INTRODUCTION

Throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, radical feminism's movement to disconnect gender from biology paved the way for a cultural consensus so strong that individuals who have never taken a gender studies class resonate with the phrase "I am a woman trapped in a man's body."[1] Although the recent re-election of Donald Trump to the American presidency has had the effect of rolling back some of this consensus, its demise should not be exaggerated. Many people in the USA and further afield remain beholden to a dissociation between gender and biology which has had the ironic effect of enshrining rigid gender stereotypes while encouraging those who feel uncomfortable in their bodies to pursue sex-alteration surgery; if a man "feels" like a woman, perhaps because he enjoys fashion, cooking, or delicate color shades, then he must in fact *be* a woman in his essence and should therefore change his biology to match his core identity. Cultural consensus on human anthropology has shifted, and this

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

book seeks to address the philosophical underpinnings of that shift. In rejecting the givenness of human nature, in failing to identify and live within the fixed limits of what it means to be a man or a woman, we lose the necessary grounds for human flourishing. What is needed, more than any legal changes, is a recovery of what it means to be male and female, man and woman, within the givenness of creation.

C.S. Lewis provides an answer. As a neo-Platonic realist, Lewis took ideas seriously and believed that they profoundly influenced reality. In *Perelandra*, Lewis presents a view of gender that is more than biological, but not less. He accepts part of Simone de Beauvoir's claim that society constructs a concept of gender, but insists that there is an essence of masculinity and femininity that expresses real principles of each. He presents the masculine as an outward orientation towards protecting the home, and the feminine as an inward orientation towards creating conditions conducive to life. Throughout his novels, Lewis has moments where the nature of these genders become clear. He also follows Aristotle's distinction between essence and quality: men can acquire the qualities of women, without changing their essence; Queen Orual in *Till We Have Faces* can be a "manly woman" who wields authority "like a man," yet her essential femininity is never in doubt.

In Lewis's mind, gender is part of the givenness of human nature; when individuals respond to the gift with disdain, or a desire to exchange it for a different gift, they evade a constituent requirement of *eudaimonia*, of joy found through excellence in being human. By articulating a strong understanding of the human person as gendered, and of gender as a complex yet unavoidable part of reality, Lewis equips a confused modernity to recover wisdom in the face of technological possibility. Contemporary society has the possibility to alter human hormones and sex organs; the question

remains whether such actions *should* occur. Lewis pushes back on technological capacity, suggesting that the path of wisdom requires asking normative questions of *should* or *ought* before action occurs.

This study proceeds through a mixture of primary and secondary scholarship. The topic of discussion will dictate whether primary or secondary citations will be more prevalent: I seek to display Lewis's words, analyze and explain them in their context, and situate that analysis within Lewis scholarship while illustrating the interconnected nature of humanities research. Portions of this work will be more philosophical, reaching for natural law analysis from Lewis' *Abolition of Man*, for example, and will draw in more philosophical texts to extend Lewis's thought. The primary method will involve close reading and intertextual analysis especially in tracing the connections between Edmund Spenser, John Milton, and Lewis. Across all chapters, this book will seek to show the reader why the arguments made are substantive and true through a preponderance of evidence.

Part of Lewis' genius lay in his ability to work out complex ideas in very rich yet incredibly clear images. He combined this ability with an awareness of the progression of ideas. Considering the world of 1940s Britain, the idea of thousands of teenagers requesting gender altering surgery seems like a *reductio ad absurdum* when imagined from Lewis' perspective. Yet, he accurately predicted that in rejecting limits and achieving the "abolition of man," freedom would be exchanged for control by a cabal of planners. Identifying a road back from cultural confusion requires not just a focus on the consequential results of bad theory, but naming, analyzing, and replacing wrong theory with truth. Lewis's analysis helps a decaying Western world recover its strength. Below is the route this study will follow to reach this end.

Chapter One will provide an overview, key definitions, and two exemplar authors who have shaped the modern consensus on gender: Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler. De Beauvoir began the tradition of radical feminism, and Butler is a contemporary end point for that theoretical approach. Both de Beauvoir and Butler retain significant influence in the contemporary academy, and understanding their ideas enables a grasp of the false theory that leads to tragedy. In order to refute the arguments underlying a denial of gendered reality, one must first understand the chain of reasoning that reaches such a conclusion. Chapter One shows why Lewis' theory is needed, and closes with a transition to Lewis's insights.

Chapter Two opens with a survey of Lewis's nonfiction writings on gender, and then examines the literary connections between Spenser, Milton, and Lewis. Lewis gained significant themes and ideas from both his literary predecessors. In gender, as in so many other areas, Lewis is not an innovator. Instead, he articulates the traditional view in a new form. Spenser taught Lewis how to shade meaning through multiple layers of symbolism and pageantry, and Milton provided Lewis with both a model to follow and mistakes to avoid in writing his own narratives of creation and temptation in Paradise. Lewis borrowed heavily from his literary masters, and considering the connections between them reveals deeper meaning in Lewis's writing.

Chapter Three builds a Lewisian theory of gender, beginning with "givenness" as a key theme in *Perelandra*. Ransom encounters this idea in the waves and fruit; he learns that the right response to what is given is gratitude