenment views, post-Enlightenment views, and views within the church revealed that there is a remarkable similarity in the conclusions regarding gender. While each period gives slightly different reasoning, each affirms and perpetuates a notion of sex polarity grounded in biological essentialism, where differences in the biology of males and females are the grounds for emphasizing the significant distinction between the genders. The rise of feminism challenged this conclusion, advocating first for equal rights for women within society and second for the elimination of all forms of sexism. In the 1970s, aspects of second-wave feminism were adopted by some evangelical Christians, known as evangelical feminists, who used biblical arguments to contend that there should not be any significant difference between men and women, a view identified as egalitarianism. As the ideas of evangelical feminists began to find greater receptivity within the church, other leaders within evangelicalism responded by critiquing evangelical feminism using gender essentialism as the standard approach for discussing gender as the descriptions of manhood and womanhood, which connected biblical roles

with the nature of men and women. The traditional conservative evangelical position holds masculinity as the view that biological males are biologically ordered to be achievers, creators, and protectors, and holds femininity as the view that biological females are biologically ordered to be nurturers, receivers, and sustainers.

Next, I interacted with forms of gender essentialism within evangelicalism today, grouping the views into four categories: (1) maximal essentialism, (2) sortal essentialism, (3) causal essentialism, and (4) agnostic essentialism. (1) Maximal essentialism holds that an object's properties are essential and that it is no longer the same object if it loses any property. This view's most significant challenge is that it does not address the reality that men and women can perform the same specific acts in their own way. (2) Sortal essentialism requires an object to be of the same kind of thing; whatever kind of thing is, it cannot change without becoming a different kind of object. This view holds that one must possess certain masculine properties to be a male and that one must possess certain feminine properties to be female. While this view is represented with different nuances by different writers, the major critiques of this view are that it moves past gender to define men and women in the context of their relationships with others (i.e., their roles) and that it does not supply compelling answers to the question of why both genders can fulfill the same virtues in the different ways.

(3) Causal essentialism does not require particular social characteristics to be displayed; it only requires an essential causal explanation for these characteristics as expressed by males or females. This understanding means that while men and women can display the same or similar virtues, the difference between the genders exists at the level of men and women's capability and potentiality to display those virtues. The main issue with causal essentialism is that by explaining how men and women can possess the same virtues, this view causes the virtues themselves become gendered. (4) Agnostic essentialism maintains that while it might be the case that gender is grounded in biological sex, it is incredibly challenging, if not impossible, to know how these

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biological realities relate to gender differences. The primary issue with agnostic essentialism is that it is questionable if this position provides more than a caution to avoid overstatement in other forms of gender essentialism, given that in avoiding critiques of other forms of essentialism, it fails to contribute anything constructive.

I then evaluated gender essentialism as a whole and found that no form of gender essentialism can satisfy all five components of the biblical framework for gender. The significant strengths of gender essentialism are that it (1) grounds gender in embodiment, (3) acknowledges and celebrates the distinctions between gender, and (4) affirms a gender binary. However, some forms of gender essentialism do not go far enough to emphasize (2) the ontological equality between men and women, and all forms fail to (5) make the common human properties and capacities expressible by both men and women. While Patrick Schreiner and Jordan Steffaniak make significant improvements to the standard view of gender essentialism within conservative evangelicalism, I conclude that no view goes far enough, and I opt to construct my own view of gender in chapter 5.

Third and finally, I clarified the relationship between gender and gender roles. One explanation for why gender essentialism continues to be the default view within conservative evangelicalism is that gender roles serve as a replacement for discussing gender itself. These roles are then grounded in the nature of men and women, which causes the issues of either (1) resulting in the gendering of virtues and traits, which does not account for why both men and women can perform both, or (2) orienting the *telos* of masculinity and femininity towards roles. I affirmed Marc Cortez's conclusion that gender essentialism is not required to maintain a complementarian framework because it is entirely possible for God to "stipulate norms for human life irrespective of underlying biological realities."[85] This reality means that the biblical prescriptions for gender roles

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[85] Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology*, 209.

do not need to be grounded in natural differences between men and women but are instead stipulated by God. The result is that gender roles no longer need to factor into discussions and definitions of gender.

This chapter's survey of forms of gender essentialism concluded that no form can satisfy all five of the components of a biblical conception of gender; therefore, an improved—or more biblically faithful—conception of gender is needed. However, before developing such a conception of gender, I must survey the predominant alternative to gender essentialism—the view that gender is a social construction.

CHAPTER 4

EVALUATING THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION
OF GENDER

Within the academy, most scholars reject gender essentialism and—instead—advocate for gender as a social construct. My reason for critiquing gender essentialism differs from the predominant reasons for rejecting it in current gender studies. This categorical difference makes it important to evaluate the logic and conclusions of proponents of social constructionism, which affirms that gender is derived from societal forces and is not dependent on biological sex.[1] This chapter will compare contemporary constructionist views of gender to the framework for a biblical conception of gender developed in chapter 2, ultimately finding social constructionism wanting, for it does not provide a conception of gender that is consistent with Scripture's teaching on gender.

First, I will identify the relationship between sex and gender according to the social constructionist position. Second, I will summarize and evaluate four common arguments that social constructionists give for rejecting gender essentialism. Third, I will provide a historical sketch that traces the emergence and development of position of the view that gender is a social construct, then present the views articulated by contemporary proponents of social constructionism, and finally offer four critiques of the social construction of gender.

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[1] The social construction of gender is not a denial that biological sex differences exist but that one can derive any meaning from those differences. For further discussion of this, see Abigail Favale, *The Genesis of Gender: A Christian Theory* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2022), 75.

Sex and Culture's Role in Determining Gender

Gender essentialism represents a "traditional coextensive" view of gender—that is, the view that gender is linked to biological sex and is biologically caused rather than socially caused.[2] The social construction of gender holds to the "revisionary disjunctive" view, which resulted from a substantial twentieth-century urge to separate sex from gender—it is the view that gender is socially grounded, that the social norms of an individual are what determine and define gender.[3] While this view exists on a spectrum, extreme forms hold that men and women are not defined by their biology at all but entirely by their social location.[4] Lesser forms of this position retain sex as a legitimate category yet still maintain that gender is disconnected from biology and tethered to social features.

These differences in understanding the relationship between biological sex and gender lead to differences in how gender is determined or recognized. Following the logic of the traditional coextensive view, proponents of gender essentialism view gender as derived from biological makeup,[5] meaning that gender is metaphysically grounded in biological sex, and gender differences are derived from biological differences.

Following the logic of the revisionary disjunctive view, proponents of the social construction of gender see a sharp distinction between sex and gender. This position views gender as having more to do with the definitions of masculinity and femininity as they are culturally expressed. Gender is derived from—or better, *produced by*—a culture's assumptions, expectations, practices, and performances that are

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[2] Jordan L. Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue: A Defense of Gender Essentialism," *Southeastern Theological Review* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 15.

[3] Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Fall of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 184.

[4] Mari Mikkola, *The Wrong of Injustice: Dehumanization and Its Role in Feminist Philosophy*, Studies in Feminist Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 21-22.

[5] Fellipe do Vale outlines the critical aspects of gender essentialism in his dissertation; see Fellipe do Vale, "Gender as Love: A Theological Account" (PhD diss., Southern Methodist University, 2021), 2.

associated with what it means to be a "man" or a "woman." Kate Bornstein summarizes this view thus: "There's a . . . simple way to look at gender. Once upon a time, someone drew a line in the sand for a culture and proclaimed . . . 'On this side, you are a man; on the other side, you are a woman.'"[6]

The view that gender is a social construct is predominant in academic discussions of gender today. One of the reasons for its broad appeal is the intuitive force of the argument. Proponents will often point to universal experience like being able to identify the gender of a baby and highlight that while a doctor has given the information about what kind of body the baby has to its parents, the baby will only be perceived by others as a boy or a girl if the parents follow the right social cues—such as dressing it in blue or pink. The Icelandic philosopher Ásta formalizes this intuition: "If a property chiefly figures in explanations of social facts, and not natural facts, that suggest that the property is a social property, and not a natural property . . . . One should consider in what kinds of explanations the property occurs."[7] Here is an example illustrating why this view is simply intuitive for so many: Being a girl is demonstrated by wearing specific clothes and avoiding others, which is a social fact. Therefore, being a girl must be a social property because a social fact determines it. Coupled with this intuition towards the social construction of gender is a revulsion towards gender essentialism, so much so that the term "essentialist" functions pejoratively in treatments on the subject.[8] Before identifying the factors that led the social construction view of gender to rise in prominence, I will first survey and critique four reasons why its proponents reject gender essentialism.

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[6] Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 22.

[7] Ásta, *Categories We Live By: The Construction of Sex, Gender, Race and Other Social Categories*, Studies in Feminist Philosophy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 70-71.

[8] Natalie Stoljar, "Essence, Identity, and the Concept of Woman," *Philosophical Topics* 23, no. 2 (1995): 261-64.

Rejecting Gender Essentialism: Four Arguments

Central to understanding the social constructionist's position is understanding its reasons for rejecting gender essentialism, as these rejections give the proper context for the development of social constructionist views. Gender essentialism serves two primary functions: (1) it provides explanatory power (e.g., What is a woman?), and (2) it provides a structure for classification based on the properties that are necessary and sufficient for inclusion in a group (e.g., What are the things that make someone a woman?).[9] The first and second arguments—the *cultural argument* and the *similarity argument*—for social constructionism's rejection of gender essentialism take issue with its explanatory use, while the third and fourth arguments—the *continuity argument* and the *exclusion argument*—reject its use of classification. In what follows, I will summarize and critique each of these four arguments for social constructionism's rejection of gender essentialism.

Cultural Argument

Summary

The cultural argument affirms that there are significant gender differences but proposes that all of these differences are not biologically but culturally determined.[10] This view is concisely presented by feminist theorist Simone de Beauvoir, who urges that women are made and not born.[11] This argument affirms that there are—or can be—differences between men and women but maintains that these gender differences result

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[9] I follow the four categories provided by Marc Cortez in "Reimagining Gender Apophatically" (lecture presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Providence, RI, November 17, 2020).

[10] Cortez, "Reimagining Gender Apophatically." For examples of this argument, see Judith Lorber and Susan A. Farrell, eds., *The Social Construction of Gender* (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE, 1991); Nancy Bonvillain, *Woman and Men: Cultural Constructs of Gender*, 4th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2006); Tracy E. Ore, *The Social Construction of Difference and Inequality: Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality*, 6th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2013).

[11] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 281.

from socio-cultural differences. This view builds upon the common practice of explaining behaviors, characteristics, and roles as cultural and then applying this logic to gender. For example, it is common to offer a social explanation—not a biological one—for why Filipinos are so hospitable, why the Ndebele tribe in Zimbabwe has a female chief, or why the celebration of Christmas looks different in London than in Berlin. This kind of rationale is similarly applied to gender differences.

Charlotte Witt describes this anti-essentialist argument as the core argument because of its influence: minimally, it points to social factors as exercising far more weight than biological factors in developing gender, and maximally it includes this notion as well as rejects all possible biological influences.[12] Witt also notes that much of the driving energy for the core argument comes from the feminist desire to reject all "patriarchal conceptions of gender, which have tended to be naturalistic."[13]

Critique

The cultural argument's rejection of essentialism has several flaws. Witt notes that if the cultural argument is built upon the premise that essentialism equals biological determinism, then it is unsound because this premise is false.[14] She also sees this argument as offering an unsatisfactory connection between the social constructionist position and anti-essentialism. Marc Cortez expands upon this point by reinforcing that "even if every notable gender difference were shaped in some way by socio-cultural influences, that would not preclude the possibility that those differences are ultimately grounded in biological differences."[15] Even if cultural forces so shape a trait that the

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[12] Charlotte Witt, "Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Theory," *Philosophical Topics* 23, no. 2 (Fall 1995): 324.

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

[14] Witt, "Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Theory," 327.

[15] Cortez, "Reimagining Gender Apophatically."

feature itself is not observable, this inability to observe a trait does not mean that the biological influence of the feature disappears; indeed, the biological explanation for the difference remains more fundamental than the social-cultural influence. To conclude, the cultural argument—that is, merely holding that gender is socially constructed—is not enough to prove essentialism untrue.

Similarity Argument

Summary

The similarity argument rejects gender essentialism by undercutting the premise that significant differences between men and women must be explained. One of the major fronts in which this argument is advanced is the field of neuroscience, where researchers demonstrate the remarkable similarities between male and female brains. Cognitive researchers like Gina Rippon, neuroscientists like Daphna Joel and Luba Vikhanski, and psychologists like Cordelia Fine have tried to undermine the "myth of the male and female brain."[16] All of these researchers rely on advances in neuroscience to demonstrate that there are no universal differences between male and female brains. As Rippon bemoans, "The brain research agenda . . . has been driven by the perceived need to explain the difference between two groups divided by their biological sex . . . . There is currently no good evidence of any relevant differences either in the brains of these two groups or in the behaviors these brains support."[17] She goes on to note that while there are average differences between the groups, the size of these differences is minimal, and any individual difference can be negated through averaging. The position taken by Rippon and others is that given the lack of significant differences between the male and

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[16] Gina Rippon, *Gender and Our Brains: How New Neuroscience Explodes the Myths of the Male and Female Minds* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2019); Daphna Joel and Luba Vikhanski, *Gender Mosaic: Beyond the Myth of the Male and Female Brain* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2019); Cordelia Fine, *Delusions of Gender: How Our Minds, Society, and Neurosexism Create Differences* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010).

[17] Rippon, *Gender and Our Brains*, 351.

female brain, there is no support that biological or structural differences between men and women should be used to explain the differences between masculinity and femininity. Therefore, gender essentialism, since it relies on these categories for explanation, should be rejected.

Critique

The primary issue with the similarity argument is the exceptionally high burden of proof it brings upon itself. For this view to refute gender essentialism, it would need to establish that there are *no* significant differences between men and women. Even if this view is paired with the cultural argument, which affirms that there are no meaningful differences between men and women that cannot be accounted for by social-cultural explanations, it still has difficulty supplying proof that there are no underlying biological or physiological differences that give rise to the social-cultural differences. The differences in reproductive capacity between men and women would likely be an insurmountable obstacle to this approach, given how the differences in maternity and paternity influence society's perception of gender. Furthermore, this view marginalizes the body as it seeks to downplay the embodied realities of human experience by explaining them away.

Continuity Argument

Summary

The continuity argument is like the similarity argument but rejects the ability of gender essentialism to function as a way of classification. It does not view the differences between men and women presented by gender essentialist positions as differences that can lead to the two distinct categories of masculinity and femininity. Instead, it contends that the differences between men and women almost always come in the form of generalizations. For gender essentialism to classify particular roles,

characteristics, or behaviors as either masculine or feminine, much clearer boundaries are needed than generalizations.

Cortez's identification of this argument with the term "continuity" captures aspects of what Witt classifies as the "instability argument," which contends that the instability of all linguistic categories undermines the ability to organize gender. Witt encapsulates the position thus:

> Language is not a transparent mirror of reality but is inherently normative and productive. It is a fun house mirror that distorts as it reflects in a way that images the culture's norms. Essentialism is a mistaken theory because it relies upon a mistaken view of language, roughly of a language that can be purified of its normative, productive, and metaphorical content. Since language cannot be purified, there is no possible essentialist language and hence, no essentialism.[18]

This view posits that no form of language can sufficiently *describe* a woman because it contains covert presuppositions about women. This notion is combined with the view that language has no fixed meaning, resulting in the instability of classifying anything as essentially masculine or feminine.

Critique

In some sense, my critique of gender essentialism in the previous chapter could be classified as a continuity argument. Current forms of gender essentialism exclude persons who should rightly be included in the category in too many instances to serve as the standard way of classifying men and women, as the descriptions given are embodied by both genders differently. While the continuity argument does not represent a definitive refutation of gender essentialism, it does show the challenges of offering functional definitions for maleness and femaleness, given the ambiguous boundaries between the two categories. Moreover, the definitions of male and female offered by those who hold to a strict gender essentialism that ties biological composition to specified roles cannot repudiate the charge of the continuity argument. However, the more nuanced views of

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[18] Witt, "Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Theory," 323.

essentialism, like those offered by Jordan Steffaniak and Patrick Schreiner, are better able to respond since they are aware of this issue and attempt to provide descriptions of masculinity and femininity, respectively, that do not apply to the other gender.[19]

On the other hand, the instability argument summarized by Witt takes a view of language that is incompatible with a view of the existence of absolute truth. This postmodern view of language runs afoul of a Christian worldview and the church's historical perspective concerning God's ability to communicate truth through language. While it is not the purpose of this project to debate linguistic theory, the instability argument would reject more than just essentialism if embraced by one seeking to hold to a biblically informed view of gender.[20]

Exclusion Arguments

Summary

The final category of arguments against essentialism is the exclusion argument, which maintains that all classificatory aspects of essentialism that seek to group humans based on gender differences always exclude some human who would be a good candidate for inclusion in a particular group. The classificatory aspect of gender essentialism is intended to provide a definitive set of criteria so that members of a gender category can be rightly identified. However, the supplied properties or group of properties exclude a significant section of humanity.[21] Cortez provides two examples: aggressiveness and nurturing. If aggressiveness is considered as a characteristic of "maleness," then "what is to be done with those with male bodies who do not exemplify this particular property? In

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[19] Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue," 15-35; Patrick Schreiner, "Man and Woman: Toward an Ontology," *Eikon* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2020): 68-87.

[20] For a detailed critique of a postmodern view of language, see Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009) 303-10.

[21] Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism,'" *Praxis International* 11, no. 2 (1991): 160.

the same way, if nurturing is a characteristic of 'femininity,' what is to be done with those who have female bodies but do not exemplify the trait of nurturing?"[22]

Witt applies the exclusion argument to the problem of a universal theory of women. When any trait or characteristic is presented as the definitive trait representing women, it is the trait or characteristic of a certain race, class, or nationality of women. Just as feminists have pushed back against the universal theory of humanity as being a universal theory of men, Witt critiques feminist essentialists as developing a universal theory of women that is white, upper-middle-class, and Western.[23] In both Witt and Cortez's examples, the problem remains: if one makes some trait essential to belonging to a group, then one must contend with what happens to those excluded from the group. As Cortez notes, any exclusion regarding human gender has significant ramifications.[24]

Critique

Just as with the continuity argument, I find the exclusion argument compelling, and my analysis of gender essentialism could fit in this category. There needs to be a better alternative because of the failures of gender essentialism to function in a classificatory role. However, the exclusion argument does not provide a definitive critique of gender essentialism, for more nuanced presentations—such as those by Steffaniak and Schreiner—are able to define men and women in a way that does not exclude persons who should be included in those categories. Still, this critique points to the importance of careful thought and a warns against simplistic answers concerning such a fundamental category of human existence.

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[22] Cortez, "Reimagining Gender Apophatically."

[23] Witt, "Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Theory," 328.

[24] Cortez, "Reimagining Gender Apophatically."

Final Thoughts

So far, I have presented and responded to the four aforementioned arguments against gender essentialism in turn. However, when gender essentialism is critiqued, critics of gender essentialism often combine these four arguments and use their collective strength to defeat gender essentialism. This challenge underscores a part of the burden of this project: current evangelical discussions of gender, which rely on gender essentialism, do not have definitions that can justify the explanatory and classificatory power their definitions give.

The most common gender essentialist definition for masculinity and femininity is an example: men lead, provide, and protect, while women affirm, receive, and nurture. The four arguments discussed above easily defeat this paradigm. First, the paradigm does not do the work necessary to articulate *why* these traits are ontologically grounded. Instead, it offers a functional definition garnered from a specific interpretation of Scripture, that does not account for how culture shapes this understanding. Schreiner notes that this reliance on only exegetical arguments results in a structural weakness of the position.[25] Second, this paradigm does not account for the similarity between men and women, for it does not consider how members of both genders embody these descriptors in Scripture.[26] As a result, the paradigm has difficulty responding to the critique of exclusion arguments since it does not account for what to do with a woman who leads or a man who nurtures. Finally, the paradigm seems unable to exculpate itself from the critique that it offers generalizations and does not provide distinct categories necessary for classifying gender. While I have already critiqued this paradigm for going beyond

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[25] Schreiner, "Man and Woman," 69-70.

[26] Schreiner, "Man and Woman," 80.

what is biblically warranted, this further challenge demonstrates how the paradigm is also philosophically problematic.[27]

To conclude, the social construction of gender is based on arguments against gender essentialism and arguments in support of the position, with both parts' serving to bolster the adoption of the social constructionist position. While the arguments against gender essentialism do not necessitate the adoption of the social construction of gender, they do (1) demonstrate the issues facing current forms of evangelical gender essentialism and (2) establish the philosophical burden that any alternative position must overcome.

I will now consider the arguments in favor of the social construction of gender by examining its historical development and evaluating the views of specific proponents of the position.

The Social Construction of Gender

As Fellipe do Vale clarifies, there is no singular view of the social construction of gender. Still, the position represents a family of opinions clustered around some primary principles and convictions.[28] To rightly understand this view, I will first provide a brief historical sketch to explain how it developed over time.[29] Then, I will present the works of Sally Haslanger, Kathryn Tanner, and Judith Butler to illustrate three different

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[27] One of the major errors those who hold to this paradigm make is that they are imprecise when they make the move from discussing aspirational traits that men and women should strive for to offering definitions of masculinity and femininity. When this discussion turns from describing a way to live to defining gender, proponents of this view seem unaware of the extraordinary philosophical burden of proof they have just brought upon themselves.

[28] Do Vale, "Gender as Love," 42.

[29] This historical sketch focuses specifically on the articulation of the social construction of gender and does not explore the underlying worldview associated with each thinker. Since this sketch covers a significant period of time, there are other philosophical and societal shifts going on, especially the move from theism to naturalism, which could explain the social constructionist position. While I acknowledge the significance of the underlying worldview, this sketch is concerned with the development of the social construction of gender itself. For a detailed analysis of the philosophical factors at play in this period see 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).

contemporary ways the social construction of gender takes shape. Finally, I will offer four critiques of the social construction of gender.

Historical Development

The view that gender is socially constructed did not rise to prominence until the 1960s and 1970s during the second wave of feminism. However, the idea is much older, having first developed around the seventeenth century. In this section, I will trace the emergence and development of this idea through the views of François Poulain de la Barre (1647-1723), John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), and Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986).[30] While many have contributed to the rise and development of this idea to its present form, these three offer unique contributions that help clarify both the view and its reception.[31]

Two common themes are present in these three views. First, these views arise from a deep concern for justice and equality for women. Thus, the development of the social construction of gender is coterminous with the origins of feminist reasoning. Second, all three views argue for the social construction of gender based on humanity's epistemic access to the components of human nature. They challenged the predominant view that a trait's being observed to be chief among women does not mean that the trait is natural to women.

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[30] I follow the work of do Vale in selecting these three figures; see do Vale, "Gender as Love," 45-66.

[31] For a full history of feminist thought, see Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, vol. 3, *The Search for Communion of Persons, 1500-2015* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

François Poulain de la Barre

François Poulain de la Barre was born in Paris in 1647 into a Roman Catholic family.[32] Poulain studied throughout France and was introduced to the thinking of René Descartes in the 1670s and early 1680s. From Descartes, Poulain learned to be suspicious of claims of authority and developed many of the epistemic methods he would apply to questions regarding the equality of men and women. Poulain wrote several books on this subject, his most famous being *A Physical and Moral Discourse on the Equality of Both Sexes, Which Shows That It Is Important to Rid Oneself of Prejudices* (1673).[33]

Poulain titles his treatise this way because, in his estimation, there is no prejudice more glaring than the commonly accepted view of the inequality of the sexes. He elaborates,

> 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 was false and is based on prejudice and popular belief; the other was that the two sexes are equal, this is, that women are as noble, as perfect, as capable as men.[34]

Poulain was unwilling to accept the prevailing view of his day of the natural inequality of the sexes, viewing it as epistemic prejudice, an early expression of frustration at social conceptions used to marginalize women.

The epistemological principle guiding Poulain's work was a motivation to disallow prejudice in his mind. This motivation is captured well when he states that it "would be a mistake to accept the way things occur in people's minds as the way they

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

[33] Poulain's Cartesian influence shows up in the opening paragraphs of his treatise when he states, "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 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 to acquire clear and distinct knowledge." François Poulain de la Barre, "A Physical and Moral Discourse Concerning the Equality of Both Sexes," in *The Equality of the Sexes: Three Feminist Text of the Seventeenth Century*, trans. Desmond M. Clarke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 119.

[34] Poulain, "A Physical and Moral Discourse," 120.

occur in nature because the former does not give us an idea of the latter."[35] To determine if inequality is natural to the sexes, Poulain asserts that one must be careful to test whether the hypotheses produce prejudices rather than accurate knowledge of reality. Poulain concludes that those who believe women's inequality to be a natural state have failed to undergo the necessary examination and have fallen prey to the "incapacity fallacy." The incapacity fallacy is the inverse of the logically sound scholastic principle *ab esse ad posse valet illation* ("from the fact that something is the case, it is valid to conclude that it is possible"); the incapacity fallacy negates both the condition and the consequence claiming that if something *is not the case*, then it follows that *it is not possible*.[36] Poulain refutes the incapacity fallacy, stating that the fact that something is not the case for women does not entail that it cannot be the case for women. Similarly, Poulain rejects the claim that the fact that something has always been the case for women entails that it could not be otherwise. Because the view of women in Poulain's day was based upon a faulty hypothesis, he rejected it as erroneous knowledge, concluding that "the common view about women is a popular and ill-fated prejudice."[37]

Poulain critiques the commonly held belief of the inferiority of women by providing an alternative hypothesis. He posits that the societal restrictions placed upon women are unnatural because they *could have been otherwise*, meaning that women's social inequality is not a result of something naturally inherent to women but could have been otherwise if social factors were different. Poulain's hypothesis is that the social factor of excluding women from education has resulted in the inequality of the genders;

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[35] Poulain, "A Physical and Moral Discourse," 155.

[36] Poulain, *De l'education des dames*, quoted in Clarke, introduction to *The Equality of the Sexes*, 38.

[37] Poulain, "A Physical and Moral Discourse," 146.

this hypothesis is the earliest form of a social constructionist view of gender.[38] He

concludes,

> 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 safety of women—if women held all authority, as they did in the amazon's empire.[39]

In other words, if women were provided different opportunities, then they would be able

to do anything men could.[40]

John Stuart Mill

The rise of the social constructionist position continued with John Stuart Mill,

who was born in 1806 in London as the son of the utilitarian philosopher James Mill.

While John Mill enjoyed much success in his professional and political pursuits (e.g., his

various triumphs include the influential treatise *On Liberty*), his key work on gender, *The*

Subjection of Women (1869), did not enjoy commercial success. In that work, he avers,

> 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.[41]

Similar to Poulain, Mill rejects the inequality he observes between the sexes and claims

that a principle of equality should replace this inequality. Again, like Poulain's notions,

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[38] Poulain, "A Physical and Moral Discourse," 18.

[39] Poulain, "A Physical and Moral Discourse," 149. Poulain references the Amazonian empire, a society where females held the authority to rule, as an example of where the legal subjection of women was removed. He appeals to this context to illustrate the possibility of a society existing with women in authority.

[40] Clarke notes that Poulain held to a sex/gender distinction, which is a required first step in thinking that gender is a social construct. Clarke, introduction to *The Equality of the Sexes*, 43n90.

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

this claim is grounded on the agnosticism that Mill believes humans should have concerning their knowledge of nature. Mill thinks that the nature of women cannot be known because they exist in a distorted state marred by inequality and subjection. The notion that the female condition exists in a distorted state is a departure from Mill's commitment that all people ought to exist in a state of social and legal equity.[42] Mill expresses his frustration with the distorted state of women emphatically:

> In regard to the most difficult question, what are the natural differences between the two sexes—a subject on which it is impossible to the present state of society to obtain complete and correct knowledge—while almost everybody dogmatizes upon it, almost all neglect and make light of the only means by which any partial insight can be obtained into it.[43]

Echoing Poulain's argument, Mill asserts that it is impossible to know whether a person is capable of performing a particular task unless she is given the chance to be successful at it; for example, it is impossible to see if it is against the nature of women to vote unless they have been allowed to vote. Given the limitations placed upon women in his day, Mill concluded that social forces exercise a more significant role in forming cultural expectations and performances of women than their natures do. He acknowledges the possibility that the inequality between men and women is a result of nature but finds it much more likely that social forces bear the bulk of the responsibility for producing the traits commonly associated with masculinity and femininity. Hence, Mill represents another case for gender as a construction of social forces.

Simone de Beauvoir

The final historical figure important for this brief sketch is Simone de Beauvoir, who is closest to contemporary thought on gender and whose views have had the most significant impact on the current landscape. Beauvoir was familiar with the

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[42] This is a central claim in Mill's work *On Liberty*.

[43] Mill, "The Subjection of Women," 140.

work of Poulain and Mill and advanced both of their ideas in her work *The Second Sex* (1949), where she makes explicit the distinction between sex and gender.[44] Debra Bergoffen and Megan Burke say of Beauvoir's work, "*The Second Sex* gave us a vocabulary for analyzing the social constructions of femininity and a method for critiquing these constructions."[45] Beauvoir provided this method by asking the question "What is a woman?"[46]

Beauvoir's central argument is (1) that it is problematic to believe that being a woman is a matter of having a certain biological make-up *and* (2) that one can fail to be a woman. "Beauvoir is writing at a time when it was commonly asserted that there is a 'feminine essence' to which women need to aspire, with the result that 'functioning as 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."[47] Responding to the idea of a feminine essence, Beauvoir observes that biological properties, such the ability to give birth, and cultural properties, such as being seen viewed as feminine, require different conditions. Since the biological properties do not automatically satisfy the conditions of the social properties, Beauvoir concludes that sex and gender are distinguishable. If what is needed to be of a particular sex (understood biologically) is not the same as what is required to be of a certain gender (understood culturally), then sex is not the same thing as gender.

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[44] Some Beauvoir interpreters deny that she held this distinction. See Nancy Baur, *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy and Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Toril Moi, *What Is a Woman? And Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pt. 1. Baur and Moi claim that it is only by reading Beauvoir in light of the work of Judith Butler that Beauvoir can be seen as a social constructionist. However, this chapter follows the predominant view concerning Beauvoir since this interpretation has significantly influenced the counterparty landscape.

[45] Debra Bergoffen and Megan Burke, "Simone de Beauvoir," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified January 11, 2023, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/beauvoir/.

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

[47] Do Vale, "Gender as Love," 61.

Beauvoir concludes that in terms of gender, to be a woman is to be an "inessential Other."[48] Because of the social standards and confinements applied to women, Beauvoir argues that women are precluded from any opportunity to engage in projects necessary for meaning because they have been denied the freedom to do so. This inability to engage in projects necessary for meaning is what Beauvoir means by "inessential."[49] This condition is not something that women lack (which could be regained if women regained their freedoms), but it is part of the definition of being a woman that one should lack these freedoms and fail to create meaning and achieve authenticity.

Regarding sex, Beauvoir follows Poulain and Mill in expressing criticism of what is deemed natural for women. While she admits that "division of sex is a biological fact, not an event in human history,"[50] she views most of the properties that are considered to be natural to women as actually being shaped by social forces. Beauvoir sees a pattern of biology's being used as justification for the subjection of women. The pattern she highlights is when an observed fact of biology (e.g., the physical differences between men and women) is extrapolated to become a social norm (e.g., "women cannot possess this social role because they are weaker than men"). However, Beauvoir argues that there is nothing intrinsic to physical differences that necessitates any one particular social order. While there may be room for biological sexes, there should not be prescriptions for gender that are drawn from differences between the sexes.[51] Instead,

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

[49] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Citadel Press, 1976), 112. According to Beauvoir, an authentic life is a life full of meaning creation. Since women are unable to create meaning, they are unable to fulfill the purpose of living an authentic life and are, therefore, inessential.

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

[51] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 269.

social factors are much more important in shaping femininity, as Beauvoir expresses in her famous conclusion, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."[52]

Summary and Final Thoughts

Poulain, Mill, and Beauvoir all make important and unique advancements for the advocacy of the social construction of gender, and each follows a similar pattern in developing his or her conclusions. Each begins by observing inequality between men and women in society and is suspicious of the claims that such inequality is grounded in something "natural." Next, each explains the inequality in terms of unjust social conditions and offers an alternative explanation for the gender features in question, striving to show how social factors (i.e., expectations and restrictions) cause and define these features. This explanation allows each to consider a world where the "natural" categories that restrict women do not exist. Finally, each is still faced with how to relate the categories of biology/sex with society/gender, and each opts to define gender in light of social construction.

Contemporary Perspective

When one surveys contemporary perspectives on gender, one discovers that similarities and differences emerge compared to the historical account. What remains the same is the conclusion that gender is a social construct; however, there are significant differences in methods, conclusions, and implications. The historical figures I have surveyed above all held some form of epistemic agnosticism regarding human nature. In contrast, many contemporary social construct theorists have transitioned to a metaphysical revision of natures, with some claiming that there is no such thing as nature. While Poulain, Mill, and Beauvoir hesitated to address metaphysics, contemporary thought has taken a decidedly metaphysical turn. In what follows, I will examine the

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

works of Sally Haslanger, Kathryn Tanner, and Judith Butler to show three different contemporary ways in which the social construction of gender takes shape.[53]

Sally Haslanger

Sally Haslanger was one of the first in the field of analytical philosophy to give explicit attention to the metaphysics of gender. She develops her book *Resisting Reality* around this central thesis: "Genders are those social positions, within a particular culture, constituted by how sexed beings are viewed and treated."[54] To support her thesis, Haslanger first develops a broader view of social construction within which her specific view of gender is situated. She labels this widest layer of social construction "gender social construction": "Something is a social construction in the gender sense just in case it is an intended or unintended product of social practice."[55] In the broadest sense, this category of social construction is intended to encompass both social entities doing the constructing (e.g., a library or school that creates and shapes culture) and the result of social construction (e.g., dog breeds).

Haslanger envisions within generic social construction three alternative ways that socially constructed artifacts can be observed: things are (1) *socially distinguished*, (2) *socially caused*, and (3) *socially constituted*.[56] First, something is socially distinguished if it is classified according to certain criteria developed by society. Haslanger notes that classification has the "power to both establish and reinforce

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[53] I have chosen these three thinkers to represent the nuances of views within the social construction of gender. Haslanger approaches the topic as a philosopher; Tanner approaches the topic as a theologian; Judith Butler, while also a philosopher, is the most notable feminist scholar of the past three decades and extends the social construction of gender further than Haslanger's conclusions.

[54] Sally Haslanger, *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 196. Since *Resisting Reality* is a collection of essays, there is no single thesis. However, each essay is consistent with the emphasis found in this statement.

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

[56] Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 190.

groupings that may eventually come to 'fit' the classifications."[57] She provides the

example of "jocks" and "nerds," observing that distinguishing between the two groups

creates a culture for each group.

Second, something is socially caused when social factors play a causal role of

bringing something into existence.[58] Haslanger offers the example of dog breeds: dog

breeds exist because humans have bred different types of dogs through the social process

of husbandry.[59] Haslanger maintains that gender is causally constructed because social

practices have created expectations that inform what is typically understood to make up

masculinity and femininity.

Third, something is socially constituted when it is defined in terms of social

relationships held between members of each category.[60] Haslanger's thesis is that gender

is a socially constituted reality, which means that "gender is not 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."[61] In other words, Haslanger maintains that gender is a social construct not

because society has caused the expectations attached to different genders but because of

the social relations required of each gender.[62] The norms and expectations of a society

upon members of each gender are a result of the relations between the members.

Haslanger's categories of socially distinguished, socially caused, and socially

constituted are not subdivisions of generic social construction but are all facets of how

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

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

[59] Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 190.

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

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

[62] Haslanger would not deny that gender is socially caused, but her main point is that the social construction of gender goes beyond gender's being something socially caused to gender's being something socially constituted.

societal norms are formed and reinforced. To illustrate, society might first socially distinguish something, such that women are smarter than men. This distinguishing between genders highlights the differences between the two groups. Then, this distinguishing causes expectations for how society views women and men and how members of each group feel expected to behave. These expectations are socially caused, which then often reinforces the socially distinguished construction. Finally, society might structure itself upon these distinctions, deciding that women, because of their greater intelligence, are more fit to lead. This decision then creates the socially constituted set of relationships between men and women in society, creating the norm where women lead because of their greater intelligence. While Haslanger would, no doubt, say that her view is more complex than this illustration, the point is twofold: (1) the categories of social construction are not fixed divisions but angles of viewing social construction, and (2) Haslanger's main thesis is that the social construction of gender ends in the production of social norms formed on social relationships, which is even more than merely stating that society has caused the expectations. In sum, according to Haslanger, gender is both socially caused and, more importantly, socially constituted because it is society that creates the norms, expectations, and roles that define what it means to be a certain gender.

Kathryn Tanner

While Haslanger approaches the social construction of gender from an analytic philosophical perspective, Kathryn Tanner arrives at a similar conclusion from a theological vantage point, striving to articulate how theology is wrapped up in culture and how culture influences the traits of theology. For Tanner, the social construction of gender is not an abnormal category. Indeed, all of reality is socially constructed, including the theology of theologians. Yet the social construction of theology allows

theology to analyze the social construction of gender in ways that depict a new social vision for women and men.

In Tanner's framework, Christology holds the key to social principles and provides an understanding of the ontology of human persons and their genders.[63] In looking for answers about human nature in Christology, Tanner concludes that human nature has a "lack of given definition, malleability through outside influence, unbounded character, and general openness to radical transformation."[64] Tanner begins her project with the affirmation that only Christ can be rightly said to be in the image of God because, according to his divine nature, he possesses *in se* everything necessary for perfectly imaging divinity. She states, "A perfect image of God can only be a divine image . . . . Creatures by definition do not share the divine nature; and consequently, human beings cannot be images of God in this way."[65] Humanity experiences approximate participation in the image of God through their union with Christ, which the Spirit establishes. Tanner notes, "[Humans] are created to have within themselves something they are not";[66] that is, to be made human is to be made for union with Christ.

Tanner develops from this emphasis on union with Christ the conclusion that it is imprecise to think of human nature as a list of intrinsic properties; rather, the properties that constitute human nature are extrinsic properties that exist by one's relationship with others. Tanner concludes, "Human nature must be characterized by an expansive openness that allows for the presence of God within it. It must be the nature that has or

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[63] Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key*, Current Issues in Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

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

[65] Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 6.

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

makes room for the divine within its basic operations."[67] Human nature is defined by its relationship both to itself and to Christ.

Tanner moves from this conclusion concerning the image of God and human nature to human ontology. She states,

> 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 to take on a specific form only as shaped by environmental inputs.[68]

While some capacities and natural faculties are necessary to be human, there is no prescribed way these should be exercised. Mirroring her understanding of the image of God, Tanner believes that human nature is significantly influenced by extrinsic dimensions that constitute human beings: "One might say these self-formative capacities are determined by human nature, but the peculiar nature of humans as rational agents is just to have no particular nature to be true to."[69] Tanner refers to this reality as human *plasticity*—that what it means to be human cannot be understood apart from the particular cultural and social influence on natural capacities, a feature she extends to all natural capacities, including bodies. In relating the human body to Christ, Tanner believes that given the extrinsic determinations even for human physical bodies, the social exercise of natural faculties, particularly when exercised in relationship to Christ, exists in a state of continual flux.[70]

Because of both her Christology and her wide understanding of culture, Tanner holds that every aspect of life is socially constructed, including gender and theology. This view frees theologians to study and critique the way gender is formed within societies in

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

[68] Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 42-43.

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

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

order to explore "the way oppression is built into the normal process of everyday life by the way of stereotypes and unquestioned norms, assumptions, and symbols."[71] The way feminist theologians can remove oppression is through the reconfiguration of Christian symbols, doctrines, and figures, dislodging the current meanings of gender in favor of less problematic conceptions of femininity. Theologians can perform this reconfiguring because the meaning associated with any object is only relatively secure as it contends with the forces of society.[72] Tanner provides an example of this approach in an essay where she evaluates whether it is right to retain Anglican liturgical references to God the Father and God the Son. Tanner analyzes the historical views of the church in an effort to demonstrate that the labels of Father and Son were meant to exclude any creaturely or corporeal elements from their connotations. Tanner concludes that this view allows for other names, especially biblical ones like "Word" or "Wisdom," to counterbalance any potentially sexist understandings and usages of "Father" and "Son."[73] In this way, Tanner connects theology with the social construction of gender as theologians identify the social meaning of theology with its impact on the social construct of gender.

Judith Butler

Judith Butler is one of the most influential gender theorists of the contemporary moment, with her work generating both significant impact and broad appeal.[74] Butler goes beyond the other theories considered so far to assert that gender *and*

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[71] Kathryn Tanner, "The Difference Theological Anthropology Makes," *Theology Today* 50, no. 4 (January 1994): 182.

[72] 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), 185-86.

[73] 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.

[74] Butler has influenced the work of several theologians, such as Mary McClintock-Fulkerson, "Gender—Being It or Doing It? The Church, Homosexuality, and the Politics of Identity," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 47, nos. 1-2 (January 1993): 29-46.

sex are social constructs. Butler's view that maleness and femaleness are categories connected to biological facts are an example of a broad constructionist form of reality. She is less concerned with the social construction of gender, since she understands the diversity of women as affirming the veracity of this view, and instead takes aim at sex, seeking to prove that feminism is best "only when the subject of 'woman' is nowhere presumed."[75]

Butler's critique is centered on her dismissal of what she labels 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 (masculinity expresses male, femininity expresses female) that is appositionally and hierarchically defined through the complex practice of heterosexuality.[76]

The heterosexual matrix is the prevailing grid by which concepts of sex and gender are produced and given meaning. The products of this matrix then go on to establish how many genders there are, how many sexes there are, what the conditions for inclusion within these categories are, and how these categories relate to one another. The heterosexual matrix is a product of culture and is the predominant interpretive lens for culture, meaning that anything produced by this matrix is viewed as socially constructed. This matrix provides the models for sex and gender:

> The institution of compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from the feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practice of heterosexual desire . . . . [T]he categories of female and male, woman and man, are simply produced within the binary frame.[77]

Butler's theory endeavors to dismiss this matrix.

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[75] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 8.

[76] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 208n6.

[77] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 31.

Butler claims that it is only within the heterosexual matrix that sex appears to be a natural, given category developed apart from culture. However, when one begins to question the conditions required to be one sex or the other, one should conclude that these conditions are just as much the product of history and culture as gender. Butler's work repeatedly questions why certain genotypical and phenotypical traits make one male and other traits make one female, concluding that all traits are merely the conceptual product of the heterosexual matrix.[78] These conceptual products have a history and could have been otherwise: "Sexual difference 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, normative."[79] Butler also writes, "If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender."[80] In sum, according to Butler, sex and gender are social constructs because they are products of the heterosexual matrix, which is itself a cultural production.

Butler works out the metaphysical grounding for this view and responds to critiques of her view more formally in her work *Bodies That Matter*. In response to critiques that accuse her of denigrating the body's materiality, she insists that she is willing to affirm the materiality of the body; however, in her affirmation, she significantly revises how the body is typically understood. For Butler, "matter" is "a process of materialization that stabilizes overtime to produce the effects of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter."[81] Butler does not refer to matter as a physical substance but employs the word as a verb—things *matter* when taken descriptively and

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[78] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 156; Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), xii.

[79] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xi.

[80] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 9.

[81] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xviii.

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verbally. In this way, matter is no less a part of the heterosexual matrix than sex and gender. For something to have materialized, it must have obtained some fixed and stable boundaries as produced by its historical interaction with the matrix. For Butler, bodies that matter are not bodies made up of material components but are bodies that have undergone the process of social construction to reach fixed and stable boundaries.[82] This explanation by Butler provides some clarity concerning how she perceives her view to not denigrate the body's materiality, although significant ambiguity persists regarding how Butler relates bodies with specific material components, such as sex organs, to the social construction of gender and sex.[83]

Summary and Final Thoughts

While the views of Poulaine, Mill, and Beauvoir showed significant similarity as the social construction of gender developed in its early stages, the differences between the views of Haslanger, Tanner, and Butler illustrate the contemporary landscape of the social construction of gender. Each of the historical figures surveyed attempted to relate the categories of sex and gender to each other. The contemporary perspective, however, holds as a given that gender and sex are disconnected from each other. Additionally, while Haslanger, Tanner, and Butler would all conclude that gender is socially constructed, each would provide a different answer for why this is so. For Haslanger, it is society that creates the norms, expectations, and roles that define what it means to be a certain gender. For Tanner, it is the notion of human plasticity, seen most clearly in believers' change in status given our relationship to Christ, that grounds her conclusion that gender is socially constructed. Finally, for Butler, gender *and* sex are social constructs because they are products of the heterosexual matrix, which is itself a cultural production. All three authors conclude that gender is a social construction, yet they each

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[82] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xx.

[83] For a critique of Butler, see do Vale, "Gender as Love," 107-13.

employ a distinct method to arrive at this conclusion. For this reason, I will focus my critique in the next section on the conclusion that gender is socially constructed.

**Critiquing the Social Construction
of Gender**

While the social construction of gender occupies the predominant view among gender theorists, it is not without its issues. I will provide four critiques: the social construction of gender (1) results in gender skepticism as the categories of man and woman are unidentifiable as such, (2) leads to the diminishing (or the complete removal) of the moral categories associated with gender, (3) contradicts the biblical teaching of the importance of embodied existence, and (4) is inconsistent with Scripture's framework of gender.

Gender Skepticism

One of the primary reasons offered for embracing the social construction of gender is that it solves the "exclusion problem," the view that classifications of gender based on perceived gender differences tend to exclude persons who seem to be of that gender. Embracing the social construction of gender is intended to rectify this issue by offering a theoretical framework that includes the various social dimensions excluded by other theories. While the social construction of gender may initially appear to accomplish this objective, it merely shifts the exclusion to a different place. As do Vale explains in his critique, the "social constructionist view commits one to the conclusion that there is no one social kind, 'women' (and *mutatis mutandis* for any other gender); rather, there are numerically distinct social kinds corresponding to different times and place."[84] In the process of showing that women are not born but are made, social constructions are faced with the conclusion that different social contexts must make different types of men and

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[84] Do Vale, "Gender as Love," 88.

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different types of women; thus, it is impossible to speak of men as such and women as such. This conclusion is consistent with the philosopher Ásta's account of the metaphysics of social construction—that "gender is radically context-dependent," meaning not only that different historical periods or different geographic locations allow for different contexts but even that "the same geographical location and period can allow for radically different contexts, so that a person may count as a certain gender in some context and not others."[85] As social constructionism seeks to identify men and women, what emerges is not a historically continuous social kind but an infinite number of social kinds given unique identifiers that indicate their historical, geographic, and racial/ethnic contexts. When this reality is considered, what emerges are different genders, not the same gender with different conditions. Consequently, there are no longer men or women as such but as many genders as there are temporal and cultural modifiers.

This position is profoundly unintuitive and troubling, especially when compared to Scripture, for it takes gender, which is more foundational than any other particularity and makes it subject to less fundamental particularities. While all particularities—the conditions for being an individual—are necessary for identifying oneself as a specific person, particularities such as race/ethnicity and historical situatedness do not modify the type of gender, as gender is the most fundamental particularity of human existence.[86] When God creates humanity according to his image, he distinguishes them among two types: male and female (Gen 1:26-27). While males and females do not account for the totality of the diversity present within humanity, this created difference does demonstrate that there is no particularity more fundamental than gender, as no other particularity grounds establishing humanity according to a different type.

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[85] Ásta, *Categories We Live By*, 73-74.

[86] Gregg R. Allison, *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2021), 48.

When the social construction of gender makes other particularities more fundamental than gender, the result is an exchange of a universal category of male and female for diluted categories based upon infinite possible social contexts. Following the logic that women are formed and not made, the product is always dependent upon the specific factors of the social environment. Therefore, the production of two comparable women would require the same social factors. While obtaining the same social factors might be possible with women of similar race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geographic and historical situatedness, as soon as any of these factors are changed, the "women" who are formed by this culture are no longer comparable to the "women" formed by another culture. Can one really compare the women formed by the cultural conditions of the nineteenth-century industrial economy and who lived within New York City's highest social tier with the women formed by the cultural conditions of sub-Saharan Africa nomadic existence in the same period? What results is the noun "woman" with a string of modifying particularities compared with the noun "woman" with a different string of modifying particularities (e.g., woman (period), (culture), (race/ethnicity), (economic class), (etc.)). This need to provide modifying particularities undermines one's ability to speak of the male or female category across culture, history, and other particularities.

The social construction of gender makes any generalizations impossible, as there is no longer a category for men or women. This view results in complete skepticism regarding gender and undermines many of the assumptions of the philosophers, theologians, and theorists who advance the argument, as all rely on being able to discuss "women" as such or "women's relationship to God." The loss of the category of "women" destroys the practice of feminism and, ultimately, undermines the Bible's revelation of humanity's creation according to two distinct types.

Removal of Moral Categories

Serene Jones illuminates a second problem with the social construction of gender when she laments, "If no single description of women's lives is correct and all are equally valid, what standards are available for assessing harm to the nature of justice and injustice in women's lives? Don't we need normative standards for assessing what is good and bad?"[87] The metaphysics of gender construction leave no satisfactory answer to Jones's question because if the necessary conditions that establish the social construction of gender are context-specific, then the moral norms associated with gender behavior will also be context specific. This dynamic renders any moral judgments about the behavior of men or women void.

Imagine a culture that constructs a definition of masculinity that includes the appropriateness of rape and a disregard of women's rights. The logic of the social constructionist position would be unable to render any moral judgment against men who commit rape or disregard women's rights aside from the set of moral standards that are developed within that same culture.[88] This ethical quandary is repugnant and seems to thwart the sense of justice that motivates many to pursue the social construction of gender. Furthermore, the social construction of morality is completely counter to Scripture's teaching on universal moral standards grounded in the character of God, which is not culturally dependent.[89]

Marginalization of Embodiment

Foundational to the theory of the social construction of gender is a disconnecting of sex and gender that results from a dismissal of biological essentialism as

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[87] Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace*, Guides to Theological Inquiry (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 41-42.

[88] Do Vale illustrates this very case with the men of the Pitcairn Island; see do Vale, "Gender as Love," 99-100.

[89] See, e.g., the instructions to husbands and wives in Eph 5:22-33, the instructions given to young women and young men in Titus 2:2-6, and the declaration that David's actions concerning Bathsheba and Uriah were morally wrong before God in 2 Sam 12-13 (cf. Ps 51).

capable of conveying meaning about gender. This theory results in a generic view of the human body where its physiological features are only given meaning due to their social recognition and are not meaning-generating components in and of themselves. By disconnecting biological essentialism from conceptions of gender, the social conception of gender seems to downplay or dismiss that the differences between men and women have a real physically embodied component. One illustration of this issue comes from Kathryn Tanner, whose view of the social construction of gender requires an understanding of the human body as "plastic" or in a state of flux. Such "plasticity" denies the created aspect of the embodied human experience: humans cannot merely change their physical bodies based on their perception but have been given a specific body with which to live. As identified in chapter 2, Scripture always associates gender with the human body and does not have a category for gender as disconnected from embodiment. To be embodied is inherently to be limited, meaning that one can only have one type of body. While changes in behavior, the expression of virtues, the pursuit of interests, and other human actions can be understood as plastic, the physical body and those things grounded in it—namely, gender—are fixed givens.[90]

Another issue with the social construction of gender is how it collapses gender into one of many other particularities of human experience. As illustrated above, when gender becomes context-dependent, any universal category for gender is lost. Instead, there are as many genders as social contexts to create them. As a result, gender as a distinct category of embodiment is overshadowed in light of individual particularity. No longer does gender provide any insight into self-identity or offer a guide to living within a specific context. Instead, other particularities—such as geographic, historical, and cultural situatedness—are given priority over gender in defining human existence. This

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[90] For further discussion of how humans are shaped by our limits, see Kelly M. Kapic, *You're Only Human: How Your Limits Reflect God's Design and Why That's Good News* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2022).

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overshadowing of gender significantly reduces a critical aspect of what it means for humanity to be created as male and female in the image of God (Gen 1:27). No longer are there two types of humanity; instead, there are as many types as there are particularities. To avoid this problem, gender should be fixed before other particularities and recognized as a category whose expression will differ based on cultural factors. Given how central embodiment is to human existence, care should be taken to ensure that gender does not marginalize the body.

Biblically Problematic

When compared to each of the five aspects of the framework for a biblical conception of gender, the social construction of gender is found to be wanting. I have already shown how this constellation of views problematically disconnects gender and embodiment[91] and does not affirm gender binarity;[92] but in addition, the view of gender that is left does not acknowledge or celebrate—as Scripture does—the distinctions between males and females.[93] Even as the social construction of gender strives to eliminate some of the negative aspects of gender polarity, predominantly female inferiority, it does so not by valuing ontological equality between the genders but by trying to create cultural forces that allow women to "transcend" their femaleness. Simone de Beauvoir's concept of "woman as 'other'" and Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity deny the inherent goodness of femaleness.[94] Instead, they consider gender differences to be unnatural constructions to which women are forced to adhere. While

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[91] This is the first condition of a biblical conception of gender listed in chapter 2: "(1) All conceptions of gender must be grounded in human embodiment."

[92] This is the fourth condition of a biblical conception of gender listed in chapter 2: "(4) All conceptions of gender must affirm a male-female gender binary."

[93] This is the third condition of a biblical conception of gender listed in chapter 2: "(3) All conceptions of gender must acknowledge and celebrate the distinctions between males and females."

[94] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 761; Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519-31.

Beauvoir and Butler represent two views within the spectrum of the social construction of gender, their impulse to see maleness and femaleness as something to overcome instead of something to celebrate is a common theme within the constellation of views and problematic when compared to Scripture's teaching on gender.

Additionally, while the social construction of gender strives to dismiss the notion that men and women are ontologically different or unequal, it does not necessarily replace this notion with a view of ontological equality.[95] For example, Butler rejects any ontological inequality between men and women because she believes ontological discussions are attempts to obscure the true motive of the speaker—power.[96] Instead of countering a view of ontological inequality between men and women with a view of ontological equality between the two, Butler concludes that any attempt to discern ontological truth about gender is merely an attempt to exert power.

Again, it would be an overstatement to assume that everyone who holds to the social construction of gender agrees with Butler's view of ontology. However, her writing features an explicit denial of the biblical commitment to the ontological equality of men and women. She dismisses all forms of complementarity between men and women as social fiction and replaces ontological equality with knowledge-power. The result is that Butler's position contradicts Scripture's concept of gender, which affirms the ontological equality between men and women.

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[95] This is the second condition of a biblical conception of gender listed in chapter 2: "(2) All conceptions of gender must recognize the ontological equality between males and females."

[96] Butler relies on the philosophical framework of Michel Foucault to conclude that what one perceives to be "real" is a fiction created and enforced by institutional power. According to Foucault, truth is either unknowable or nonexistent; all that remains is power. Knowledge, therefore, is not a matter of decerning truth because truth is a construction of power. Foucault uses the term "knowledge-power" to encapsulate this idea, which Butler then applies specifically to the ability to discern truth associated with gender. See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Vintage, 1980). Butler applies "knowledge-power" to gender. See Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 24.

Summary

While the social construction of gender represents the predominant view among gender theorists today, its dismissal of gender essentialism is incorrect. Though it can take many forms, the theory of the social construction of gender is founded on the premise that gender and sex are distinct realities and that all of the norms, characteristics, roles, and expectations associated with masculinity and femininity are culturally derived and constructed. While this view promises to offer a way forward so that no person is wrongly excluded from the category of men and women and attempts to find a way to eliminate any inherent inferiority between the genders, the theory does not accomplish all to which it aspires. The social construction of gender is problematic because when gender is the product of social forces, no longer do men and women remain men and women as such; instead, there are as many genders as there are cultures to define them. Moreover, morality related to masculine and feminine behavior becomes culturally dependent, with no way to protect women from marginalization or harm if cultural conceptions of masculinity allow for such demeaning and evil actions.

Furthermore, the social construction of gender marginalizes the embodied existence of humanity, disregarding the vital role created bodies play in play in forming human identity. In the end, the social construction of gender either denies or has a deficient view of all five criteria outlined in the framework for a biblical conception of gender. For these reasons, the social construction of gender is not a desirable theory for determining what it means to be male and female or for defining what constitutes a man or a woman. Hence, an alternative approach should be sought out.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the position that gender is a social construct, ultimately finding it to be wanting. First, I identified that the social construction of gender holds to a revisionary disjunctive view regarding the relationship of sex and gender, which views gender as socially grounded. Gender is not directly related to biological sex; rather, the

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social norms that culture places on individuals determine and define gender. This view is predominant in academic discussions of gender today and is often assumed as the intuitive way to view gender.

Second, since the social construction of gender is often paired with rejections of gender essentialism, I evaluated four arguments against gender essentialism: the (1) cultural argument, (2) similarity argument, (3) continuity argument, and (4) exclusion argument. (1) The cultural argument holds that while there are significant differences between the genders, these differences are culturally grounded. The main issue with this argument's rejection of gender essentialism is that simply holding to social construction is not enough to prove essentialism untrue. Even if the cultural forces that shape a trait are not observable, this does not mean that the biological influence of the feature disappears; indeed, the biological explanation for the difference remains more fundamental than the social-cultural influence. (2) The similarity argument rejects gender essentialism on the premise that differences between men and women do not need to be explained. The primary issue with this argument is the exceptionally high burden of proof it brings upon itself. For this view to refute gender essentialism, it would need to establish that there are *no* significant differences between men and women. (3) The continuity argument rejects gender essentialism's ability to function as a classification system for gender. While this argument does address the limitations of certain forms of gender essentialism, it does not defeat forms that are nuanced in their classification. Furthermore, this argument is often paired with a view of language that dismisses the ability to hold to absolute truth—a view incompatible with the Christian worldview. (4) The exclusion argument holds that the classificatory aspects of essentialism that seek to group humans based on gender differences always exclude some human who would be a good candidate for inclusion in a particular group. While this critique should encourage greater nuance and clarity within presentations of gender essentialism, there are forms of

essentialism—such as those offered by Patrick Schreiner and Jordan Steffaniak—that could defend themselves from this view.

Third, I provided a historical sketch of the social construction of gender. In surveying the historic positions represented by the work of François Poulaine de la Barre, John Stuart Mill, and Simone de Beauvoir, I discovered that a similar pattern emerges in their view of the social construction of gender. Each writer begins by observing inequality between men and women and then moves to define inequality in terms of unjust social conditions. Doing so leads to the conclusion that inequality is not a product of natural differences in gender but a result of society's construction. Each writer then proceeds to relate biology and gender in terms of social construction.

Next, I presented contemporary theories of the social construction of gender, which showed similarities and differences when compared to the historical account. What remains the same is the conclusion that gender is a social construct; however, there are significant differences in methods, conclusions, and implications. While Poulaine, Mill, and Beauvoir hesitated to address metaphysics, contemporary thought has taken a decidedly metaphysical turn. While Sally Haslanger, Katheryn Tanner, and Judith Butler would all conclude that gender is socially constructed, each would provide a different answer for why this is so. For Haslanger, it is society that creates the norms, expectations, and roles that define what it means to be a certain gender. For Tanner, it is a view of human plasticity, seen most clearly in believers' change in status given our relationship to Christ, that grounds her conclusion that gender is socially constructed. Finally, for Butler, gender *and* sex are social constructs because they are products of the heterosexual matrix, a cultural production.

Finally, I offered four issues with the social construction of gender. (1) The social construction of gender leads to gender skepticism. When the social construction of gender makes other particularities more fundamental than gender, the result is an exchange of a universal category of male and female for diluted categories based upon

infinite possible social contexts. (2) The social construction of gender results in the removal of universal moral categories as behaviors for members of each gender become context dependent. (3) The social construction of gender results in the marginalization of embodiment as it disconnects biological sex from gender. (4) The social construction of gender is biblically problematic, for it fails to connect gender to embodiment, hold to gender binary, recognize the ontological equality between men and women, and acknowledge and celebrate the distinctions between males and females.

Since the social construction of gender ultimately fails to provide a satisfying biblical alternative to gender essentialism, I conclude that a better—or more biblically faithful—conception of gender is needed. I will begin developing this alternative in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

HUMAN NATURE AND GENDER

Since gender essentialism and the social construction of gender have been

evaluated and found to be wanting, an alternative concept of gender is needed to

represent Scripture's teaching about men and women. One way to describe the approach

of gender essentialism is that it moves from function to form, based upon the logic that

function follows form. Consequently, gender essentialism concludes that there must be

something different in the natures of men and women that accounts for their difference in

behavior, roles, and biblical prescriptions. This conclusion leads to what could be

classified as functional definitions of men and women, describing what men and women

do or how they are to be rather than engaging with their fundamental nature.[1] Another

way to understand the current discussion within evangelicalism regarding gender is that it

seeks to articulate the final cause—the end goal of masculinity and femininity—without

giving much attention to the formal cause of gender—the essence of gender.[2]

The goal of this chapter is to reverse this common approach and begin with the

formal cause of gender, propose an ontological definition of men and women, and

develop a conception of gender based on this definition. I agree with Gregg Allison that

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[1] John Piper describes his definition of masculinity and femininity as a "description" and notes that his "focus is on the significance that manhood and womanhood have for the relational dynamics between men and women and the implications of these dynamics for the roles appropriate to each." John Piper, "A Vision of Biblical Complementarity," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. Piper John and Wayne Grudem, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 41. This description illustrates that the common evangelical approach is descriptive and concerned primarily with roles.

[2] Final cause and formal cause are two of Aristotle's four causes, a philosophical framework Aristotle developed as part of his understanding of metaphysics and an accurate understanding of what a thing is. See Andrea Falcon, "Aristotle on Causality," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified March 7, 2019, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-causality/.

the most helpful way to understand gender is that there are no particular properties or capacities, outside of physiological differences, that belong exclusively to men or that belong exclusively to women. Instead, men and women uniquely express common human traits as men and as women.[3]

To support this position, I will first develop an ontological definition of men and women supported by Scripture's teaching on the ontological equality of the sexes. Then, I will consider how the common humanity of men and women is the grounds for common human capacities and common human properties.

Towards a Scripturally Supported Ontological Definition of Men and Women

Ontology is the part of metaphysics that deals with the nature of being; therefore, an ontological definition seeks to articulate the most fundamental aspect of a thing.[4] If one follows the logic of Aristotle, then to know a thing's end, one must first understand its nature.[5] The reason an ontological definition is preferred over a functional definition, which describes how a thing works or operates, is that an ontological definition operates at a more foundational level and provides a metaphysical grounding for the teleological orientation of some thing.

For this reason, when discussing human persons, a functional definition describes common observations about them but does not articulate what a person is. As

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[3] Gregg Allison, *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2021), 49. Allison uses the clause "outside of reproductive capacities" as a qualifier. I have modified this to "outside of physiological differences" to clarify that this view affirms the biological differences between men and women and does not seek to eliminate them. I am grateful to Torey Teer for making this suggestion.

[4] This statement is taken from the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s entry for ontology: "The science or study of being; that branch of metaphysics concerned with the nature or essence of being or existence." *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, "Ontology, n.," Oxford University Press, last modified December 2022, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/131551?redirectedFrom=ontology&.

[5] Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2018), 172.

Robert Spaemann notes, "Persons are not roles, but they are role-players."[6] Equating a person with a role, the standard approach of functional definitions fails to differentiate between the *actions* of a person and what it means *to be* a person. An ontological definition, however, moves beyond the roles to understand a person as a "role-*player*."

While this explanation underscores the predilection for an ontological definition of persons generally, my specific affinity for an ontological definition of humanity is due to its consistency with the *imago Dei* as an ontological category. To arrive at an ontological definition of men and women, I will first articulate and defend an ontological definition of the *imago Dei*. Next, I will interact with Gracilynn Hanson's recent research in order to demonstrate Scripture's view of the ontological equality of men and women. Finally, I will conclude with an ontological definition of men and women.

**Ontological Understanding
of the Image of God**

Five broad perspectives exist on the definition of the image of God. First, the *functional perspective* designates the *imago Dei* as a functional application of God's nature to humanity so that the function and purpose of humankind reflect God's nature and are generally tied to the divine decree for humanity to exercise dominion over creation.[7] Second, the *relational perspective* presents the social capacity of humanity as central to what it means to image God: humans are created in the image of God because they relate to God and others.[8] Third, the *substantive perspective* determines that some attribute or characteristic of humanity reflects or is the image of God. There is no

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[6] Robert Spaemann, *Persons: The Difference between 'Someone' and 'Something'*, trans. Oliver O'Donovan, Oxford Studies in Theological Ethics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 84.

[7] For an overview of functional arguments, see J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The* Imago Dei *in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 93-146.

[8] E.g., Stanley Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 197-99.

consensus on what this aspect is; still, it is generally considered to be some immaterial component of human nature.[9] Fourth, the *teleological perspective* views the image of God as the ultimate goal of human existence, making the fullness of the image of God an eschatological reality.[10] Fifth, the *ontological perspective* considers the image of God to be central to what it means to be human.[11] Central to this ontological perspective is a two-fold notion that the image of God exists (1) before any action that humanity takes and (2) before any aspect that humankind possesses. Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum provide support for the first emphasis, while Marc Cortez provides support for the second.

A fuller discussion of this fifth view follows. In their work *Kingdom through Covenant*, Gentry and Wellum conclude that "the historic views of the image of God [i.e., the first four views listed above] fail to satisfy the grammatical and historical interpretation of the text."[12] Gentry and Wellum define the *imago Dei* as a "divine-human relationship with two dimensions." The first dimension is "a covenant relationship between God and man [sonship]," and the second is "a covenant relationship between man and the earth [servant kingship]."[13] They continue, "It is important to note that this definition of the divine image is not a functional but an *ontological* one."[14] The basis for

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[9] E.g. Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 5.6.1 (p. 532). Irenaeus attributes the image of God to rational capacity.

[10] E.g. Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952), 48-49.

[11] Only the ontological perspective has a holistic understanding of human persons. The other four views fail, for they treat humanity like "pieces of a jigsaw puzzle." Gregg R. Allison, "Humanity, Sin, and Christian Education," in *A Theology for Christian Education*, by James Riley Estep Jr., Michael J. Anthony, and Gregg R. Allison (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 180.

[12] Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 186.

[13] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 236.

[14] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 236.

this conclusion comes from Gentry and Wellum's analysis of the ancient Mesopotamian understanding of "image" as typically referring to a physical statue, which would have communicated the two main ideas of rulership and sonship just mentioned.[15] Their detailed grammatical analysis leads to the same conclusion: that "image" and "likeness" carry the force of rulership and sonship.[16] Gentry and Wellum arrive at their ontological definition of the image of God by noting that both cultural context and linguistic analysis reveal (1) that man exercises "servant kingship" as a result of being made in the image of God and (2) that ruling is not the essence of the image itself.[17] They conclude, "Man *is* the divine image."[18] The image is not something one aspires to but describes the product of God's divine creation.

Wellum and Gentry place the existence of the *imago Dei* prior to anything humanity does. Even in connecting the image of God with the command to exercise servant kingship in creation as God's divine vice-regents, Wellum and Gentry do not identify the function of the image with what the image is. Building upon their conclusion, I suggest that the image of God as an ontological reality means that man's creation in the *imago Dei* precedes anything he does. Humanity is called to fulfill the divine mandate to rule over the earth because they are image bearers, not so that they can become image bearers. The *imago Dei* exists prior to any action.

Cortez follows a similar line of reasoning to support an ontological understanding of the image of God. He links the terms "image" and "likeness" in Genesis 1:26 to the Old Testament's use of "image" (*tselem)* and "likeness" (*demut*) to refer to idols. He uses this conceptual background to understand what idols were and how they

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[15] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 227.

[16] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 233.

[17] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 236.

[18] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 236.

functioned.[19] First, Cortez sets the fundamental principle for understanding idols in the ancient world as the "identification of a god with his idol."[20] Second, Cortez proposes, "We need to view the *imago Dei* as a declaration that God intended to create human persons to be the physical means through which he would manifest his own presence in the world."[21] Cortez distances himself from other perspectives of the image of God by highlighting the fact that humanity's extension of God's real presence in the world comes as a *consequence of* their being made in the image of God, though Cortez acknowledges that this function remains distinct from the meaning of the image itself.[22] He concludes, "We would thus need to say that the basic meaning of the *imago Dei* has nothing to do with any particular capacities of the human person, even though capacities remain necessary for how we live in response (function) to the reality of being made in the image of God (essence)."[23]

Again, while humanity's creation in the image of God means that they will be representatives of his presence, this view must be seen as a result of humanity's creation in the *imago Dei* and not what the *imago Dei* means. Cortez emphasizes that humanity's creation in the *imago Dei* is prior to any aspect or capacity of human existence. The ontological reality of the image of God means that the capacities of the image do not define the image. The *imago Dei* exists before any capacities.

Since humanity's creation in the image of God is best understood ontologically, it is fitting that men and women should be defined ontologically.

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[19] Marc Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology: A Constructive Account of Humanity in the Light of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018), 108.

[20] Cortez, *Resourcing Theological Anthropology*, 109.

[21] Cortez, *Resourcing Theological Anthropology*, 109.

[22] Cortez, *Resourcing Theological Anthropology*, 113.

[23] Cortez, *Resourcing Theological Anthropology*, 113.

Ontological Equality of Men and Women

Genesis 1:27 is the critical text for understanding Scripture's teaching on gender. Following the divine deliberation in Genesis 1:26, Scripture pronounces, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." There are two central biblical affirmations on gender here: (1) humanity is made in the image of God, and (2) humanity is created male and female. These two affirmations shape the understanding of what it means for humankind to be gendered embodied beings. To further understand the implications of this crucial text, I will now consider the Bible's presentation of the similarities and differences between the genders.

Scripture demonstrates that men and women are created with ontological equality that is not sameness. Gracilynn Hanson traces the uniformity and distinctions made in Scripture between men and women through the created state, temporal state, and redeemed state to encompass the entirety of the Bible's presentation on gender.[24] I will summarize her presentation to advance the argument of (1) the ontological equality of men and women, (2) their similarities in purpose, and (3) the absence of essential gender traits ascribed to either gender.

Ontological Equality in the Created State

Hanson begins with the created state and first emphasizes the uniformity of purpose between men and women derived from their image-bearing nature (Gen 1:26-27). God actualized his plan to create man in his image by creating humanity as male and female, revealing his intention for this gender binary. Since both genders bear God's image and represent his likeness, they are given the same privileges and responsibilities.[25]

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[24] Gracilynn Hanson, "Establishing a Framework for Female-Gendered Embodiment in a Redemptive Context" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 40-75.

[25] Bruce Waltke states, "Each individual man and woman bears the image of God apart from his or her counterpart." Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2007), 217.

As noted earlier, Gentry and Wellum draw out two aspects of humanity's image-bearing status: humanity relates to God as an heir (i.e., a son) and relates to creation as a servant king.[26] This relation is expressed in the divine blessing and mandate for humanity to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28). The duality of gender is the basis for humanity's being fruitful and multiplying, while the divine image is correlated with God's command for humanity to rule and subdue the earth.[27] Therefore, "as servant king and son of God, mankind will mediate God's rule to the creation in the context of a covenant relationship with God and the earth on the other."[28] This ability demonstrates men and women's uniformity in purpose as both bear the divine image and are given the same blessing and mandate.

Additionally, within the context of the created state, Hanson emphasizes humanity's uniformity in (1) constitution, (2) kind, and (3) need for relationships. First, both men and women are physical beings from physical material and receive their life as a gift from God. The creation of Eve from the rib of Adam emphasizes this constitutional sameness as Eve is recognizably *of the same stuff* as Adam and was created on the same day of creation (Gen 1:31).[29] Second, Genesis 1:26-27 also emphasizes that males and

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[26] The full hermeneutic study of Gen 1:26-27 completed by Gentry and Wellum can be referenced for a thorough treatment of the *imago Dei* concept, according to the cultural and linguistic context in the Old Testament and ancient Near Eastern world. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 220-53.

[27] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 224.

[28] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 230.

[29] Hanson highlights that when one refers to "man" and "woman" in the created state, the intention is to indicate particularity, referring strictly to Adam and Eve (even though Eve is not named until Gen 3:20). She notes, "These terms are not intended to apply directly to all men and woman across history. Though some universal conclusions can be drawn from the creation of Adam and Eve, it would be superficial (and dangerous) to presume a direct, universal application indiscriminately." Hanson, "Framework for Female-Gendered Embodiment," 43. I agree with and affirm her caution regarding application of the terms "man" and "woman" in the created state to all men and women across history. The creation of Adam and Eve represents the creation of both the first man and the first woman as well as the creation of the first husband and the first wife, further demonstrating the need for caution when making universal appeals to the created state.

females are *of the same kind*.[30] Genesis 1 demonstrates the pattern of all living things'

being created according to their kind: plants after their kind (v. 12), water creatures after

their kind (v. 21), birds after their kind (v. 21), and land beasts after their kind (v. 25).

Yet, no other animal is suitable for man (Gen 2:19-20). It is not until God brings the

newly formed woman to the man that Adam declares her to be of the same kind, his very

bone and flesh (Gen 2:23). Third, creation of men and women of the same kind reveals

that both genders were created with uniformity in need for relationship. It was "not good"

for man to be alone, so God made a helper corresponding to him (Gen 2:18) and, after

uniting them, declared that all he had made was "very good" (Gen 1:31).[31] Humanity was

created to live together as male- and female-gendered embodied people.

Hanson moves from discussing the uniformity between men and women in the

created state to considering the distinctions between them in the created state. Adam and

Eve were formed separately (Gen 2:7, 21-22). In both cases, God created them; Adam did

not participate in or consent to the creation of woman. God formed both of the same

elements: physical material and immateriality. However, God created each individually in

two distinct iterations. This distinction in creation establishes a framework for

articulating the distinction between men and women: God created humanity as one kind

with two types—male and female.[32] "Humankind" designates the uniformity of creation

in the image of God, while "type" designates the male/female distinction. What is true of

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[30] The Hebrew term *'ādām* is used generically for male and female throughout Gen 1-5. The intended meaning of the term fluidly vacillates between man, Adam (the first man), and all of humanity. Gentry and Wellum use the term "man" in their exposition due to this ambiguity but "argue in the strongest terms that the image of God applies generically to all humans, both male and female." Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 220.

[31] Victor Hamilton illustrates God's negative assessment of "man's lack of a corresponding companion. The skies without the luminaries and birds are incomplete. The seas without the fish are incomplete. Without mankind and land animals, the earth is incomplete. Every phenomenon in Gen. 1-2, God excepted, needs something else to complete it and enable it to function." Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1990), 175.

[32] The term "type" is used to identity that males and females are distinct varieties of the same category—humanity. Though both are human, they are special in some fundamental way. I am following the language used by Hanson in "Framework for Female-Gendered Embodiment," 46.

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humankind—its creation in the image of God with the same purpose, constitution, mandate, and need for relationship—is true of both male and female types. At the same time, this uniformity does not obliterate the differences between the two types, as they are created distinctly.[33] This framework summarizes the ontological conclusions drawn of males and females in the created state.

Ontological Equality in the Temporal State

Moving to the temporal state, which includes the fallen state and redemptive state, Hanson highlights the uniformity between males and females in terms of (1) guilt, (2) judgment, (3) requirements within the Old Testament community, (4) requirements within the new covenant community, (5) union with Christ, and (6) mission.[34] First, both man and woman are guilty following the eating of the forbidden fruit (Gen 3:6-13). Both had their eyes open, recognized their nakedness, and hid from God. Second, both are judged by God (Gen 3:14-19). The man and woman share in the burden of cursed creation as both aspects of the divine mandate—the multiplication of humankind and the subduing of the earth—are cursed (Gen 3:16-19).[35]

Third, there is uniformity in requirements within the Old Testament community as God requires all of his people, both male and female, to be holy as he is holy (Lev 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7, 26); he commands the obedience of all of his people.[36] Fourth, in the New Testament, God again provides uniformity in requirements for his

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[33] This creation according to a binary is consistent with the pattern of binary creation in Gen 1-2. For further illustration of the pattern of binary creation, see Gregg R. Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 23, no. 2 (Summer 2019): 164.

[34] Hanson, "Framework for Female-Gendered Embodiment," 49-63.

[35] Hanson, "Framework for Female-Gendered Embodiment," 49.

[36] Hanson highlights the distinction between men and women within the context of the Old Testament community in terms of personal presentation and societal treatment. The distinction in personal presentation relates to the prohibition of cross-dressing (Deut 22:5) and other cross-sex behavior (Lev 18:22). The distinction in societal treatment references the specific laws regarding female biological function (Lev 12:1-8; 15:19-33), sexual infidelity (Num 5:11-31; Deut 22:13-21), and sexual assault (Exod 22:16-17; Deut 22:22-29). Hanson, "Framework for Female-Gendered Embodiment," 50-52.

people as the new covenant community—they must be holy as he is holy (1 Pet 1:15-16). There is also complete uniformity in God's indiscriminate provision of the means through which both men and women are saved as they place their faith in the person and work of Christ, receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and receive the new covenant promise of having the law written on their hearts (Acts 2:4, 17-18, 22-24, 38-42; Heb 8:10). Fifth, men and women enjoy uniformity in their union with Christ; there is no distinction of gender in the body of Christ (Gal 3:8). This reality does not mean the eradication of gender but that union with Christ precedes gender identity as the fundamental reality that shapes the Christian life. Sixth, there is a uniformity in mission for both males and females. Both are commissioned to share the gospel (Matt 28:16-20) and participate in this work (John 9:1-39; Acts 8:25-39; Rom 16:1-15; Phil 4:2-3; Col 4:15).

The pattern of ontological equality that does not diminish distinction is reaffirmed in the temporal state. As Hanson concludes, "Outside of the context of the defined covenantal relationships (marriage and church community), God's treatment of the ontological nature of gender is largely indistinct."[37] Marriage and participation within the church community represent a unique relational reality as God establishes differences of gender roles within the context of these relationships. However, these defined roles indicate the appropriate behavior of the persons within their roles but do not indicate a difference in the ontological nature of those persons.[38] Since this affirmation represents a key clarification of the understanding of the relationship between gender roles and gender ontology, I will discuss the unique relational reality of marriage and the community of the church in detail.

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[37] Hanson, "Framework for Female-Gendered Embodiment," 62.

[38] Hanson, "Framework for Female-Gendered Embodiment," 62-63.

Excursus: Marriage and Church Community

The covenants of marriage and the church community represent unique relational realities. The following discussion focuses on ontology rather than roles or functions within these relationships, concluding that while there are specific distinctions and restrictions within these relationships based on gender, these roles indicate appropriate behavior but do not indicate the *essential nature* of the person performing the role.[39] Again, according to Spaemann, "Persons are not roles, but they are role-players, who stylize themselves in one or another manner."[40]

Marriage. The relationship of marriage represents an exclusive covenant between one man and one woman as covenant partners. The marriage relationship and all related features are unique to the specific married individuals within the context of their marriage. Marriage is more than a contract of mutual convenience, as its permanence is underscored by the covenantal language used within Scripture.[41] There is uniformity in covenant commitment as both husband and wife are bound to one another in total fidelity.[42] Each is to demonstrate holiness (Mal 2:16) as a holistic commitment to the marriage covenant. Just as God's people demonstrate their faithfulness to him through sexual purity (1 Thess 4:1-8), so also husbands and wives are both held to sexual fidelity in the marriage relationship.

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[39] I continue to follow Hanson's approach in this section to distinguish between ontological uniformity and distinction specifically within marriage and the church. Hanson, "Framework for Female-Gendered Embodiment," 56-62.

[40] Spaemann, *Persons*, 84.

[41] In Mark 10:6-8, Jesus quotes Gen 1:27 and 2:24 to define God's intention for marriage. Genesis 1:27 establishes the foundation of the unity for the binary of gender, shared image-bearing, and the mutual complementarity of men and women. Genesis 2:24 provides the pattern for the permanence of marriage. In the words of R. T. France, "It lifts marriage from being a mere contract of mutual convenience to an 'ontological' status." R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 392.

[42] The divine intent for marriage is revealed in Gen 2:18-25. Allen Ross renders the passage as "one man and one woman becoming one flesh and live together in their integrity." Ross highlights that his rendering of the passage in the present tense emphasizes this passage as the foundation of marriage. Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 127.

Furthermore, there is uniformity in terms of the goal of marriage and the model for marriage, as both husbands and wives are to pursue great conformity to the likeness of Christ and are called to model their love for one another after Christ's love for the church. Colossians 3 represents one example of this shared goal as Paul outlines, in practical terms, how followers of Christ are to put away their sinful self and to put on the new self. While these instructions apply to all who have been "raised with Christ" (Col 3:1), the instructions in verses 1-17 immediately precede Paul's specific instructions for husbands and wives in verse 18 and demonstrate the mutual goal of both husbands and wives: being made more like Christ.[43] If Christoconformity is the goal of marriage, then it follows that Christ is the model of marriage. This reality is seen in Ephesians 5:22-33. While the details of the requirements listed for wives (vv. 22-24) and husbands (vv. 25-33) are different, Christ is the model for both, as wives reflect the church's relationship to Christ and husbands reflect Christ's love for his church.

While Scripture speaks to uniformity in marriage regarding covenant commitment, goal, and model, it also attests a distinction in roles and requirements for husbands and wives. However, as noted earlier, while these passages represent differences in terms of role requirements, they do not inform the ontological definition of men or women.[44] Passages such as Ephesians 5:25-33, Colossians 3:19, and 1 Peter 3:7 detail the requirement of husbands in terms of loving their wives and are summarized in

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[43] Paul's instruction in Col 3:18 should be understood as relating to the immediate context. The "new-self" way of living (vv. 12-17) will manifest itself in how relationships are modeled. Paul first gives the goal for all believers and then demonstrates how this goal will specifically affect the Christian household.

[44] Both males and females can fulfill the totality of their purpose—conformity to Christ—without being married (1 Cor 7:7). From this equality in purpose, one can conclude that one's ontological identity is detached from one's (potential) role as a spouse (or any other role; e.g., parent). This equality does not vacate the significance of these roles for human flourishing and the fulfillment of God's creation mandate, but it keeps from over-reading significance into roles and from drawing conclusions regarding the ontological nature of men and women. Hanson writes, "Though many passages speak to distinction in carrying out the commitments of marriage between men and women (Eph. 5; Col. 3; 1 Pet. 3), these passages do not directly inform the ontological meaning of men and women." Hanson, "Framework for Female-Gendered Embodiment," 57. She grounds this claim in the shared goal and model for marriage.

terms of sacrificial leadership. The complementary passages of Ephesians 5:22-24, Colossians 3:18, and 1 Peter 3:1-6 detail the requirements for wives in terms of willing submission to their husbands. The roles of husband and wife are fulfilled through the distinct and non-reversible requirements of Christ-like love and leadership on the part of husbands towards their wives and church-like submission on the part of wives towards their husbands. In Ephesians 5:22-33, Paul does not ground the differences in role requirements in terms of ontological differentiation but instructs that marriage is a picture of Christ and the church (v. 32). In other words, the role requirements of husband and wife do not reveal an ontological distinction between men and women but reveal that God intended marriage to be a picture of the gospel. Marriage roles are not based on the nature of men and women but on wives' ability to model the church's submission to Christ and husbands' ability to model Christ's loving self-sacrifice for his church.

Even passages like 1 Peter 3:7, where the husband's call to love his wife is justified in terms of "showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel," do not necessitate an ontological differentiation between men and women.[45] Whether this passage refers to the women's more vulnerable position as the submissive wife or due to inferior physical strength, the emphasis is on the action of the husband to love his wife.[46] In this passage, and all others that teach on roles for husbands and wives, the purpose is most clearly to instruct husbands and wives to honor Christ by modeling their relationship to one another after Christ's relationship to the church. As a result, biblical

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[45] Wayne Grudem states, "Peter, therefore, directs husbands that instead of misusing their authority for selfish ends, they should use it to 'bestow honour' on their wives." Husbands should then honor their wives as the weaker vessels because they are the more vulnerable person in the marriage relationship. Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Nottingham: IVP Academic, 1988), 110.

[46] Greg Forbes considers Peter's mention of the woman as the weaker vessel as referring to a woman's typically "inferior physical strength." Greg Forbes, *1 Peter*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2014), 131. This interpretation is consistent with empirical research on the physical difference typical of men and women in terms of strength and size. However, physical differences do not inform ontological meaning.

teachings on roles should not be viewed as revealing something about the essential nature

of men and women; accordingly, ontological conclusions should be avoided.[47]

Church community. The church consists of individual members who have been

joined together in a local body. The New Testament pattern shows that leaders and

members are to be committed to one another, not failing to meet regularly. This

commitment should be honored by every believer, regardless of gender. However, there

are some requirements provided in Scripture that outline appropriate participation in the

church for men and women. In this way, men and women in the church community can

be viewed in terms of both shared commitments and distinct requirements.

The New Testament provides ample discussion regarding church members'

commitment to and responsibilities towards one another.[48] This fact is demonstrated with

several biblical metaphors: a physical body, a flock of sheep, a family unity, and a temple

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[47] First Corinthians 11:2-16 represents one of the most often appealed to passages for grounding ontological differences between men and women. Hanson addresses this passage in detail and concludes, "Since the claim of woman being man's glory (v. 7) is followed by Paul's reminder of mutual dependence (v. 11) and uniformity in origination as coming from God (v. 12), the passage affirms that 'God has so arranged things that "in the Lord" the one cannot exist without the other.'" Hanson, "Framework for Female-Gendered Embodiment," 59, quoting Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 578-79. Paul's justification in v. 8 and clarification in vv. 11 and 12 seem designed to keep the early argument (vv. 3-7) from being read in a way that would subordinate women to men.
　　　The main question in view in this passage concerning men and women is this: What is Paul's emphasis on the two stages of creation intended to portray? Some scholars focus on understanding this passage through the concept of "the law of primogeniture" in Scripture (i.e., the rights given to the ones who come first, usually first-born sons). See Michelle Lee-Barnewall, *Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian: A Kingdom Corrective to the Evangelical Gender Debate* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 137-38. Craig Keener notes that the law of primogeniture generally applied to inheritance, which does not seem to be in view in 1 Cor 11:2-16. Craig S. Keener, "Women in Ministry: Another Egalitarian Perspective," in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. James R. Beck, rev. ed., Counterpoints Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2005), 205-57. Lee-Barnewall concludes, "Only the man learns of his need for the woman, not the converse. Because 'it is not good for man to be alone,' woman is created for the man. There is no corresponding statement of the woman's need for man. Again, Paul supports this understanding of the creation account when he says, 'man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake' (1 Cor. 11:9). The conclusion drawn is that Eve was made as a helper for Adam, not the other way around." Lee-Barnewall, *Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian*, 138. However, the next point made by Paul in vv. 11-12 seems to imply the mutual dependence of men and women through reproduction. Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 579. In conclusion, this passage does seem to reinforce the teaching found elsewhere in Scripture that God has ordered the marriage relationship and has given specific roles to husbands and others to wives. However, the presence of these roles does not necessitate that they are grounded in nature. For this reason, this passage should not be used to make ontological conclusions about the nature of men and women.

[48] Matt 18:15-31; Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; 1 Cor 12:4-11, 12-31; 2 Thess 3:6-15; Heb 10:25.

structure.[49] Each of these metaphors illustrates the vital connection of church members to one another. For example, in 1 Corinthians 12:4-13, Paul uses the analogy of the body to emphasize that while there is variety among the different parts (members), the parts together make up the one body (the church). This analogy illustrates the posture of members towards one another: one of joy in the different gifts God has provided and of deep commitment to one another. All of the metaphors emphasize that this personal commitment to the one family of God, the church, is not dependent upon or qualified based on gender.

Furthermore, when Paul discusses spiritual gifts, there is no indication that these gifts are distributed based on gender (1 Cor 12:4-11). Rather, it should be the expectation of the church that both male and female members would be gifted in these ways for the building up of the body of Christ. Gregg Allison and Andreas Köstenberger note that the purpose of the Spirit's gifts is manifested in two areas: (1) spiritual gifts allow the church to progress in maturity as the gifts serve to deepen the church's conformity to the likeness of Christ; (2) spiritual gifts allow the church to expand its mission as the gifts serve the proclamation of the gospel.[50] These gifts are distinct from offices of the church, as the gifts are not roles. According to 1 Corinthians 12, the Spirit is responsible for the distribution of gifts, and at least one "manifestation of the Sprit is given to each person for the common good" (v. 7). The Spirit is actively "distributing to each person as he wills" (v. 11) and empowering the church as members use their gifts. Both men and women play an essential role in the progression of the church towards maturity and the advancement of the church's mission, so it is expected that both men

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[49] For further discussion on biblical metaphors, see Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, exp. ed., Image Classics (New York: Image, 1991); Sam Emadi, "Metaphors and Membership: How Biblical Metaphors for the Church Require Church Membership," 9Marks, May 7, 2019, https://www.9marks.org/article/metaphors-and-membership-how-biblical-metaphors-for-the-church-require-church-membership/.

[50] Gregg R. Allison and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit*, Theology for the People of God (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), 426.

and women would receive all gifts as the Spirit leads without distinction based upon gender.

While there are no gender distinctions in terms of personal commitment and the reception of the gifts of the Spirit, there are gender distinctions in participation in the church community. These distinctions most significantly take the form of limitations of ministry roles, with the most prominent being the limitation on the office of elder to qualified men.[51] This distinction sees gender as one of the considerations for the ability to hold a particular office within the church.[52] The limitation of this office to qualified men creates a distinction between elders—selected qualified men—and non-elders—both men and women—regarding particular ministry responsibilities within the church.

It is beyond the scope of this work to provide a definition of these ministerial roles.[53] Though I affirm the complementarian position that the office of elder is limited to qualified men, my purpose here is to discuss whether these role distinctions contribute an ontological definition of men and women. In agreement with Hanson, I affirm that the ministry roles describe the persons who are eligible to assume the roles but do not

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[51] First Timothy 2:11-15 serves as the key to holding to this position. While it is beyond the scope of this work to deal with the scholarship on this interpretation, I agree with Tom Schreiner's understanding of this text; see Thomas R. Schreiner, "An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15: A Dialogue with Scholarship," in *Women in the Church: An Interpretation and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 163-225. For other concurring interpretations of this passage, see Schreiner, "Another Complementarian Perspective," in Beck, *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, 314-22; Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 441-53. For the egalitarian position, see Linda L. Belleville, *Women Leaders and the Church: Three Crucial Questions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000); Ronald W. Pierce and Cynthia Long Westfall, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality: Biblical, Theological, Cultural, and Practical Perspectives*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021). For a critique on both positions, see Lee-Barnewall, *Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian*.

[52] There are two offices within the church: elder (1 Tim 3:1-7) and deacon (1 Tim 3:8-13). There is ongoing debate regarding gender restrictions for both offices. With regard to the office of elder, the complementarian position holds that the office is limited to men, while the egalitarian position holds that both men and women can hold this office. With regard to the office of deacon, there are those of complementarian conviction who hold to limiting the office to men and others who hold that both deacons and deaconesses are biblically warranted. For a detailed discussion on these roles in the church, see Gregg R. Allison, *The Church: An Introduction*, Short Studies in Systematic Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 131-46.

[53] For a detailed discussion on the biblical arguments of both sides, see Beck, *Two Views on Women in Ministry*.

indicate the intrinsic nature of the persons.[54] While the qualifications for ministry roles may, in part, be based on gender, they do not provide an ontological definition for either men or women. Again, there is a distinction between roles, the specific set of responsibilities, and the nature of the person who holds the role. Ontological definitions are metaphysically prior to roles; therefore, roles do not inform ontological definitions of men and women.

These distinctions in roles ministerially do not reveal a distinction in nature between men and women. In other words, is the prohibition of women from holding the office of elder grounded in a distinction in the nature of women from men? As discussed in chapter 3, the assignment of specific roles to specific groups of people does not necessitate that the distinction is based on differences in nature but can be fully understood as representing God's divine decision to order creation in a specific way.[55] Again, Paul's appeal to creation in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is not to highlight a difference in nature between men and women; instead, it is a reference to the order of creation.[56] This clarification means that Eve's creation as the second human does not convey an ontological fact about women but simply a historical fact—which, in turn, means that Paul's prohibition is not grounded in differences in nature (ontology) but is redemptive-historical.[57]

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[54] Hanson, "Framework for Female-Gendered Embodiment," 60.

[55] For further discussion on this line of reasoning, see Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology*, 203-10.

[56] Referring to 1 Tim 2:13-14's reference to the creation of man and woman, Douglas Moo writes that "a statement about the nature of women *per se* would move the discussion away from the central issue, and it would have a serious and strange implication." Douglas Moo, "What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority over Men?," in Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 247.

[57] This distinction does not diminish the significance of Paul's teaching or its continued relevance for the church. It does however limit ontological conclusions regarding the fundamental nature of men and women being drawn from this passage.

In conclusion, the New Testament teaches that both men and women share equally in their commitment to the church and their reception of the gifts of the Spirit to build up the specific local church in which God has placed them. While there are biblically warranted distinctions regarding ministry roles based on gender, these distinctions do not contribute to an ontological definition of either gender. Rather, they provide God's design for the proper ordering of his church as both men and women work to fulfill the church's mission.

This discussion concludes the excursus on marriage and the church community.

Ontological Equality in the Restored State

Lastly, in the restored state, males and females will share a uniformity in the reality of gendered embodiment. In the new heavens and new earth, humans will continue to exist as gendered embodied beings.[58] Since there will be human beings in the new creation, there will be gender in the new creation, given the assurance for believers of the resurrection of the complete embodied person.[59] Christ's resurrected body was recognizable and had a significant resemblance to his pre-resurrection body.[60] Just as God the Son incarnate had a gendered body, so also his resurrected body was assuredly gendered. Christ's resurrection demonstrates that male- and female-gendered embodiment will exist for eternity in the resurrected state as current human bodies correspond with resurrected human bodies. While Scripture is less explicit on the gender distinctions in the restored state, believers can be sure that gendered embodiment is an eternal reality.

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[58] Hanson, "Framework for Female-Gendered Embodiment," 63-65.

[59] Peter Kreeft, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Heaven . . . But Never Dreamed of Asking* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 128.

[60] Matt 28:9, 16-17; Luke 24:13-35; John 20:19-28; 21:1-2; Acts 1:3; 9:3-5; 1 Cor 15:6-7.

Unlike gendered embodiment, biblical roles are temporal and will not be identical in the restored state, as Christ's finished work of redemption is definitive and will fulfill all of the roles that his people temporarily hold. Marriage is an example of this reality; as Jesus revealed, "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Matt 22:30).[61] This point further demonstrates the importance of not deriving ontological meaning from temporal roles, since roles such as husband/wife, pastor/congregation, and parent/child will all cease in eternity.[62] For the gender distinctions between men and women to be eternal, they must be based upon ontological realities and not derived from gender roles that will not persist.[63]

Conclusion

Hanson's biblical survey clarifies the dual reality that God created humankind according to two distinct types—male and female—that share ontological equality. This biblical survey deals with the Bible's presentation of gender, not roles. In advancing an understanding of what it means to be male and female, Allison's position that there are no particular capacities or properties, outside of physiological differences, that belong exclusively to men or that belong exclusively to women fits well with this presentation of Scripture. The understanding of common human capacities and properties flows naturally from the biblical reality that men and women share unity in their purpose, constitution, blessing and mandate, judgment for sin, requirements for covenant membership, union with Christ, and mission. This understanding of common human capacities and properties

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[61] The traditional assumption drawn from this text is that human marriage will cease to exist in eternity. By logical consequence, sexual intercourse and childbearing will also cease to exist in eternity. Jesus's comparison of humans to the angels seems to only be directed at the lack of marriage and does not extend to their absence of physical bodies.

[62] Hanson, "Framework for Female-Gendered Embodiment," 63.

[63] Hanson clarifies that while the temporal roles will cease, there is good reason to infer that the new heavens and the new earth will be an organized society. This clarification means that one can expect for personal presentation and the treatment of others to be present in the restored state. Hanson, "Framework for Female-Gendered Embodiment," 65.

also fits well with the fact that men and women were both created after the same model—the very image of God. Hanson's work underscores the importance of defining gender ontologically so that gender distinction is not based upon roles that do not persist into the restored state and are not a result of overextending the narrative of the created state. With this framework in place, I will now present an ontological definition of men and women.

**Ontological Definition
of Men and Women**

Given that an ontological definition best represents Scripture's discussion of the *imago Dei*, it follows that an ontological definition of masculinity and femininity is more fitting than a functional definition.[64] Seeking to define men and women by focusing on their nature leads to the following definition. First, Allison defines a man as follows:

> A man is a human being created in the divine image in the male-type of humankind and who inherently expresses the common human capacities and the common human properties in ways that are typical of and fitting for a man.[65]

Second, I modify Allison's definition to define a woman:

> A woman is a human being created in the divine image in the female-type of humankind and who inherently expresses the common human capacities and the common human properties in ways that are typical of and fitting for a woman.[66]

These two definitions have two main components: (1) an emphasis on the common humanity of men and women and (2) a distinction between men and women in their gendered embodiment.[67] Each component will be addressed in detail. I begin with a brief

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[64] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 200.

[65] Gregg R. Allison, "What Is a Man?," ERLC, June 6, 2022, https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/what-is-a-man/.

[66] Both Allison and I are indebted to Hanson's work and have adapted her definition of a woman; see Hanson, "Framework for Female-Gendered Embodiment," 156. Allison makes this same modification to his definition for woman in his course notes for a PhD seminar he taught. Gregg R. Allison, "Part Five: Theological Considerations" (course notes for 84877 "Complementarity," The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022).

[67] This project focuses on the ontological aspect of gender and does not address gender expression in detail. I affirm the importance of gender expression, but it is not the main focus of this project. Rather discussion of gender expression is an implication of the theological formulation developed in this project and an area of possible additional study.

justification for how this definition satisfies the conditions for a definition of men or women to rightly be identified as biblical.

First, this definition affirms that God created humanity in his image as either male or female (Gen 1:26-27). There is the general *kind*, humanity or humankind, of which there is the male and female *types*. There are only male-gendered image bearers and female-gendered image bearers. This definition is consistent with Scripture's emphasis that gender exists as a male-female binary.[68] Second, this definition is grounded in embodiment.[69] God did not create genderless or generic humanity but created either male-gendered image bearers or female-gendered image bearers. As Allison concludes, "Everything about human beings as divine image bearers is gendered."[70] Third, this definition recognizes the priority of embodiment for discussing gender, as it is the distinction between male- and female-gendered embodiment that serves to ground the major distinction between the two genders.[71] This distinction results from the goodness of God's creation to create humankind according to two distinct types, both of which equally bear God's image and are equally called to participate in fulfilling the divine mandate (Gen 1:28).

Fourth, this definition acknowledges the ontological equality between men and women by affirming that both male and female types of humanity equally bear the image of God.[72] As noted above, the image of God is rightly seen as an ontological category,

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[68] This statement is the fourth condition of a biblical conception of gender listed in chapter 2: "(4) All conceptions of gender must affirm a male-female gender binary."

[69] This statement is the first condition of a biblical conception of gender listed in chapter 2: "(1) All conceptions of gender must be grounded in human embodiment."

[70] Allison, "What Is a Man?"

[71] This statement is the third condition of a biblical conception of gender listed in chapter 2: "(3) All conceptions of gender must acknowledge and celebrate the distinctions between males and females."

[72] This statement is the second condition of a biblical conception of gender listed in chapter 2: "(2) All conceptions of gender must recognize the ontological equality between males and females."

which means that it identifies what is most fundamentally true about humanity. Since both men and women equally share in the image of God, they possess full ontological equality. Fifth, a central component of this definition is that men and women can express all common human properties and capacities equally.[73] Equally here refers to equality of origin of the common human properties and capacities but does not imply equality of outcome. When Scripture speaks of properties and capacities, it addresses them in terms of what is commonly expressible by men and women. It avoids associating certain properties, virtues, capacities, or abilities with only one gender. Instead, it presents a nuanced view of the commonness of these aspects of humanity held by both men and women. As Allison clarifies,

> God created men and women alike with (1) human capacities: rationality, cognition, memory, imagination, emotions, feelings, volition, motivations, purposing, and more; and (2) human properties—gentleness, courage, initiative, nurturing, patience, protectiveness, goodness, and more. These are common capacities and common properties; there are no particular capacities and properties that belong exclusively to men or to women.[74]

In addition to satisfying the requirements of a biblical conception of gender, this definition of men and women also avoids three errors that Allison warns against.[75] The first error is to so differentiate men and women that the properties expressed become two distinct properties. For example, there is no longer merely gentleness but male gentleness and female gentleness. This error is avoided as the properties and capacities associated with humanness are not gendered but are commonly held and expressed by gendered beings. The second error is to conceptualize maleness and femaleness only in terms of stereotypes in such a way that men and women who do not fit these stylized expressions doubt if they rightly belong to the category. This definition of men and

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[73] This statement is the fifth condition of a biblical conception of gender listed in chapter 2: "(5) All conceptions of gender must affirm that human properties and capacities are expressible by both males and females."

[74] Allison, "What Is a Man?"

[75] Allison, "What Is a Man?"

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women avoids this error because it does not equate maleness and femaleness with roles but sees men and women as "role-players." The third error is to extend "typical and fitting" to any culturally allowed behavior. This definition of men and women avoids this error because it submits itself to Scripture, not culture; therefore, "typical and fitting" is dictated by God's design. This instruction means that the act of cross-dressing or any other attempt to intentionally obscure one's gender would be prohibited because it violates God's specific moral command for gender expression (Deut 22:5).[76] In every way, this definition of men and women seeks to move beyond functional and role-based definitions to the metaphysics of maleness and femaleness.

In conclusion, Scripture supports the ontological equality of males and females. First, Scripture affirms that both men and women are created in the image of God (Gen 1:27). The *imago Dei* is best understood as an ontological category, meaning that being created in God's image is the most fundamental aspect of what it means to be human. Humanity's creation in God's image is prior to any other aspect or capacity of human existence and demonstrates that men and women share equality at the most foundational level.

Second, Scripture demonstrates that men and women are created with ontological equality that is not sameness. A survey of Scripture reveals that Scripture teaches the following concerning men and women in the created, temporal, and restored states: (1) the ontological equality of men and women, (2) their similarities in purpose, and (3) the absence of essential gender traits ascribed to either gender. This survey underscores the importance of not including roles in the formation of ontological

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[76] The application of this point becomes of concern due to the constantly changing clothing industry and what it proposes for clothes for men and women. As difficult as application might be, developing a list of proper and improper clothes for men and women is a time-consuming and never-ending task and may not turn out to be as helpful as one might expect. Fellipe do Vale offers a discussion from an Augustinian framework of love; see, e.g., his development of love and secondary goods like clothing. Fellipe do Vale, "Gender as Love: A Theological Account" (PhD diss., Southern Methodist University, 2021), 257-58.

definitions of men and women, for roles (1) describe appropriate actions for men and women but do not define gender and (2) do not persist in the restored state. This reality means that Allison's position that there are no particular capacities or properties, outside of physiological differences, that belong exclusively to men or that belong exclusively to women fits well with this presentation of Scripture and offers a conception of gender that contributes to an ontological definition of men and women.

Based on an ontological understanding of the image of God and Scripture's consistent emphasis on the ontological equality between men and women, I presented the following ontological definitions:

> A man is a human being created in the divine image in the male-type of humankind and who inherently expresses the common human capacities and the common human properties in ways that are typical of and fitting for a man.

> A woman is a human being created in the divine image in the female-type of humankind and who inherently expresses the common human capacities and the common human properties in ways that are typical of and fitting for a woman.

These definitions faithfully represent Scripture's teaching on men, women, and gender and avoid the errors associated with alternative definitions. These ontological definitions of men and women provide the foundation for a conception of gender based on the common human capacities and properties shared between men and women. These ontological definitions have two main parts: (1) an emphasis on the common humanity of men and women and (2) a distinction between men and women in their gendered embodiment. I will develop each part in detail to demonstrate how the definitions provided correspond to Scripture's teaching on ontological equality without sameness.

Common Humanity

The ontological definitions of men and women provided emphasize that men and women both share the same human nature yet are distinct because of their gendered embodiment. These definitions maintain the complementarian framework—equal yet distinct—while focusing primarily on the common humanity of men and women without

denying or failing to celebrate the unique contribution of both genders. Men and women are both created according to the larger category of humankind; thus, one would expect the predominant theme between the two to be the things held in common. To emphasize the common humanity shared between men and women, I will expand the discussion in the areas of common human nature, common human capacities, common human properties, and common human *telos*, then I will conclude with the Christological significance of this focus.

Common Human Nature

Human nature, as a metaphysical category, is what is most basic and common to all humankind. While fundamental categories can be challenging to define, the Christian affirmation that all humans are created in the image of God serves as the minimum theological understanding of human nature. Genesis 1:27 serves as the grounds for affirming that humanity, both male and female, was created in the image of God and bears his likeness. This approach does not define human nature solely by a person's possession of certain traits or abilities. Rather, it grounds what makes one distinctly human in that which is most fundamental: bearing God's image.

The image of God should be understood holistically. God has created all humanity with a material aspect (a body) and an immaterial aspect (a soul). Both aspects are a part of the goodness of God's creation of humankind in his image. The holistic nature of humanity created in the image of God highlights two important realities about human creation. First, it highlights the extensiveness of the image of God in humans. God has created humans with several components:

> (1) a mental component associated with intellect, cognition, mind, thinking, memory, and reasoning; (2) an emotional component associated with feelings, sentiments, the heart, passions, motivations, and affections; (3) a volitional component, associated with the will, judgment, decision-making, purposing, and choosing; (4) a moral component, associated with the conscience, ethical awareness, scruples, a sense of right and wrong, feeling of guilt/innocence, shame/honor, and

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fear/power; and (5) a physical component, associated with the body, action, agency, and affecting change.[77]

Each of these components displays a unique created gift from God to humankind through his decree to create humanity in his image.

While these five components can be identified as distinct elements of what it means to be human, it is impossible to separate them from one another because of their interdependence. As Karl Barth affirms, it does no good to try to separate the parts of humanity that are fashioned after the image and likeness of God from the parts that are merely human.[78] Instead, each identifiable component informs what it means for humans to be made in the image of God, with the full sense of the *imago Dei* only being realized when its full extensiveness is appreciated.

Second, the holistic emphasis of humanity's creation in the image of God highlights the unity between the material and immaterial aspects of humanity. With John Calvin, I affirm that the *imago Dei* extends to every part of our humanity.[79] While one may not choose to view the soul as the seat of the image of God, as Calvin did, it is important to maintain that the soul does not exercise priority or superiority over the body. Whether viewed as embodied souls or ensouled bodies, humanity is composed of both material and immaterial aspects without separation and without priority given to either aspect. Both are valued and critical to what it means for humanity to be made in the *imago Dei*.[80]

Since both men and women were created in the image of God, they share the same common human nature. Scripture's emphasis on the common human nature, as

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[77] Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," 162.

[78] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III, *The Doctrine of Creation*, pt. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 195.

[79] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics 20–21 (London: S. C. M. Press, 1960), 1.15.3 (Battles, 1:186).

[80] Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 70.

grounded in the image of God, serves as the foundation for affirming common human capacities, common human properties, and a common human *telos*.

Common Human Capacities

This conception of gender is based on the affirmation that are no particular capacities or properties, outside of physiological differences, that belong exclusively to men or that belong exclusively to women—instead, men and women uniquely express common human traits as men and as women. This view of common human capacities will be explained and illustrated.

Human capacities such as rationality, cognitive abilities, emotional make-up, volitional faculty, motivations, and purposing are all common human capacities and thus equally displayed in both men and women.[81] To clarify, affirming common human capacities does not mean that each individual person will have the same aptitude for, control of, or awareness of each of these capacities; rather, this affirmation means that to be human is to be characterized by these capacities and that the extent of their expression is not determined or restricted by one's gender.

To illustrate, Thomas Aquinas locates the *imago Dei* in humanity's intellectual capacity: only intelligent creatures can properly be said to be in the image of God. And for Aquinas, even among rational beings, the image of God is located within the mind.[82] Following this logic, Thomas concludes (1) that the image of God is found more perfectly in angels than in humanity because of the more perfect intelligence of angels and (2) that women bear the image to a slightly lesser degree than men because of their

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[81] This statement is not an exhaustive list of human capacities. In *What Is a Person?*, Christian Smith identifies thirty capacities that work together to define personhood; see Christian Smith, *What Is a Person? Rethinking Humanity, Social Life, and the Moral Good from the Person Up* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 42-59.

[82] Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 3 vols. (New York: Benziger Bros., 1947), 1.93.2, 6.

diminished rational capacity.[83] The affirmation of common human capacities is intended

to correct this second conclusion that restricts rationality based upon gender. As

demonstrated in the historical sketch in chapter 1,[84] Aquinas's conclusions were largely

based upon an Aristotelian metaphysic that was overly dependent upon an incorrect view

of human anatomy. Instead, starting with common human nature, common human

capacities characterize both genders.

This affirmation of common human capacities is non-reductionistic and

focuses on male and female image bearers as complete persons, not reducible to a list of

capacities. Thus, gender is grounded in a strong view of the common human nature

shared between men and women, and differences in expression or use of common

capacities is not evidence of a difference in nature.

Christian Smith relates capacities to the emergence of personhood.[85] He

provides three important considerations for discussing human capacities. First, he offers

the concept of emergence contra reductionism. Emergence holds that something new is

created through the interaction between and combination of distinct characteristics

necessary to create a new entity, with the new identity being more than merely the sum of

the component characteristics.[86] Emergence recognizes that there is value in

understanding the distinction between the capacities that go into forming personhood, yet

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[83] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.93.3.

[84] See pp. 9-10.

[85] Emergence is a debated theory within anthropology, especially within theological anthropology. The debate comes from those who reject emergence in favor of reductionism and those who reject emergence because emergence is often presented as antidualist. However, there are those who have presented emergence as compatible with dualism. Within theological anthropology, John Cooper presents emergent dualism. See John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). William Hasker has also addressed emergence from a theological perspective. However, his view is marked by a reliance upon theistic evolution, which enters into an additional debate. See William Hasker, *The Emergent Self* (Cornell, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001). Smith is one who claims that emergence is antidualist. Smith, *What Is a Person?*, 26n2. For an example of a rejection of emergence in favor of reductionism, see Francis Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul* (New York: Scribner, 1994).

[86] Smith, *What Is a Person?*, 25-26.

it never seeks to reduce personhood to merely the sum of the constituent parts. Smith contrasts this view with reductionism, which he defines as having the "bad habit of trying to answer the 'what is this?' question by asking the 'what is this made of?' question as if the 'is' of the 'this' is never more than 'what' that it is 'made of.'"[87] In affirming common human capacities, Smith's view of emergence clarifies that gendered embodied persons are not reducible to their component capacities; rather each of these capacities interact to result in emergent personhood.[88] This understanding guards one from describing men or women as generic persons, thereby reducing them to a capacity, biological process, or any other component part.

Additionally, Smith studies the dynamic relationship between human capacities. He notes, "A series of real, distinct, interrelated causal capacities are emergent from the human body . . . as it operates in its material and social environment."[89] In other words, Smith notes how human capacities interact with one another. In listing thirty capacities, Smith develops a taxonomy that relates these capacities to their interaction with the subjective self, social relationships, and the material world. He concludes that "every listed capacity engages social relationships with other humans."[90] This insight demonstrates how culture conditions the recognition, identification, and expression of different capacities. The affirmation of common human capacities acknowledges the importance of normal human bodies and social interactions with others. Further, this

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[87] Smith, *What Is a Person?*, 38. Smith also points out that reductionism has often been labeled "nothing buttery"—attributed to C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton, and Donald McKay—because of its insistence that a thing is *nothing but* a list of its basic parts.

[88] For an example of emergence and dualism being held together, see Joshua Farris's notion of "emergent creationism," wherein "(1) God acts, sufficiently, by way of bringing about the particular soul; and (2) the body/brain, at some sufficient complexity, is necessary condition for the soul's organization." Joshua R. Farris, *An Introduction to Theological Anthropology: Humans, Both Creaturely and Divine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 72. For an extended discussion on this position, see Joshua R. Farris, *The Soul of Theological Anthropology: A Cartesian Exploration*, Routledge New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies (New York: Routledge, 2016).

[89] Smith, *What Is a Person?*, 42.

[90] Smith, *What Is a Person?*, 55.

affirmation accounts for potential differences—actual or inflated—in capacities between people as conditioned by their environment more so than as unavailable to certain individuals because of gender, race, or some other particularity. To illustrate, the common human property of intelligence was historically viewed as stronger in men than in women, which led to the conclusion that women should not be educated. However, as John Stuart Mill postulated, if women were given equal access to education, then the perceived gap in intellectual capacity would be shown to be a product of social forces, not a natural difference between the capacity of men and the capacity of women.[91]

Finally, Smith's discussion of human capacities is noteworthy in the context of defining men and women according to common capacities in that he makes no distinction in his list of capacities based on gender. While he does not explicitly state this point, nowhere does Smith qualify the capacities in terms of gender. Instead, he develops a view of emergent personhood based upon human capacities that are expressed by both men and women and form the component capacities from which the personhood of every embodied person emerges.[92] Smith's framework of capacities is consistent with the affirmations of this definition of common human capacities shared by men and women grounded in the common human nature that each share.

Common Human Properties

One of the errors the established definitions of men and women has sought to avoid is differentiating men and women so that the properties expressed become so distinct that the result is a male or female version of each property. Additionally, in countering maximal forms of gender essentialism, this approach seeks to avoid a gendered list wherein only certain properties fall on the male side while others are

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[91] John Stuart Mill, "The Subjection of Women," in *"On Liberty" and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 138-40.

[92] Smith, *What Is a Person?*, 42-59.

relegated only to the female side. Instead, the established definitions affirm that both male- and female-embodied image bearers can express all human properties. While my approach is different than the causal essentialism provided by Jordan Steffaniak, there is a great deal of similarity between our conclusions at this point. Steffaniak writes,

> Human beings of either sex can practice every virtue indiscriminately. Men are not designed to practice protection whereas women are designed to practice nurturing, as if it is a scale of extremes with men and women on opposing sides and only physically capable of pursuing certain virtues. Men and women can pursue all the same virtues—love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, self-control, etc.[93]

Stating that men and women possess common human properties is another way of stating that men and women can pursue and practice all of the same virtues.

Within the Christian framework, the list of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) summarizes the common human properties of men and women: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. There are several observations and points of application that can be derived from this list. First, Paul does not qualify the listing of the fruit of the Spirit in terms of gender—that is, there is not a male fruit of the Spirit and a female fruit of the Spirit. Rather, a common set of virtues will be present when the Holy Spirit's work is evident in one's life. Second, this listing emphasizes that men and women are not designed to possess certain virtues as if they were set in opposition to one another. Instead, both pursue the same virtues, having the same capacity to display each. Third, the fruit of the Spirit set forth a more comprehensive picture and description that establishes how a man should act and how a woman should act. Instead of working to create a modified list based on gender roles or gender stereotypes, when discussing the actions of men and women irrespective of other roles

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[93] Jordan L. Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue: A Defense of Gender Essentialism," *Southeastern Theological Review* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 15-35. The very next part of this statement is "however biology does determine that men have differing levels of *capability* than women to display particular virtues and differing levels of *potentiality* to display them." While I do not completely disagree with this statement, as I hold that biological differences lead to the differences of expression of common human properties, I disagree with the wording of capability and potentiality. See chapter 3 for my full critique.

(e.g., husband, wife, parent, church member), the fruit of the Spirit represent the common pursuit of both genders. Both men and women are called to yield to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives and allow the Spirit to produce his fruit.

As another illustration of the common properties shared between men and women, the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7), viewed as the most succinct summary of the ethical implications of being a disciple of Jesus, sets out how all followers of Jesus, both men and women, flourish.[94] This teaching by Jesus was given to male and female disciples; it is not qualified by gender. Instead, both men and women can fully receive Jesus's teaching, respond in faith, and be formed as disciples capable of following him. This point is evidenced by the fact that Jesus had both male and female devoted followers throughout his lifetime.

Affirming common human properties shared between men and women on the basis of their common human nature does not mean that men and women will express the common human properties in the same way. Steffaniak makes a similar point when he offers the following illustration:

> For example, a mother is ordered to express nurturing differently than a father upon the birth of a child. Since only the mother is capable of breastfeeding a child, she is given a form of nurturing that the father is not. While the father can display the same amount of nurturing, he cannot display the virtue in the same ways. Therefore, the social characteristics can be shared by both, but each sex has the potential to show them differently.[95]

The use of the term "common" affirms that the virtues displayed are not qualified based on gender. However, it does not deny that men and women, based on the differences in their gendered embodiment, will express the common properties differently or that other particular differences in their human embodiment will affect their expression of the

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[94] Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018).

[95] Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue," 31.

properties. However, no matter the variations in expression, the properties describe something more ontologically fundamental that both men and women hold in common.

Common human properties can and will be displayed differently by men and women because of the differences in their gendered embodiment. This difference in expression means that the core distinction between men and women is their embodiment, not the expression of specific properties. Aimee Byrd clarifies this emphasis when she articulates, "I do not need to do something in a certain way to be feminine . . . . I simply am feminine because I am female."[96] One does not need to act in a certain way to become a man or women; rather, men and women are created by God in his image as either the male or female type of humanity, and then everything they do is either as a man or a woman, respectively. This reality does not imply that all actions are morally acceptable, but it does communicate that gender is a fixed category that is not impacted by behavior.[97] This ontological definition of men and women, with its emphasis on common human properties, is more foundational than any social feature, which means it can account for why there will be different expressions of the common properties without one's needing to alter the definition because of those differences.

Common Human *Telos*

Given that men and women share a common human nature, common human capacities, and common human properties, it is most fitting to speak of men and women as having the same *telos*—that is, the same goal to pursue. One of the potential issues with the traditional categories of biblical manhood and biblical womanhood is that they

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[96] Aimee Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 114.

[97] Cross-dressing is the easiest illustration of this point. If a man were to present himself as a woman through cross-dressing, then his action would be morally wrong as it violates God's command in Deut 22:5. However, just in taking on the clothing of a female and possibly stereotypical female mannerisms, the man has not become a woman as everything he does is still as a man. He is man who is acting like a woman through cross-dressing, which is morally wrong, but his action has not in any way impacted his ontological identity.

can teach that men and women should pursue different goals because men and women have different ends. Byrd finds this view wrongheaded, as virtues are not gendered, and concludes that everyone has the same *telos* of knowing and enjoying God.[98] Spaemann reaches a similar point in his discussion on personhood, as he urges Christians to "take on the only true role that a human being can play—'putting on Christ.'"[99] This expression (Rom 13:14; Gal 3:27) is typical and fitting for both men and women and points both men and women to a single *telos*.

Steffaniak takes issue with Byrd's dismissal of manhood and womanhood. While acknowledging that humanity has the same end, he affirms the validity of subordinate ends and holds that men and women have different ones.[100] While agreeing in part with Steffaniak, I find Byrd's point more advantageous. While individuals, pastors, or churches might decide that using the language of biblical manhood and womanhood is helpful in their context, they should only do so while keeping the ultimate end in mind—formation into the likeness of Christ. If manhood and womanhood are presented as ways to help both men and women be more like Christ and cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, then the subordinate ends are useful on their way to the ultimate end. However, Byrd is reacting to the fact that biblical manhood and womanhood can be presented in a way that communicates that men and women have different ultimate ends, which distracts from their common pursuit of putting on Christ.

This discussion becomes increasingly important in the context of natural law. If men and women are viewed as having the same *telos*, then the emphasis of natural law will be on the similarities between men and women as common members of humankind

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[98] Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 109-11.

[99] Spaemann, *Persons*, 85. He appeals to Augustine, *Confessions*, 8.12.29 (which cites Rom 13:13-14).

[100] Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue," 31-32. According to the traditional framework for biblical masculinity and femininity, a subordinate end for men would be the leading of their families, and a subordinate end for women would be the nurturing and raising of their children.

and both created in the image of God. However, if men and women are viewed as having different ends, then the emphasis of natural law will be on the distinctions between men and women. Such an emphasis may potentially obscure the fact that both are called to put on Christ, cultivate the same fruit of the Spirit, and orient their lives to know and enjoy God.

One of the most significant benefits of this ontological definition of men and women is that it emphasizes what is common to men and women as two types of the same kind of humanity. Both are created by God in his image, both have a common human nature, both possess common human capacities, and both display common human properties—all while maintaining distinction from each other based on differences of gendered embodiment. All of this equality results in making it very clear that men and women have the same end—conformity to Christ.[101]

Christological Significance

Ultimately, the emphasis on common human nature and the subsequent features of common human capacities, properties, and *telos* have Christological significance, given that both men and women have a common Savior. Both are united to Christ (Rom 6:3-7; Col 3:1-4) in their salvation and are conformed to his likeness through the work of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:13-17). Union with Christ is not disrupted by the distinctions between male and female genders.[102] However, this truth does raise the question of how one affirms the centrality of Jesus as Savior without implying that maleness is normative for humanity in general. Marc Cortez draws attention to the

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[101] Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher make a similar point when they describe the relationship between men and women as a "Christic." This principle identifies their desire to focus on the centrality of Jesus, the gospel, and the incarnation and how these truths relate to how men and women interact—that is, they are proposing that every answer to gender-identity questions should be related to Jesus. Elyse M. Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher, *Jesus and Gender: Living as Sisters and Brothers in Christ* (Bellingham, WA: Kirkdale Press, 2022).

[102] Cortez makes a similar point in interacting with Gregory of Nyssa; see Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology*, 199.

serious implications of any view of gender that sees men and women as fundamentally distinct:

> If Jesus exemplifies a distinctively male way of being human that is essentially different from a female way of being human, *and* if Jesus is the paradigmatic human, then two conclusions seem inevitable: (1) the male way of being human is more paradigmatic; and (2) Jesus cannot be the normative model for women . . . . [W]e also encounter the significant difficulty that the biblical authors expect the Spirit to reproduce in all Christians the same kinds of virtues and behaviors we see in Jesus (e.g., Gal 5:22-23).[103]

This problem is avoided when one emphasizes the common human nature of men and women, which is the same human nature that Christ took on in the incarnation.[104]

The incarnation of the Son is both *paradigmatic* and *particular*. The incarnation is *paradigmatic* in that the Son took on a common human nature. Jesus, like all humans, has a common human nature that is inextricably linked to his gendered embodiment and holistically bears the image of God. In the incarnation, Jesus's perfect representation of the image of God and his sinless expression of common human capacities and properties are normative. The incarnation is *particular* in that Christ's particularities (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, historical situatedness) are not in themselves normative. What is normative, however, is Jesus's embodiment; thus, embodiment should be seen as central to the image of God. This affirmation allows one to emphasize the goodness of embodiment while not ignoring the details of Jesus's historic existence or over-universalizing any of his particularities.[105]

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[103] Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology*, 204-5.

[104] I affirm a Chalcedonian definition (451) of persons and nature with respect to the human nature that Jesus took on in the incarnation. For a detailed discussion of the importance of Chalcedon for defining persons and nature, see Stephen J. Wellum, *The Person of Christ: An Introduction*, Short Studies in Systematic Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 102-7. See also Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 304-12.

[105] For a more detailed discussion on how Jesus's gender relates to humanity, see Cortez, *Resourcing Theological Anthropology*, chap. 6 ("The Male Messiah: Sexuality, Embodiment, and the Image of God,"; pp. 190-211).

Jesus relates fully to male and female image bearers as he shares the common human nature and equal status as bearing God's image. Both men and women can then follow Christ's example—how he perfectly utilized the common human capacities, perfectly displayed the common human properties, and now represents the common human *telos* in that all of his disciples are to be conformed to his likeness and united to him through the Spirit.

Conclusion

This chapter offered an ontological definition of men and women as an alternative to the more common functional definitions. As Spaemann states, "Persons are not roles, but they are role-players." Therefore, it is necessary to define men and women not according to their roles but according to their nature.[106] Scripture informs an ontological definition of men and women by teaching that men and women share extensive ontological equality in the created, temporal, and restored state, yet without ever transgressing the created distinction between men and women as two different types of humanity. This definition holds men and women to be common yet distinct, which is grounded in their ontological equality as created in the image of God:

> A man is a human being created in the divine image in the male-type of humankind and who inherently expresses the common human capacities and the common human properties in ways that are typical of and fitting for a man.

> A woman is a human being created in the divine image in the female-type of humankind and who inherently expresses the common human capacities and the common human properties in ways that are typical of and fitting for a woman.

These definitions have significant advantages over functional definitions. First, these definitions satisfy the requirements of the framework for a biblical conception of gender developed in chapter 2. Second, these definitions avoid some of the significant errors associated with functional definitions, which rely too heavily on roles and place

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[106] Spaemann, *Persons*, 84.

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too great an emphasis on the distinction between men and women. While affirming that men and women are distinct because of the created differences in their gendered embodiment, these ontological definitions focus first on what men and women share. Both men and women are created in the image of God and holistically bear that image in a way that is not reducible to only a single aspect. From this shared creation in the image of God, men and women share a common human nature, which implies that both men and women can equally display the common human capacities and common human properties shared between them and are ordered towards the same *telos*.

These definitions of men and women give priority to the commonality between them. Furthermore, these definitions highlight how Scripture emphasizes their shared creation in the image of God, their joint creation mandate, their mutual participation in God's redemptive-historical plan, their equal access to salvation through Christ, and their united call to carry out the Great Commission. Even though it emphasizes male and female commonality, Scripture never reduces men and women to sameness; instead, it teaches that men and women are created as distinct types of humanity and that their distinctions grounded in their gendered embodiment will persist through this age into the age to come. While the initial emphasis is the commonality between men and women, these definitions also underscore the distinction between men and women. This aspect of these definitions will be elaborated upon in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6

GENDER IN THE CONTEXT OF EMBODIMENT

The conception of gender and the definitions of men and women developed in this project seek to follow Scripture's dual emphasis (1) that men and women share ontological equality because of their creation in the image of God and (2) that men and women are distinct. In the previous chapter, emphasis was placed on the ontological equality of men and women and the implications in terms of their common human nature, common human capacities, common human properties, and common human *telos*. However, to mistake this conception of gender as denying the distinction Scripture makes between men and women would be to misunderstand its emphasis. While prioritizing ontology and refusing to allow roles to be given ontological meaning, this conception still holds to Scripture's distinction between men and women as two different types of humanity.

The established definitions of men and women are as follows:

A man is a human being created in the divine image in the male-type of humankind and who inherently expresses the common human capacities and the common human properties in ways that are typical of and fitting for a man.

A woman is a human being created in the divine image in the female-type of humankind and who inherently expresses the common human capacities and the common human properties in ways that are typical of and fitting for a woman.

These definitions emphasize both the commonality and equality between men and women and their distinction in their embodiment. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that embodiment is the key to understanding Scripture's emphasis that men and women are created as two distinct types of humanity without in any way mitigating their ontological equality and equality of nature. To accomplish this objective, I will first

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define embodiment following Gregg Allison's framework. Then, I will identify gender's position in the context of human embodiment to show how fundamental gender is to all a person is and does.

Embodiment Defined

A basic definition of embodiment is "having, being in, or being associated with a body."[1] This definition recognizes that having a body, the material aspect of human nature, is the proper state of human existence, as all people have or are in a body.[2] Embodiment can also describe the field of study that explores how people are present bodily and engage physically in the world. Thomas Csordas brings these two emphases together: "The body is a biological, material entity, while embodiment can be understood as an indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and the mode of presence and engagement in the world."[3] While one can approach embodiment merely through the observations of practical experience, this project specifically develops a theology of human embodiment that addresses how Scripture and theology inform the state of having a body, with Gregg Allison's four theses on human embodiment serving as the foundation.

Theses on Human Embodiment

Allison's four theses on human embodiment mark the basis for understanding and defining human embodiment because of their comprehensiveness and degree of organization.[4] Allison structures the entirety of what it means to be embodied under the

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[1] Justin E. H. Smith, ed., introduction to *Embodiment: A History*, Oxford Philosophical Concepts (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1.

[2] Gregg R. Allison, *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2021), 14.

[3] Thomas J. Csordas, "Somatic Modes of Attention," *Cultural Anthropology* 8, no. 2 (May 1993): 135.

[4] Gregg R. Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 23, no. 2 (Summer 2019): 157-80.

four categories of creation, gender, particularity, and sociality. This taxonomy provides the necessary structure to present, understand, and elaborate on all aspects of embodiment. While there are other theological accounts of embodiment,[5] none is as concise and comprehensive as Allison's.[6] Furthermore, his framework supports the view developed in the previous chapter that roles should not be given explanatory power at the ontological level. At the same time, however, his framework provides the foundation to address roles. To outline a full theological view of embodiment, I will present and evaluate Allison's four theses of human embodiment: the created body, the gendered body, the particular body, and sociality.

The Created Body

   Allison's first thesis is that embodiment is the proper state of human existence and that God's design for image bearers is for them to be embodied human beings.[7] Justin Smith poses the question "Am I who I am principally in virtue of the fact that I have the

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   [5] While the theological accounts of human embodiment are limited, the number is growing. Pope John Paul II pioneered the way for contemporary Roman Catholic theology with *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books, 1986, 2006). Other contributions include Mary T. Prokes, *Toward a Theology of the Body* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); John B. Nelson, *Body Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992); Nelson, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978); Benedict Ashley, *Theologies of the Body: Humanist and Christian* (Braintree, MA: Pope John Center, 1985); Carlo Maria Martini, *On the Body: A Contemporary Theology of the Body*, trans. R. M. Giammanco Frongia (New York: Crossroad, 2001); Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *I Am My Body: A Theology of Embodiment*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Continuum, 1995); Nancy R. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018); Ola Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies: Incarnation, the Gaze, and Embodiment in Christian Theology*, trans. Carl Olsen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016); Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Revelatory Body: Theology as Inductive Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015); Samuel M. Powell and Michael E. Lodahl, eds., *Embodied Holiness: Toward a Corporate Theology of Spiritual Growth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999); Timothy C. Tennent, *For the Body: Recovering a Theology of Gender, Sexuality, and the Human Body* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020); John W. Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made: A Protestant Theology of the Body* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021). Other helpful resources from a non-theological perspective include Smith, *Embodiment*; Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014).

   [6] For example, Kleinig's *Wonderfully Made* outlines six categories relating to the body. While his categories are not identical with Allison's, there would be ways to fit all that Kleinig presents about the body within Allison's framework for embodiment. Tennent's *For the Body* has four main areas, one of which is how culture views the body. While much can be gained from Tennent's work, his framework is organized around responding to contemporary cultural issues regarding the body. Allison's framework, on the other hand, offers a foundational view of embodiment. While Allison is aware of current challenges to embodiment, those challenges are not the central focus of his framework.

   [7] Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," 160.

body I have?"[8] Allison answers "Yes" and adds that it is proper to affirm the statement "I am my body."[9] Biblical support for this thesis is found primarily in Genesis 1:26-28, where God deliberates to create humanity in his image and then actualizes this deliberation through the creation of male- and female-embodied image bearers. Genesis 2:7 provides more poetic detail of the specific creation of Adam, where God formed his body from the dust of the ground and then breathed into him the breath of life.[10] In Allison's words, "Adam is an embodied human being made alive by God himself."[11]

This thesis finds theological support both in the Genesis narrative and the incarnation of Christ. First, a theological reading of Genesis 1:26-28, informed by the resurrection of the body, affirms that embodiment is an essential feature of God's holistic creation of human beings.[12] The creation of humankind in God's image involved the creation of embodied humanity with intellect, emotions, volition, morality, and physicality, with the image of God not being restricted to merely one component, action, or relational capacity. The image of God is holistic and includes human embodiment. Second, the incarnation gives theological significance to embodiment as Jesus took on a full human nature, which included a physical body.[13] Furthermore, after his resurrection,

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[8] Smith, introduction to *Embodiment*, 2.

[9] Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," 160. This statement is not an affirmation of "I am *only* my body." However, it does counter the predominant view that "I do not have a soul; I am a soul. I have a body." While this statement has been wrongly attributed to C. S. Lewis, it seems to originate with George MacDonald in *Annals of a Quiet Neighborhood* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1867), chap. 28. For a helpful counter to this "I am my soul" affirmation, see Federica Matthews-Green, "The Subject Was Noses: What Happens When Academics Discover That We Have Bodies," *Books and Culture* (January/February 1997): 14-16.

[10] I prefer Allison's take that this breath is the actualizing principle of humanity, the spark of life, rather than the impartation of a soul. Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," 161.

[11] Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," 161. The same is true of Eve, the first woman, who was also formed from organic material, the rib of Adam, and given life by God (Gen 2:21-22).

[12] See 1 Cor 13:35-58 for an extensive discussion on resurrected bodies.

[13] For a detailed discussion of how Jesus's incarnation relates to all humanity, see Marc Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology: A Constructive Account of Humanity in the Light of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018).

Jesus maintained the features of his particular human body, demonstrating the importance of human physicality and embodiment.

In conclusion, the created body thesis states that God's design for his image bearers—the proper state of human existence—is that they are embodied human beings.

The Gendered Body

The gendered body thesis is that "a fundamental given of human existence is maleness or femaleness."[14] Again, Genesis 1:27 serves as the seminal text for this affirmation, stating God's creation of humanity according to two types: male and female. As Emil Brunner avers, "Humanity certainly is divided into men and women, and the distinction goes down to the very roots of our personal existence, and penetrates into the deepest 'metaphysical' grounds of our personality and our destiny."[15] Gender is fundamental to what it means to be embodied, with gender and embodiment being inextricably linked together. However, while the distinction between men and women being fundamental, that distinction is located in their embodiment—it is not a distinction between their natures. Again, when it comes to the ontology of human nature, Scripture affirms ontological equality between men and women because of common human nature, common human capacities, and common human properties, and a common human *telos*.[16]

The emphasis on common humanity does not diminish the importance of gender distinctions and differences, as humans are "gendered all the way down."[17] Studies in human genetics reveal that about 6,500 genes, out of about 20,000, are expressed differently in men and women, which supports the notion that gendered

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[14] Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," 163.

[15] Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*, trans. Olive Wyon (London: Lutterworth, 1939), 345.

[16] Chapters 2 and 5 of this project make this point.

[17] Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," 164.

embodiment is crucial to the identity of human beings as men and women.[18] As Allison clarifies, "This point means that I experience myself as an embodied man, I relate to others as an embodied man, and as an embodied man I relate to God."[19] The reverse is true of women—they relate to themselves, to others, and to God always as embodied women. Hence, gender is a fundamental given of human existence.

While it does not directly address the looming gender confusion experienced in society, this affirmation does run counter to such confusion in every way. Metaphysical definitions of persons often assume the physical aspects that are necessary to create and sustain life (i.e., the five essential organs: heart, brain, kidneys, liver, and lungs), without which there would be no person to define. Similarly, even as this project defines gender ontologically, the physical and biological distinctions between men and women are essential to fully understanding what a man or woman is. While I ground the fundamental distinction between men and women in God's decision to create humanity according to two types, the actualization of that creation means that men and women are created with biological differences in their chromosomal composition, reproductive physiology, sex hormones, and a number of secondary sex characteristics. While men and women are more than the difference between an XY and XX chromosome pair, or any other biologically reductionistic description, they are certainly not less. Just as the failure to have a working pair of lungs undermines the continuation of personhood, failure to note how God actualizes and perpetuates his creative activity through fixed biological differences is equally destructive to a right understanding of what it means to be human. The gendered body thesis avoids biological essentialism by grounding the distinction

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[18] The differences appear mostly in sexual organs, particularly the mammary glands, but they also include the adipose (fat), skeletal muscle, skin, and heart tissues. Medically, these differences express themselves in male- and female-prevalent diseases (e.g., the prevalence of Parkinson's disease in men) and male- and female-prevalent reactions to certain drugs. Moran Gershoni and Shmuel Pietrokovski, "The Landscape of Sex-Differential Transcriptome and Its Consequent Selection in Human Adults," *BMC Biology* 15, no. 7 (2017), https://doi.org/10.1186/s12915-017-0352-z.

[19] Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," 165.

between men and women in God's act of creating men and women with a common human nature and distinct bodies. This dual affirmation—commonality of nature and distinction in physicality—is God's design for his gendered image bearers.

The Particular Body

Allison defines particularity as "the condition of being an individual."[20] Particularity is a fundamental given of human existence, for God specifically designs and creates each human to be a particular gendered embodied individual. In classifying particularity, Allison maps it over six categories: ethnicity/race, family/kinship, temporality, spatiality, context, and story.[21] Particularity is concerned with the relationship of embodiment to individuality: to be a person is never to be a generic human but always a particular individual. This thesis also articulates the relationship between one's context and one's understanding of individuality and embodiment. Smith notes that "embodiment is the product of a mostly local, particular history."[22] While each person is equally an image bearer, every person expresses their humanity as an embodied individual.

In what follows, I briefly unpack the six aspects of human particularity. (1) *Ethnicity*. Ethnicity is the description of one's origin—specifically, one's shared languages, customs, religion, and nationality. A particular ethnicity characterizes every gendered embodied individual.[23] (2) *Family*. A particular family, including family background and kinship ties, characterizes every gendered embodied individual. This point affirms that every particular individual is shaped by one's biological or adopted

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[20] Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," 166.

[21] Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," 166.

[22] Smith, introduction to *Embodiment*, 7.

[23] In one sense, gender is the primary particularity as it is a part of one's individuality that precedes all other particularities. I agree with Allison that gender is rightly considered a primary-order characteristic and that the six particularities listed here are second-order characteristics. Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," 167n40.

family and the details of one's relations to them. (3) *Temporality*. A particular time and age characterize every gendered embodied individual. This point affirms that all people are located within time and that time, both mathematical and subjective, shape one's understanding of themselves. (4) *Spatiality*. A particular space and place characterize each gendered embodied individual.[24] In the words of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, "Existence is always 'being a body in the world.'"[25] (5) *Context*. A particular context characterizes every gendered embodied individual. Context includes the interrelated conditions in which human beings live, act, and understand their experience as well as socioeconomic, political, educational, cultural, and religious factors.[26] (6) *Story*. A particular story characterizes each gendered embodied individual. Allison writes, "As narratively-constituted and narratively-communicative creatures, human beings know, experience, process, remember, relate, feel, and decide according to their specific narrative."[27] Story is central to putting together who one is and understanding oneself as an individual. These six categories represent Allison's definition of particularity and give detail to what it means to be an individual. This concept focuses on the reality of human embodiment by describing the things that characterize every individual.[28]

While one way to support particularity is through sociological observation and demographic studies, there is good scriptural and theological support for this position. Psalm 139:13-16 highlights that God has carefully and intricately creates each person

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[24] For an extended theological account of the importance of emplacement, which relates to temporality and space, see Craig G. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

[25] Moltmann-Wendel, *I Am My Body*, 99, quoting F. J. J. Buytendijk, *Woman: A Contemporary View* (Glen Rock, NJ: Newman Press, 1968).

[26] Allison, *Embodied*, 66.

[27] Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," 169.

[28] Allison is clear to differentiate particularity from intersectionality. While both can engage with some of the same categories, particularity focuses on describing reality. In contrast, intersectionality is focused on how the facts of particularities divide, privilege, and disenfranchise specific individuals from one another. See Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," 169.

according to his particular design. God is intimately involved in each aspect of the creation of embodied image bearers. Furthermore, passages like Acts 17:26 ("From one man he has made every nationality to live over the whole earth and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of where they live") reveal God's design and determination of particularities such as ethnicity/race, family/kinship, temporality, spatiality, context, and story.

The incarnation demonstrates the importance of particularity in relationship to God's creation and what it means to be an embodied person. According to Galatians 4:4-5, "When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." Here is the affirmation of some of the particularities of Christ—his temporality, family, ethnicity, context, and story. In the incarnation, the Son did not take on a generic humanity but became a particular man. He was born of Mary and raised by his adoptive father, Joseph. He was a Jewish man living in Palestine at the time of the Roman occupation. And importantly, as the Gospel of Matthew highlights, he was the "son of David, son of Abraham" (1:1). These particularities are central to understanding who Jesus is and what he came to do. Furthermore, the particularities of Jesus's work now change the particularity of all believers as those whom Christ redeems are adopted as sons and daughters of God the Father through the indwelling Holy Spirit. The incarnation and redemption demonstrate the importance of particularity as the particular God brings both about through the particular incarnate Son.

In conclusion, a fundamental given of human embodiment is particularity, the affirmation that God specifically creates each human being to be a particular gendered embodied individual characterized by ethnicity/race, family/kinship, temporality, spatiality, context, and story.

Sociality

The sociality thesis states that a fundamental given of human existence is sociality, the universal human condition of desiring, expressing, and receiving human relationships. Allison clarifies sociality by defining both sociality and sexual activity. Sociality is "a personal and relational reality, not a physical activity."[29] It is the universal condition of being oriented towards others that allows humans to form and enjoy relationships, community, and companionship. Sexual activity is one expression of sociality and refers to "any physical event or movement between people that is intended to arouse erotic desires and sensations for various purposes including reproduction, pleasure, relaxation, reduction of stress, connectedness/unity, and extending comfort."[30]

Human sociality implies both design and capacity.[31] First, by divine design, all gendered embodied humans desire, express, and receive relationships. Second, all people can engage in those relationships according to divine design or pervert those relationships in conscious or unconscious ways. Informed by Scripture, the divine order expresses itself in the case of female-embodied image bearers (1) in relationship with other women as friendship, apart from same-sex attraction and homosexual activity; (2) in relationship with men, as friendship apart from lust and heterosexual activity; and (3) in the specific relationship of marriage to one man as the only proper context for sexual activity. Similarly, the divine order expresses itself in the case of male-embodied image bearers (1) in relationship with other men as friendship, apart from same-sex attraction and homosexual activity; (2) in relationship with women, as friendship apart from lust and

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[29] Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," 170.

[30] Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," 170.

[31] Allison draws these two concepts from Gracilynn Hanson; see Gracilynn Hanson, "Establishing a Framework for Female-Gendered Embodiment in a Redemptive Context" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 141-46.

heterosexual activity; and (3) in the specific relationship of marriage to one woman as the only proper context for sexual activity.[32]

From the beginning, Scripture presents human beings as people in need of community. When the triune God deliberates to create humanity in his image, the community shared within the Godhead is reflected in the sociality shared between all embodied image bearers. As Genesis 2:18 reveals, "It is not good for man to be alone." For this reason, God created humanity according to two types, male and female, and tasked them with marrying, having children, and building society (Gen 1:26-28). Scripture contains examples of marrying, bearing children, raising families, and forming society. It also includes examples of strong bonds of friendship, such as Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17) and David and Jonathan (1 Sam 18:1). These relationships reach their pinnacle in the relationship formed between church members, who are bound together in Christ (Eph 2:11-22) and are not separated by any rivalry or division. The church is the fullest expression of genuine sociality.

Theologically, sociality is the context for much of the discussion in Scripture about the proper relationship of distinct gendered embodied image bearers to other gendered embodied image bearers. Because of the fall and the corruption of sin, God's design for sociality has been corrupted, and this brokenness is experienced in some form in all relationships. Personal pride and selfishness undermine the humility and service required for the flourishing of relationships. Whereas sociality is intended to result in humanity's reflection of the bond of love shared between the divine persons within the Godhead, it can instead become one of the clearest revealers of individual sin and personal rebellion. While sexual rebellion against God's design (Rom 1:24-25) is one evidence of this depravity, the whole list of flesh-characterized living given in Galatians

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[32] Allison helpfully articulates divine design in the same way. See Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," 171.

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5:16-21 undermines proper sociality. However, in Christ and his accomplished work of salvation, believers have the model and the means for proper sociality. Christ has torn down the dividing wall of hostility and united us to God and to others (Eph 2:11-22). As the Holy Spirit produces his fruit in believers, proper sociality can be restored as church members seek to promote and encourage God's design in all relationships with one another.

In conclusion, sociality is a fundamental given of human existence. It is the universal condition of desiring, expressing, and receiving human relationships, including bonding, community, and companionship. God has designed his image bearers to be social beings who express their sociality through appropriate interpersonal relationships.

The Proper State of Existence

These four theses represent the aspects of embodiment and signify the comprehensiveness of embodiment. Based on Scripture, it is a fundamental given of human existence that all people are created, gendered, particular, and social. Thus, the proper state of human existence is having a body. While humanity is comprised of both a material aspect and an immaterial aspect, each component is part of what it means to be fully human, with neither part being more significant than the other. This equality of aspects means that having a body and all it entails is central to being human. Individuals ignore their bodies to their detriment, failing to joyfully accept what God has given them and with thankfulness take proper care of their bodies and live according to the Creator's design.[33] While *trans*gender might be a primary example of how people ignore the parameters of their embodiment, individuals can transgress many other particularities. For example, when individuals fail to recognize the limits of time, seeking to maximize

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[33] Allison spends significant time going through the more fundamental implications of embodiment in *Embodied*. While each chapter is intended to be practical, chapters 7-13 are especially so.

productivity at the expense of proper rest, they are in a state of trans-temporality.[34] A proper understanding of embodiment corrects and reorients humans to these limits, fostering a view that understands these limits as reminders of their creation by God.

Additionally, a right understanding of embodiment helps hold together the dual reality (1) that all humanity shares a common human nature and (2) that every individual is created distinct. A right theological understanding of embodiment allows both affirmations to be balanced and corrects against views that emphasize one of these realities over the other. To illustrate, a right understanding of embodiment corrects views that see men and women as having fundamentally different natures because of the fundamental differences in their biological composition; there can be both commonality of nature and meaningful biological distinction. Similarly, a proper theology of embodiment corrects against views that maintain that social constructs are the only explanation for differences between individuals, as embodiment affirms that the differences are a result of their creation by God.

Rightly understanding human embodiment is the key to developing a conception of gender that is biblical, for embodiment (1) emphasizes that males and females share ontological equality, (2) acknowledges and celebrates the distinctions between males and females, and (3) holds together gender binarity without tension. Embodiment explains how the two genders can be equal in their nature yet distinct in terms of the created differences between men and women—and *only* men and women because of God's creation of humanity according to two types. The dual emphasis of common humanity (including nature, capacities, properties, and *telos*) and distinction (celebrating God's creation of humankind according to two types) allows the conception

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[34] For more discussion on the importance of limits, see Kelly M. Kapic, *You're Only Human: How Your Limits Reflect God's Design and Why That's Good News* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2022).

of gender developed in this project to satisfy the biblical framework and affirm both realities without tension.

Gender in the Context of Human Embodiment

Since gender is only one aspect of what it means to be an embodied person, considering gender in the context of embodiment helps clarify how gender interacts with the other aspects of embodiment. In this section, I place the gendered body thesis in the context of the created body thesis, particularity thesis, and sociality thesis to clarify and enrich the conception of gender developed in this project.

Created, Gendered, Particular, and Social

Allison does not indicate whether the order he lists the four theses in is important for understanding embodiment. However, ordering the (1) created, (2) gendered, (3) particular, and (4) social aspects as a fixed taxis provides greater clarity for what it means to be an embodied person. This ontological order highlights how the aspects interact with and inform one another and underscores created as the most fundamental aspect of one's embodiment.

Understanding the four aspects of embodiment in a fixed order is especially important for defining each aspect of embodiment because this taxis sets the parameters for what data is considered at the ontological level. For example, when one defines gender ontologically and attempts to arrive at a most basic definition, only the created aspect should inform the ontological definition, for being gendered is ontologically before any other particularity or any relationship formed because of human sociality. This emphasis does not mean that particularity or sociality is unimportant, but this fixed order does make a philosophical distinction to clarify what gender is.

To return to the definition of a woman:

A woman is a human being created in the divine image in the female-type of humankind and who inherently expresses the common human capacities and the common human properties in ways that are typical of and fitting for a woman.

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This definition shows that the fixed taxis of the aspects of embodiment are (1) created, (2) gendered, (3) particular, and (4) social.

First, the definition shows (1) created as the most ontologically foundational aspect by emphasizing creation in the image of God. The common human capacities and common human properties mentioned in this definition are grounded in creation, thus making them more ontologically foundational than gender.

Second, the definition accentuates (2) gender by emphasizing that women are formed according to the female type of humanity. Identifying gender as the second most foundational category clarifies why women are women. Suppose the aspects of embodiment are not fixed. In that case, one might be tempted to answer the question "What is a woman?" in biological terms—that is, women are women because of their chromosomal composition, physiological make-up, potentiality to give birth, etc. While all of these descriptions are true about women, it is more fundamentally true that women are women because God created them according to the female type of humanity. This emphasis is important because one could envision a scenario where scientific advances allow for all of these biological aspects to be altered as individuals undergo more complex attempts to "change one's gender." Even if scientific advances allowed for humans to alter their biological composition at increasingly more basic levels, affirming that what makes a woman a woman is God's creation of her according to the female type of humanity renders it is impossible to change one's gender because it is impossible to change God's creation.

Third, the definition highlights (3) particular and (4) social in the clarifying phrase "in ways fitting for a woman," which modifies how the common capacities and properties are to be expressed. The behavior of a woman does not make her a woman; she

is a woman because she is created according to the female type of humanity.[35] However, particularity and sociality instruct the fittingness of her actions. Since a woman is created according to the female type of humanity, everything she does is as a woman because her gender is ontologically prior to all particularities and relationships. Yet particularity and sociality both instruct her on who she is and provide the context in which she strives to follow God's design for individual and communal living.

The aspects of embodiment inform one another according to a fixed taxis based on their ontological priority: (1) created, (2) gendered, (3) particular, and (4) social. Figure 1 illustrates how ontological data moves from the most fundamental aspect of embodiment, (1) created, to inform the understanding of the other aspects of embodiment at an ontological level.
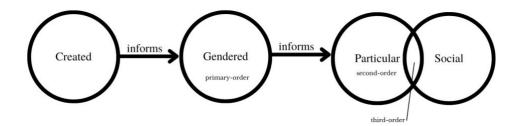

Figure 1. Order of aspects of embodiment

While (1) created and (2) gendered represent discrete aspects of embodiment that are easy to separate conceptually, the ontological information provided by (3) particular and (4) social can become more difficult to observe distinctly. Allison briefly references a tiered structure to particularity by distinguishing between gender as a primary-order particularity and ethnicity/race as a second-order particularity.[36]

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[35] This point completely rejects Judith Butler's concept of "gender performativity," which holds that women must do to be. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 24.

[36] Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," 167n40.

Expanding this tired structure to contain three levels clarifies the interaction between different aspects of particularity. As Allison states, gender is the sole *primary-order* particularity as gender is ontologically before all other particularities and informs every particularity that follows. Second, ethnicity/race is the only particularity in the *second-order* tier. While ethnicity/race is not as foundational as gender, it remains more fundamental than all other particularities because it represents a fixed piece of one's identity in the same way gender does. Finally, the *third-order* tier contains all other particularities: family, temporality, spatiality, context, and story. This tier is characterized by the dynamic interaction of these particularities with the particularities of others. In this tier, sociality influences aspects of these particularities. While sociality retains its identity as a distinct aspect of embodiment that provides more information about personal identity, it affects and informs parts of particularity. Figure 1 illustrates the interaction between and overlap of (3) particular and (4) social.

The purpose of creating this taxis for the aspects of embodiment is not to compartmentalize or mechanicalize individuals but to create a tool for metaphysical description and constructing ontological definitions. These distinctions do not compartmentalize a person, for every aspect of embodiment is essential. However, since all aspects of embodiment are observed simultaneously, these distinctions bring clarity to answering the metaphysical questions "What is a man?" or "What is a woman?" It is only when gender is considered in relation to the other aspects of embodiment that its ontological meaning can be observed and defined. For this reason, viewing the (1) created, (2) gendered, (3) particular, and (4) social aspects as a taxis moving from most to least ontologically fundamental offers a helpful tool for analysis.

Given that the aim of this project is concerned with gender, I will now expand on the discussion of how gender interacts with both particularity and sociality to further clarify what should and should not be included in discussions of gender.

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Gender and Particularity

As stated above, gender is the primary particularity and is more fundamental than any other particularity. Everything one does is either as an embodied man or an embodied woman, for gender is even more fundamental to personal identity than ethnicity, family, or context. Given the connection between gender and biological sex, humans are gendered all the way down and begin to develop differently from the moment of conception, with about 32 percent of all genetic expressions being different for men and women. These differences at the biological level are often the focus of discussions of gender as traits and behaviors become associated with one gender in contrast with the other, resulting in the formation of gender stereotypes. While gender stereotypes are not inherently wrong, they often represent reductionistic views of gender and can limit what is considered fitting male and female behavior beyond the prescriptions of Scripture.[37]

This dissertation moves in a different direction. It develops a conception of gender that does not see men and women as fundamentally different, as if males are on one range of appropriate behaviors and females are on a completely separate range of appropriate behaviors. Instead, this conception of gender views men and women as living and acting within the context of a common human range, stemming from their common creation in the image of God, with a focus on the diversity of expressions being tied to individual particularity. This understanding changes the language commonly used in discussing maleness and femaleness from the universal declarations "Men are always _____" and "Women are always _____" to discussions of typical behavior, characteristics, and activities. This shift then allows these distinctions to be discussed as the differences in individuals rather than as universalizing activities, traits, behaviors, or emotions tied to maleness and femaleness.

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[37] For an extended discussion of gender stereotypes, see Preston Sprinkle, *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2021), chap. 5 ("Gender Stereotypes"; pp. 79-94).

The biblical story of Jacob and Esau illustrates this point. In Genesis 25:24-28, Esau and Jacob are twin boys born to Isaac and Rebekah. Esau is described as extremely hairy from birth and a skillful hunter, whereas Jacob is portrayed as a quiet tent dweller. These two brothers display different preferences and have different personalities, but neither of these distinctions is attributed to their gender. Esau is a man who hunts, Jacob is a man who cooks, and neither of these activities influences each brother's masculinity. Their gender is prior to all particularities, so everything either man does is always as a man. The differences between the brothers are attributable to the great diversity of personalities with which God has created humanity, expressed through their particularities. Jacob and Esau share a common human nature, are both created in the male type of humanity, and express their maleness in ways that are typical and fitting. The differences between the two fitting expressions reveal the variety of appropriate expressions and clarify that gender is not a list of actions, traits, or accomplishments but ontologically prior to all these things.

However, affirming that everything a man done is as a man does not mean that any action is morally acceptable. The expression "typical and fitting" qualifies that all actions are beholden to God's design. For example, Scripture prohibits the act of cross-dressing or any other attempt to intentionally obscure one's gender because doing so violates God's specific moral command for gender expression (Deut 22:5). However, within morally acceptable actions, there is a great deal of variety of appropriate activities that both men and women can enjoy as long as those actions are not done in an attempt to obscure one's gender. To clarify, if a woman desires to go hunting because she enjoys the activity and wants to spend time with her family or her society values the skills of women hunters, then her hunting activity should be celebrated. However, the activity would be problematic if her motivation was to appear manly by doing an activity that her social context deemed masculine.

Similarly, culture and motivation have an impact on clothing as well. As Allison notes, "One of the most evident differences between cultures is clothing expectations."[38] If a Scottish man dons a kilt, no one accuses him of cross-dressing because of the context in which and motivation with which he wears it. Every Christian in each culture will dress differently. Rather than providing a list of appropriate pieces of clothing, Scripture has two guiding principles. First, Christians should pursue modest dress (1 Tim 2:9-10). While Paul directs his instructions specifically towards women, the principle that motivates it is equally applicable to men. Christians are to honor the Lord by wearing modest clothing, neither too ostentatious nor too revealing. Second, men and women are not to obscure their gender through cross-dressing (Deut 22:5). This prohibition addresses both the action and the disposition to obscure one's gender through clothing. The specifics of the clothing are always enculturated, with a great deal of variety existing between cultures and cultural expectations, which may also change over time. Christians should be cautious and thoughtful before they adopt changing trends to ensure that they are modest and do not communicate an attempt to obscure their gender.[39]

Every context, which includes immediate and larger culture, establishes standards and expectations for what is typical and fitting regarding gender expression, the set of attitudes and behaviors conveyed by people regarding expected behavior by male and female persons.[40] While this context is important for shaping how people express their maleness or femaleness, it does not influence the ontological definition of man or woman, as gender is ontologically prior to social context. Men and women do not perform to become men or women; rather men and women express their common human

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[38] Allison, *Embodied*, 194.

[39] For an extensive discussion of clothing, see Allison, *Embodied*, chap. 10 ("The Clothed Body"; pp. 191-208). At the heart of what I am advocating is a view of Christian freedom where thoughtful Christians can make their own decisions on clothing as long as they are confident, are motivated by modesty, and are in no way seeking to obscure their gender.

[40] Allison, *Embodied*, 42.

capacities and properties in typical and fitting ways. While the social context is important for developing personal identity and establishing one's fit within the broader culture, it should not set external standards for what a man or a woman is. Instead, Christians in all cultures should affirm that both men and women are created in the image of God and share a common nature, capacities, properties, and a *telos*.

Gender and Sociality

Gender roles are rightly understood in the context of sociality, as gendered-embodied people relate to one another. This project approaches the development of a conception of gender from a different direction than the traditional evangelical position by starting with the formal cause of gender (i.e., the essence of gender). The traditional approach begins with the end goal of masculinity and femininity, defined by biblical gender roles, with the result that roles become the definitions of men and women.[41] This approach has the order wrong; men and women exist as men and women first and then engage with other men and women in ways that are governed by how individuals are to conduct themselves in the context of relationships. Roles do prescribe proper behavior in the context of relationships, but these prescriptions are only operative for those individuals who have taken on certain roles. This clarification means that sociality, not gender, is the proper sphere in which to discuss roles.

While roles naturally involve gendered people, the roles themselves do not influence one's gender. Rather, as part of being a man or a woman, one can take on certain roles and responsibilities. The different roles men and women adopt do not represent differences in their nature but demonstrate God's design to have male and female image bearers fulfill complementary roles within marriage and the church. To illustrate, once a man takes on the role of husband, he is morally bound to fulfill all that

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[41] See, e.g., John Piper, "A Vision of Biblical Complementarity," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. Piper John and Wayne Grudem, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 41.

God requires of husbands, including loving his wife as Christ loved the church, providing spiritual leadership for his family, and all other biblical commands directed at husbands. The biblical responsibilities given to husbands are only prescriptive to individuals who have taken on the role.

A man is a man first, and everything he does is as a man. Once a man takes on the role of elder, for example, he takes on an increased set of responsibilities and a more detailed description of what is proper and fitting for him as a leader of a church. Similarly, a woman is a woman first, and everything she does is as a woman. When a woman is married, she takes on increased responsibilities related to the role and a more detailed description of what is proper and fitting for her as a wife. Sociality, and the roles it entails, are an important aspect of what it means to be an embodied person, and roles provide a great deal of instruction for how one is to conduct oneself. However, these roles do not define gender, for gender is ontologically prior to sociality. Roles are concerned with how men and women relate to one another, not what men and women fundamentally are.[42] In this way, the conception of gender I have developed, although it takes a different starting point to discuss men and women than the traditional approach, remains thoroughly complementarian as it is committed to all of Scripture's teaching regarding how men and women are to relate to one another in the context of their different relationships and roles.

Conclusion

Scripture affirms that men and women are created in God's image with the same nature yet as two distinct types of humanity. Their equal status as image bearers

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[42] Christians can arrive at different opinions regarding how to handle instructing men and women who have yet to take on a particular role. Some choose to approach roles as aspirational and teach a form of biblical manhood and womanhood that closely aligns with the required behaviors for husbands and wives in an effort to prepare single church members to fulfill these roles successfully. As long as these roles are identified as a sub-*telos* to the ultimate *telos* of conformity to Christ, then this approach would not violate the gender conception developed.

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provides the foundation for affirming a common human nature, common human capacities, common human properties, and a common human *telos* shared between men and women. This emphasis on the commonality between the genders is a helpful starting point to correct conceptions of gender that begin with or over-emphasize the distinctions between genders. Still, this emphasis would be insufficient on its own. For this conception of gender to be biblical, it must also affirm and celebrate Scripture's teaching that men and women are distinct. A theological understanding of embodiment is the key to properly holding the commonality and distinction together.

Embodiment is the affirmation that everyone has a body and that this is the proper state of human existence. As Gregg Allison has shown, embodiment can be understood as having four aspects: (1) created, (2) gendered, (3) particular, and (4) social. The created aspect affirms that God created humanity, including human bodies, in his image. The gendered aspect affirms that maleness and femaleness are fundamental to human existence. The particular aspect affirms that a fundamental given of human existence is particularity, the condition of being an individual. The social aspect affirms that a fundamental given of human existence is that individuals tend towards association and the formation of relationships with others. All of these aspects represent God's design for his image bearers who bear his image in their creation as embodied beings.

I hold that Allison's aspects of embodiment represent a fixed taxis moving from the most ontologically fundamental to the least: (1) created, (2) gendered, (3) particular, and (4) social. The purpose of this taxis is to clarify which aspects of embodiment should be considered in developing ontological definitions. In fixing the order of the aspects of embodiment, one can understand gender as ontologically grounded in God's creation as either a male or female type of humanity. It is only when gender is considered in relation to the other aspects of embodiment that its ontological meaning can be observed and defined. This relationship clarifies that gender is not based on any trait or role, given that gender is ontologically prior to particularity and sociality. Instead, it is

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the common human nature, capacities, properties, and *telos* that gendered persons always express in ways that are fitting to their masculinity or femininity. Hence, a man is fundamentally a man first; therefore, everything he does is as a man. In the same way, a woman is a woman first; therefore, everything she does is as a woman.

According to Robert Spaemann, "Persons are not roles, but they are role-players, who stylize themselves in one or another manner."[43] Thus, men are not roles but are created in the image of God according to the male type of humanity to express the common human nature stylized as men. Likewise, women are not roles but are created in the image of God according to the female type of humanity to express the common human nature stylized as women.

In this way, gender viewed in the context of embodiment provides sufficient clarity to identify the formal cause of gender—that is, what gender is in its essence: the proper state of human existence where God created all of humanity in his image according to either the male type or female type of humanity. Based on this common humanity, men and women share a common human nature, common human capacities, common human properties, and common human *telos*, yet they express these commonalities as distinct types of humanity in ways that are fitting to their masculinity and femininity. Their commonality and distinction result from God's creative act, revealing who they are and how they are to live.

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[43] Robert Spaemann, *Persons: The Difference between 'Someone' and 'Something'*, trans. Oliver O'Donovan, Oxford Studies in Theological Ethics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 84.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The conception of gender developed in this project is this: (1) men and women
share a common humanity that is grounded in their mutual creation in the image of God
and results in the expression of common human properties and common human capacities
in ways that are fitting to their masculinity or femininity; (2) men and women are
distinguished as two unique types of humanity because of the created differences of
gendered embodiment. The purpose of this project was to present and defend this
conception of gender built upon common human properties and common human
capacities as *consistent* with Scripture, internally *coherent*, *defensible* against external
critique, and *valuable* for contemporary discourse on gender.

Chapter Review

Chapter 1 served as an introduction to this study. First, I stated the thesis of
this project, presented in the prior paragraph. Second, I detailed the methodology of this
study: (1) the priority of Scripture, (2) an epistemological commitment to faith seeking
understanding, (3) consistency with the rule of faith, and (4) the value of historical
theology. Third, I provided a historical sketch to identify the historical development of
conceptions of gender, identifying sex polarity, the view that men and women are
significantly different from one another and that men are superior to women, as the
dominant historical position.[1] Fourth, I surveyed contemporary works on gender
regarding my research interest: John Piper, Wayne Grudem, Kathryn Tanner, Fellipe do

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[1] Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, vol. 1, *The Aristotelian Revolution, 750 B.C.-A.D. 1250* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 77.

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Vale, Patrick Schreiner, Jordan Steffaniak, and Owen Strachan. Fifth, I stated the significance of a conception of gender grounded in common human properties and common human capacities—namely, as an alternative to gender essentialism and the social construction of gender, which represent the two categories into which most contemporary conceptions of gender fit. Sixth, I outlined the rest of the dissertation, which is considered in greater detail presently.

In chapter 2, I summarized Scripture's teaching on biological sex and gender to provide a framework for evaluating contemporary conceptions of gender.

First, I defined "sex," "gender," and the categories of views on how the two terms relate to one another. "Sex" refers to "the physical, biological, and anatomical dimensions of being male or female (including chromosomes, gonads, sexual anatomy, and secondary sex characteristics)."[2] "Gender" refers to "the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of being male or female."[3] While sex and gender have traditionally been used interchangeably, recent shifts in language render them two distinct terms with sex referring to *biological* sex and gender referring to what it means to be male or female. However, this distinction in terms does not necessitate that gender and sex are distinct from one another. Views that hold sex and gender as inextricably connected to one another are labeled "traditional coextensive," while views that separate sex and gender are classified as "revisionary disjunctive." In this project, I held to a traditional coextensive view, identifying that while sex and gender represent two distinct terms, they cannot be disconnected.

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[2] Mark A. Yarhouse, Justin Sides, and Cassandra Page, "The Complexities of Multicultural Competence with LGBT+ Populations," in *Cultural Competence in Applied Psychology*, ed. Craig L. Frisby and William T. O'Donohue (New York: Springer, 2018), 578.

[3] Mark Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 16-17. This definition by Yarhouse is consistent with descriptions provided by other scholars, such as Sally Anne Haslanger in *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 42-43.

Second, I surveyed Scripture's teaching on biological sex, summarized in seven statements:

1. Both male and female sexes are created in the image of God.

2. Human sex exists as a male and female binarity.

3. The human body is essential for humanity's status of image bearer.

4. Scripture maintains the distinction between male and female sex and prohibits cross-sex behavior.

5. Jesus affirmed the goodness of created sexed embodiment.

6. Paul affirms that a body is central to personhood.

7. The sexual differentiation between men and women will likely remain after the resurrection.

Third, I summarized Scripture's teaching on gender. While Scripture does not use the term "gender" or speak of male and female in the direct way that gender is defined, theology as faith seeking understanding provides tools to address the current discussion on gender. Scripture's teaching on gender is summarized with these four statements:

1. Gender is an important aspect of human embodiment, as everything one does is done as a gendered being.

2. Biological sex and gender are inextricably related and in no way does Scripture present gender as disconnected from biology.

3. While the move to consider gender as a distinct concept from biological sex is recent, Scripture's discussion of biological sex and the social features of maleness and femaleness allows conclusions about gender to be drawn from Scripture.

4. Gender, like biological sex, is always connected with the state of being embodied. Even though gender is conceptionally distinct from biological sex, it is never distinct from the body.

Fourth, I developed a framework for evaluating conceptions of gender. Based on Scripture's teaching on gender, for any conception of gender to be considered biblical, it must have these five components:

1. Be grounded in human embodiment.

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2. Recognize the ontological equality between males and females.

3. Acknowledge and celebrate the distinctions between males and females.

4. Affirm a male-female gender binary.

5. Affirm that human properties and capacities are expressible by both males and females.

This framework provides the standard for evaluating existing conceptions of gender and the foundation for constructing my own conception of gender.

In chapter 3, I surveyed and evaluated gender essentialism, the view concerned with determining what fixed or innate qualities are intrinsic to being male or female, ultimately concluding that it does not satisfy all five biblical criteria presented in chapter 2.

First, I provided a historical sketch of the development of gender essentialism, beginning with Aristotle's creation of essentialism as a tool for metaphysical analysis and moving to the contemporary evangelical context. In surveying pre-Enlightenment views, post-Enlightenment views, and views within the church, I noted that there is a remarkable similarity in the conclusions regarding gender. While each period gives slightly different reasoning, each affirms and perpetuates a notion of sex polarity grounded in biological essentialism, where differences in the biology of males and females are the grounds for emphasizing the significant distinction between the genders. The rise of feminism challenged this conclusion, advocating first for equal rights for women within society and second for the elimination of all forms of sexism. In the 1970s, aspects of second-wave feminism were adopted by some evangelical Christians, known as evangelical feminists, who used biblical arguments to contend that there should not be any significant difference between men and women, a view identified as egalitarianism. As the ideas of evangelical feminism began to find greater receptivity within the church, other leaders within evangelicalism responded by critiquing evangelical feminism using gender essentialism as the standard approach for discussing gender as the descriptions of

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manhood and womanhood, which connected biblical roles with the nature of men and women. The traditional conservative evangelical position holds masculinity as the view that biological males are biologically ordered to be achievers, creators, and protectors, and holds femininity as the view that biological females are biologically ordered to be nurturers, receivers, and sustainers.

Second, I interacted with forms of gender essentialism within evangelicalism today, grouping the views into four categories: (1) maximal essentialism, (2) sortal essentialism, (3) causal essentialism, and (4) agnostic essentialism. (1) Maximal essentialism holds that an object's properties are essential and that it is no longer the same object if it loses any property. This view's most significant challenge is that it does not address the reality that men and women can perform the same specific acts in their own way. (2) Sortal essentialism requires an object to be of the same kind of thing; whatever kind of thing is, it cannot change without becoming a different kind of object. This view holds that one must possess certain masculine properties to be a male and that one must possess certain feminine properties to be female. While this view is represented with different nuances by different writers, the major critiques of this view are that it moves past gender to define men and women in the context of their relationships with others (i.e., their roles) and that it does not supply compelling answers to the question of why both genders can fulfill the same virtues in the different ways.

(3) Causal essentialism does not require particular social characteristics to be displayed; it only requires an essential causal explanation for these characteristics as expressed by males or females. This understanding means that while men and women can display the same or similar virtues, the difference between the genders exists at the level of men and women's capability and potentiality to display those virtues. The main issue with causal essentialism is that by explaining how men and women can possess the same virtues, this view causes the virtues themselves become gendered. (4) Agnostic essentialism maintains that while it might be the case that gender is grounded in

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biological sex, it is incredibly challenging, if not impossible, to know how these biological realities relate to gender differences. The primary issue with agnostic essentialism is that it is questionable if this position provides more than a caution to avoid overstatement in other forms of gender essentialism, given that in avoiding critiques of other forms of essentialism, it fails to contribute anything constructive.

I then evaluated gender essentialism as a whole and found that no form of gender essentialism can satisfy all five components of the biblical framework for gender. The significant strengths of gender essentialism are that it (1) grounds gender in embodiment, (3) acknowledges and celebrates the distinctions between gender, and (4) affirms a gender binary. However, some forms of gender essentialism do not go far enough to emphasize (2) the ontological equality between men and women, and all forms fail to (5) make the common human properties and capacities expressible by both men and women. While Patrick Schreiner and Jordan Steffaniak make significant improvements to the standard view of gender essentialism within conservative evangelicalism, I concluded that no view goes far enough and opted to construct my own view of gender in chapter 5.

Third and finally, I clarified the relationship between gender and gender roles. One explanation for why gender essentialism continues to be the default view within conservative evangelicalism is that gender roles serve as a replacement for discussing gender itself. These roles are then grounded in the nature of men and women, which causes the issues of either (1) resulting in the gendering of virtues and traits, which does not account for why both men and women can perform both, or (2) orienting the *telos* of masculinity and femininity towards roles. Following the work of Marc Cortez, I affirmed his conclusion that gender essentialism is not required to maintain a complementarian framework because it is entirely possible for God to "stipulate norms for human life

irrespective of underlying biological realities."[4] This emphasis means that the biblical prescriptions for gender roles do not need to be grounded in natural differences between men and women but are instead stipulated by God. The result is that gender roles no longer need to factor inro discussions and definitions of gender.

In chapter 4, I surveyed and evaluated the social construction of gender, the view that affirms that gender is derived from societal forces and is not dependent on biological sex, ultimately concluding that it, too, fails to satisfy the biblical criteria developed in chapter 2.

First, I identified that the social construction of gender holds to a revisionary disjunctive view regarding the relationship of sex and gender, which views gender as socially grounded. Gender is not directly related to biological sex; rather, the social norms that culture places on individuals determine and define gender. This view is predominant in academic discussions of gender today and is often assumed as the intuitive way to view gender.

Second, since the social construction of gender is often paired with rejections of gender essentialism, I evaluated four arguments against gender essentialism: the (1) cultural argument, (2) similarity argument, (3) continuity argument, and (4) exclusion argument. (1) The cultural argument holds that while there are significant differences between the genders, these differences are culturally grounded. The main issue with this argument's rejection of gender essentialism is that simply holding to social construction is not enough to prove essentialism untrue. Even if the cultural forces that shape a trait are not observable, this does not mean that the biological influence of the feature disappears; indeed, the biological explanation for the difference remains more fundamental than the social-cultural influence. (2) The similarity argument rejects gender

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[4] Marc Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology: A Constructive Account of Humanity in the Light of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018), 209.

essentialism on the premise that differences between men and women do not need to be explained. The primary issue with this argument is the exceptionally high burden of proof it brings upon itself. For this view to refute gender essentialism, it would need to establish that there are *no* significant differences between men and women. (3) The continuity argument rejects gender essentialism's ability to function as a classification system for gender. While this argument does address the limitations of certain forms of gender essentialism, it does not defeat forms that are nuanced in their classification. Furthermore, this argument is often paired with a view of language that dismisses the ability to hold to absolute truth—a view incompatible with the Christian worldview. (4) The exclusion argument holds that the classificatory aspects of essentialism that seek to group humans based on gender differences always exclude some human who would be a good candidate for inclusion in a particular group. While this critique should encourage greater nuance and clarity within presentations of gender essentialism, there are forms of essentialism—such as those offered by Patrick Schreiner and Jordan Steffaniak—that would be able to defend themselves from this view.

Third, I survey views of given for why gender is socially constructed, separating the survey into three historic views and three contemporary views. In surveying the historic positions represented by the work of François Poulaine de la Barre, John Stuart Mill, and Simone de Beauvoir, I discovered that a similar pattern emerges in their view of the social construction of gender. Each writer begins by observing inequality between men and women and then moves to define inequality in terms of unjust social conditions. Doing so leads to the conclusion that inequality is not a product of natural differences in gender but a result of society's construction. Each writer then proceeds to relate biology and gender in terms of social construction.

Turning to contemporary theories of the social construction of gender, I noted that these contemporary views showed similarities and differences when compared to the historical account. What remains the same is the conclusion that gender is a social

construct; however, there are significant differences in methods, conclusions, and implications. While Poulaine, Mill, and Beauvoir hesitated to address metaphysics, contemporary thought has taken a decidedly metaphysical turn. While Sally Haslanger, Katheryn Tanner, and Judith Butler would all conclude that gender is socially constructed, each would provide a different answer for why this is so. For Haslanger, it is society that creates the norms, expectations, and roles that define what it means to be a certain gender. For Tanner, it is a view of human plasticity, seen most clearly in believers' change in status given our relationship to Christ, that grounds her conclusion that gender is socially constructed. Finally, for Butler, gender *and* sex are social constructs because they are products of the heterosexual matrix, a cultural production.

Finally, I offered four issues with the social construction of gender. (1) The social construction of gender leads to gender skepticism. When the social construction of gender makes other particularities more fundamental than gender, the result is an exchange of a universal category of male and female for diluted categories based upon infinite possible social contexts. (2) The social construction of gender results in the removal of universal moral categories as behaviors for members of each gender become context dependent. (3) The social construction of gender results in the marginalization of embodiment as it disconnects biological sex from gender. (4) The social construction of gender is biblically problematic, for it fails to connect gender to embodiment, hold to gender binary, recognize the ontological equality between men and women, and acknowledge and celebrate the distinctions between males and females.

Since the social construction of gender ultimately fails to provide a satisfying biblical alternative to gender essentialism, I concluded that a better conception of gender is needed.

In chapter 5, I constructed a conception of gender based on the view that there are no particular capacities or properties, outside of physiological differences, that belong exclusively to men or that belong exclusively to women. Instead, men and women

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uniquely express common human traits as men and as women. This conception of gender holds the ontological equality of men and women to be the starting point for developing a conception of gender and develops an ontological definition of men and women.

First, I argued for the superiority of an ontological definition of gender, for it corresponds to humanity's creation in the image of God. Since the image of God is best identified as an ontological reality, it is fitting that men and women should be defined ontologically. In addition, an ontological definition of gender aligns with Scripture's view of the ontological equality of men and women. I demonstrated that the ontological reality of the image of God means that the capacities of the image do not define the image and that the *imago Dei* exists prior to any capacities. Further, building upon Gracilynn Hanson's framework, I affirmed that Scripture holds a view of (1) the ontological equality of men and women, (2) their similarities in purpose, and (3) the absence of essential gender traits ascribed to either gender.

Given the ontological equality of men and women, I presented the following ontological definitions of "man" and "woman":

> A man is a human being created in the divine image in the male-type of humankind and who inherently expresses the common human capacities and the common human properties in ways that are typical of and fitting for a man.[5]

> A woman is a human being created in the divine image in the female-type of humankind and who inherently expresses the common human capacities and the common human properties in ways that are typical of and fitting for a woman.[6]

These two definitions have two main components: (1) an emphasis on the common humanity of men and women and (2) the distinction between men in women in their gendered embodiment. I showed that these definitions move beyond functional definitions to provide a robust ontological definition of man and woman that satisfies the

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[5] Gregg R. Allison, "What Is a Man?," ERLC, June 6, 2022, https://erlc.com/resource-library/ articles/what-is-a-man/.

[6] Both Allison and I are indebted to Hanson's work and have adapted her definition of a woman; see Gracilynn Hanson, "Establishing a Framework for Female-Gendered Embodiment in a Redemptive Context" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 156.

biblical framework for gender developed in chapter 2 and avoids the errors associated with other conceptions of gender.

Second, since men and women represent the creation of humankind according to two types, I addressed the implications of this conception of gender, specifically with respect to its notion of common humanity. Given the common humanity, men and women share (1) a common human nature, (2) common human capacities, (3) common human properties, and (4) a common *telos*. First, since both men and women were created in the image of God, they share the same common human nature. Second, human capacities such as rationality, cognitive abilities, emotional make-up, volitional faculty, motivations, and purposing are all common human capacities; therefore, each of these capacities can be equally displayed in both men and women. Third, men and women can pursue and practice all of the same virtues regardless of gender. The expression of common human properties can and will be displayed differently by each gender because of the differences in their gendered embodiment. Still, the notion of common human properties clarifies that one does not need to act in a certain way to become a man or a woman. Fourth, men and women have the same ultimate goal of Christoconformity. This *telos* means that they are each to put on Christ and become more like him, yield to the Holy Spirit's work and allow him to cultivate his fruit in their lives, and pursue knowledge and enjoyment of God. These four affirmations are grounded in the common humanity shared between men and women and demonstrate the implications of the ontological definition developed in this chapter.

In chapter 6, I considered gender in the context of human embodiment to show how my emphasis in chapter 5 on the common humanity shared by men and women is compatible with Scripture's teaching of men and women as two distinct types of humanity.

First, I defined embodiment based on Gregg Allison's four theses wherein he defines embodiment theologically in terms of being created, gendered, particular, and

social.[7] These four theses represent the aspects of embodiment and signify the comprehensiveness of embodiment. Based on Scripture, it is a fundamental given of human existence that all people would be created, gendered, particular, and social. Additionally, a right understanding of embodiment helps hold together the dual reality that all humanity shares a common human nature and that every individual is created distinct, which explains how men and women can share the same type of nature yet be distinct in terms of embodiment.

Second, I considered gender in the context of embodiment to demonstrate how gender's relationship to the created, particular, and social aspects of embodiment inform and clarify what gender means. I argued that Allison's four theses represent a fixed taxis, moving from most ontologically foundational to least. This ordering means that from an ontological perspective, only the created aspect of embodiment informs gender, while gender informs both particularity and sociality. Placing gender in a fixed order with the other aspects of embodiment allows for three important affirmations: (1) The distinctions between gender are grounded in God's creation of men and women in his image according to two distinct types of humanity. God's creation of men and women as two distinct types of humanity is even more ontologically significant than the biological and physiological differences they exhibit. (2) Gender is the primary particularity and is more fundamental than any other particularity. This affirmation means that everything one does is either as an embodied man or an embodied woman, as gender is even more fundamental to personal identity than race/ethnicity, family, or context. (3) Gender roles, while essential to following God's design, do not inform the ontological definition of gender.

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[7] Gregg R. Allison, "Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 23, no. 2 (Summer 2019): 157-80.

In this way, gender viewed in the context of embodiment provides sufficient clarity to identify the formal cause of gender (i.e., what gender is in its essence): the proper state of human existence where God created all of humanity in his image according to either the male type or female type of humanity. Based on this common humanity, men and women share a common human nature, common human capacities, common human properties, and common human *telos*, yet they uniquely express these commonalities as distinct types of humanity in ways that are fitting to their masculinity and femininity. Their commonality and distinction result from God's creative act, revealing who they are and how they are to live.

The end of chapter 6 marks the completion of my proposal. This chapter review demonstrates the accomplishment of this project's objectives of being *consistent* with Scripture, internally *coherent*, and *defensible* against external critique. I will identify the project's *value* for contemporary discourse on gender below.

Research Implications

Having summarized my argument up to this point, I will now offer a few implications of my research.

(1) The conception of gender developed in this project thoroughly confronts and rejects sex polarity, replacing it with a view of ontological equality. As noted in chapter 1, Prudence Allen defines sex polarity as the view that men and women are significantly different and that men are superior to women.[8] Both premises of sex polarity are rejected by the conception of gender developed in this project. First, the conception of gender as grounded in common human properties and common human capacities rejects that men and women are significantly different. As discussed in chapter 5, men and women are created in God's image and share a common human identity. From this

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[8] Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, 1:77.

common identity follows the affirmation that there are no particular capacities or properties, outside of physiological differences, that belong exclusively to men or that belong exclusively to women. Instead, men and women uniquely express common human traits as men and as women. Second, this conception of gender rejects men as superior to women, emphasizing the ontological equality between the two genders. By ontological equality, this project affirms that what is most fundamental about both men and women is that God created them in his image. Since both men and women share the same creation, display God's image, pursue the same *telos* of conformity to Christ, and participate in the same mission, this project concludes that men and women share ontological equality, and any notion of the superiority of one gender over the other is rejected.

(2) Building a conception of gender upon common human properties and common human capacities makes the contribution of shifting the starting point for discussions on gender towards emphasizing the commonality between men and women. The motivation to begin with the common humanity of men and women is a result of seeking to define gender according to its essence, which originates in God's action to create humanity in his image according to the male and female types. All discussion of a common human nature, common human capacities, common human properties, and a common human *telos* is grounded in the affirmation that both men and women are created in the image of God (Gen 1:27). This emphasis does not deny that men and women are distinct; it celebrates God's creation of humanity according to two types and recognizes that each is necessary for fulfilling the divine mandate and purpose God gave to humanity. The distinction between men and women is not in terms of their nature but is a result of their embodiment, as God created each as a different type of humanity. Consequently, both men and women will display common human properties and common human capacities in ways fitting to their masculinity and femininity, respectively, as they both pursue conformity to the likeness of Christ.

This contribution of beginning the discussion of gender with commonality has three significant benefits. First, it makes clear that men and women share a common human nature. This point is essential given the Christological significance of the incarnate Son's taking on a full human nature and being born as an embodied male. If men and women do not have the same nature, then Christ's human nature only relates to male humanity. However, since men and women *do* have the same nature, Christ's work made way for the redemption of both male- and female-embodied image bearers. Second, this contribution orients the discussion of gender towards valuing the vital part that both men and women play in God's work to reconcile all people to himself through Christ. While there are differences in roles that men and women will fulfill in accomplishing this work, these differences do not diminish the valuable contribution of both men and women. While beginning the discussion of gender with the distinctions in roles does not necessitate a devaluing of women's contribution, it does require effort to ensure that a devaluing effect is not communicated.[9] Third, emphasizing the commonality between men and women orients both genders towards their ultimate *telos*. While emphasizing biblical masculinity and femininity can clarify how men and women can faithfully follow God's design for particular roles, it can also confuse the subordinate *telos* of biblical manhood and womanhood with the ultimate *telos* of conformity to the likeness of Christ. When one begins with the commonality of men and women, this *telos* is clearly presented as the end goal of both men and women and clarifies that each gender is to pursue this aim.

(3) This conception of gender provides an ontological definition of "man" and "woman":

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[9] I have in mind the egalitarian critique that complementarians' oft-promoted notion of "equal but different" is a hollow refrain. For an example of this critique, see Linda L. Belleville, "Women in Ministry: An Egalitarian Perspective," in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. James R. Beck, rev. ed., Counterpoints Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 64-68.

> A man is a human being created in the divine image in the male-type of humankind and who inherently expresses the common human capacities and the common human properties in ways that are typical of and fitting for a man.
>
> A woman is a human being created in the divine image in the female-type of humankind and who inherently expresses the common human capacities and the common human properties in ways that are typical of and fitting for a woman.

These two definitions demonstrate their biblical fidelity and philosophical superiority over contemporary evangelicalism's standard definition.[10]

These definitions are biblical in that they (1) are grounded in human embodiment, (2) recognize the ontological equality between males and females, (3) acknowledge and celebrate the distinctions between males and females, (4) affirm a male-female gender binary, and (5) affirm that human properties and capacities are expressible by both males and females.

These definitions are philosophically superior in that they avoid the challenges that the lead, provide, and protect versus affirm, submit, and nurture paradigm faces. These definitions define the essence of men and women, beginning with what is most basic—their creation in the image of God. By beginning with what is most fundamental, these definitions recognize that everything one does is as a man or a woman, as gender is the most foundational particularity. The major issue with the functional definition is that it sets up a standard where members of a gender must perform some action in order to be classified as biblically masculine or feminine. Furthermore, this standard evangelical definition cannot account for the fact that members of both genders are able to perform these functions. This issue makes the definition vulnerable to the continuity argument[11]

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[10] Jordan Steffaniak presents the following as representing conservative evangelical views on masculinity and femininity, respectively: (1) biological males are biologically ordered to be achievers, creators, and protectors; (2) biological females are biologically ordered to be nurturers, receivers, and sustainers. Jordan L. Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue: A Defense of Gender Essentialism," *Southeastern Theological Review* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 20.

[11] The continuity argument rejects the ability of gender essentialism to function as a way of classification. It does not view the differences between men and women presented by gender essentialist positions as differences that can lead to the two distinct categories of masculinity and femininity.

and the exclusion argument.[12] However, the ontological definitions developed in this project are able to defend against both objections because the distinction between men and women is grounded in God's creative act to form humanity according to two types. Men and women share a common human nature expressed in their common human properties and capacities even while they are distinct in terms of their created embodiment. This understanding accounts for how men and women can express all of the same virtues and have all of the same capacities while maintaining that men and women represent two distinct types of humanity.

Jordan Steffaniak evaluates the evangelical desire for gender essentialism and concludes, "Conservative evangelicals desire something far more robust than is philosophically feasible or biblically warranted."[13] The ontological definitions provided in this project satisfy both critiques regarding the current definitions by not extending the definitions beyond what is biblically warranted or philosophically defensible. These definitions affirm the essence of what a man is and what a woman is without restricting the diversity of individual expression of particular men and particular women. While these definitions originated with the work of Gregg Allison, this project has contributed a defense of these definitions, demonstrating their biblical fidelity and philosophical defensibility.[14]

(4) This conception of gender is grounded in embodiment and contributes to the framework for emphasizing what is held in common between men and women without denying the distinction. Grounding this conception in embodiment provides a correction against both gender essentialism and the social construction of gender. First,

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[12] The exclusion argument, which argues that all classificatory aspects of essentialism that seek to group humans based on gender differences always exclude some human, who would be a good candidate for inclusion.

[13] Steffaniak, "Saving Masculinity and Femininity from the Morgue," 32.

[14] Allison, "What Is a Man?"

locating the distinction between men and women in embodiment corrects against gender essentialism's impulse to ground the distinction between men and women in characteristics or actions. As stated in chapter 5, this impulse is problematic because Scripture contains examples of men and women displaying the characteristics and actions of the other gender. Furthermore, it would go against Scripture's teaching to affirm that men and women have different natures, so differentiating gender at the level of nature is ruled out. Grounding the conception of gender in embodiment places the distinction between men and women at what is most fundamental—their creation by God in his image according to two types of humanity. Men and women were created with the same human nature (the grounds for affirming common human properties and capacities) but with distinction according to their gendered embodiment. Given the significance of embodiment to personhood, this distinction affirms that men and women are gendered all the way down, and that their creation according to the male type or female type of humanity will impact all aspects of their personhood. This distinction does not impact the fact that men and women share the same nature as they were both created in the image of God. Embodiment allows the distinction between men and women to be located in the right place and rejects distinctions that go too far (i.e., distinctions in nature) or are superficial (i.e., distinctions in characteristics).

Second, providing a conception of gender grounded in embodiment corrects the social construction of gender, which can marginalize the body. As discussed in chapter 5, the social construction of gender disconnects sex and gander, resulting in a view of the human body in which physiological features only have meaning because of their social recognition. This impulse results in the downplaying or dismissing of the physical, embodied differences between men and women. However, Scripture always associates gender with the human body and does not have a category for gender as disconnected from embodiment. Again, by grounding the conception of gender in embodiment, the distinction between men and women is located in God's act of creating

humankind according to two types—male and female. This affirmation does not reduce men and women to mere biological determinism, as it maintains that they share a common human nature, but it does hold that the differences in male and female bodies are both a result of God's good creation and necessary for the flourishing of humankind. Only because humanity exists as both male-gendered embodied image bearers and female-gendered embodied image bearers can the divine mandate be fulfilled (Gen 1:28).

(5) This conception of gender properly locates gender roles in the discussion of male and female sociality. As noted in chapter 6, discussion of gender roles often confuses the discussion on gender, as these roles can be viewed as the final cause of gender (i.e., the goal of masculinity and femininity), thereby allowing for manhood and womanhood to be defined in terms of men and women's fulfilling these roles. However, this conception of gender makes the contribution of locating all discussions of roles to the aspect of sociality within the context of embodiment. This contribution, combined with the emphasis on the importance of defining gender according to its formal cause (i.e., its essence), allows for biblical roles to be properly emphasized as significant for the Christian life without contributing to the definition of gender. As presented in chapter 6, the aspects of embodiment—created, gendered, particular, and social—represent a fixed taxis moving from what is the most ontologically foundational to the least. Since gender is ontologically prior to sociality, sociality does not contribute to the ontological definition of gender. Instead, one is a man or a woman first, and then depending on the particular relationship, one is called to live out the biblical prescriptions associated with the role.

To clarify, one could ask why wives submit to their husbands. If roles are the final cause, then one might answer that wives submit to their husbands because it is in their nature to do so. However, according to the framework developed in this project, this answer would be problematic because it attributes the action to a distinction in the nature of men and women. Since men and women have the same nature and are both called by

Scripture to fulfill the action of submitting (Eph 5:21), attributing the instruction for wives to submit to their husbands to the nature of women should be dismissed. Instead, this question should be answered in a way that affirms that when a woman takes on the role of wife, God has provided instruction for the flourishing of the relationship, which includes a wife's submitting to her husband (Eph 5:22).[15] Roles are significant for how Christian men and women live their lives, but they do not offer definitional power to the essence of gender because gender is ontologically prior to roles. While gender will influence which roles one is to take on, the roles themselves do not need to be grounded in nature in order to be maintained. Instead, roles should be grounded in God's instruction for how his people as gendered embodied beings are to live and relate to one another.

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Areas of Future Research

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Having highlighted the contributions of my project, I will now suggest some areas of future research.

One of the more significant areas of future research involves the application of this conception of gender to discussions of the transgender experience. While the topic of transgender is related to this discussion of gender, I have restricted my focus to providing clarity on ontological definitions of "man" and "woman." I hold that these definitions are a first step for knowing what a man is and what a woman is before engaging in discussion with those with "gender dysphoria," that is, with people whose sex and gender identity do not align.[16] Preston Sprinkle identifies the key question in the transgender discussion: "If someone experiences incongruence between their biological sex and their internal sense

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[15] One could further explain that Scripture's reason for providing that design is that the marriage relationship is to be a representation of the relationship between Christ and his bride, the church (Eph 5:25).

[16] Gregg R. Allison, *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2021), 41.

of self, which one determines who they are—and why?"[17] While I have not directly addressed this question in my project, I have established a conception of gender that provides the necessary framework for answering this question. Fundamentally, I have established the importance of embodiment to rightly understand gender and argued that biological sex and gender are always inextricably linked. I have also sought to provide greater clarity on what a man is and what a woman is so that some of the social reasons a person might experience gender dysphoria (e.g., not fitting the gender stereotypes of the culture in which one lives) can be addressed in a way that clarifies what accurately defines a man and a woman.

Related to the transgender discussion, this conception of gender could be applied to answering this question: Does gender identity exist as a distinct ontological essence? While gender identity does exist in terms of language (i.e., words and expressions used to describe how one views one's own gender), this question is oriented metaphysically to ask whether gender identity provides a distinct ontological essence of a person.[18] The implications of this question are significant for the transgender discussion. If one views gender identity as a distinct ontological essence, then it is more difficult to answer why incongruence between biological sex and gender identity should result in a person's seeking to align gender identity with their biological sex. This question about gender identity has raised significant debate surrounding the transgender issue as well as among those who style themselves "gender-critical feminists" who argue that "being a woman is not an 'identity.'"[19] While this project has not directly addressed this question,

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[17] Preston Sprinkle, *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2021), 24.

[18] Sprinkle also raises this question; see Sprinkle, *Embodied*, 46.

[19] Sheila Jeffreys, *Gender Hurts: A Feminist Analysis of the Politics of Transgenderism* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 4.

the gender conception and method provided with the ontological understanding of gender could be applied to this research question.

Another area of future research involves using the conception of gender developed in this project to interact with the constellation of positions within complementarianism.[20] While complementarianism fundamentally affirms that men and women are equal in their creation in the image of God, access to salvation through Jesus Christ, and receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit but are different in terms of roles and responsibilities, a divergence occurs in the application of this view.[21] A helpful way of understanding the discussion is asking in what *spheres*, or areas of life, do complementarian convictions dictate behavior, with the three main spheres discussed being the home, the church, and society. Again, the purpose of this project was to discuss gender, not gender roles, but the implications of this framework do lend themselves to engaging in this discussion, as multiple points developed would have bearing on how one stylizes one's complementarianism. Hence, taking this conception of gender and applying its features specifically to the discussion within complementarianism is an area of possible future research.

Final Thoughts

To return to the point established by John Webster, I affirm that theologians speak most helpfully and can contribute to those in other fields and persuasions when they make concrete theological claims with clarity and confidence.[22] Doing so was the aim of the project—namely, presenting a conception of gender constructed upon common

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[20] Gregg Allision identifies the three views of "minimum complementarianism," "moderate complementarianism," and "maximum complementarianism." Gregg R. Allison, *The Church: An Introduction*, Short Studies in Systematic Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 140-43.

[21] Allison, *The Church*, 132.

[22] This sentence summarizes the argument of John Webster in "The Human Person," in *Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 219.

humanity that is *consistent* with Scripture, internally *coherent*, *defensible* against external critique, and *valuable* for contemporary discourse on gender. Men and women share a common humanity, given their common creation in the image of God (Gen 1:27). This common human identity grounds their common human nature, common human capacities, common human properties, and common human *telos*. However, because of the distinction of their embodiment, emphasizing men and women's common humanity does not diminish the differences between the two genders maintained and celebrated throughout Scripture.

While more discussion on gender is sure to follow, I am optimistic that this project will encourage others who discuss gender theologically to begin by emphasizing the commonalities shared between men and women. Further, it is my hope that those who engage in discourse on gender will ensure that their proposals align with Scripture's teaching on gender, which (1) is grounded in human embodiment, (2) recognizes the ontological equality between males and females, (3) acknowledges and celebrates the distinctions between males and females, (4) affirms a male-female gender binary, and (5) affirms that human properties and capacities are expressible by both males and females.

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ABSTRACT

MALE AND FEMALE, HE CREATED THEM:
GENDER IN THE CONTEXT OF
HUMAN EMBODIMENT

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In this dissertation, I develop a conception of gender that (1) holds that men and women share a common humanity that is grounded in their mutual creation in the image of God and results in the expression of common human properties and common human capacities in ways that are fitting to their masculinity or femininity, respectively, and (2) maintains the distinction between men and women as two unique types of humanity that is grounded in the created differences of gendered embodiment. This project aims to present and defend this conception of gender as *consistent* with Scripture, internally *coherent*, *defensible* against external critique, and *valuable* for contemporary discourse on gender. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to this study. In chapter 2, I develop a framework for evaluating conceptions of gender based on Scripture's teaching. In chapter 3, I define, evaluate, and critique gender essentialism, the view concerned with determining what fixed or innate qualities are intrinsic to being male or female. I ultimately conclude that gender essentialism does not satisfy the biblical criteria developed in chapter 2. In chapter 4, I survey and evaluate the social construction of gender, the view that affirms that gender is derived from societal forces and is not dependent on biological sex. I ultimately conclude that the social construction of gender also fails to satisfy the biblical criteria developed. In chapter 5, I construct a biblical conception of gender based on the view that there are no particular capacities or

properties, outside of physiological differences, that belong exclusively to men or that belong exclusively to women. Instead, as I argue, men and women uniquely express common human traits as men and as women. According to this conception of gender, the common humanity of men and women serves as the foundation of the ontological equality of men and women. Hence, in this chapter, I offer an ontological definition of men and women. In chapter 6, I consider gender in the context of human embodiment to show how the emphasis on the common humanity of men and women is compatible with Scripture's teaching on men and women as two distinct types of humanity. Chapter 7 concludes this study.

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        ThM Fellow, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, 2021-2023

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT
        Student Ministry Coordinator, Faith Bridge Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida, 2017-2018
        Student Minister, Sojourn Community Church J-Town, Louisville, Kentucky, 2018-2019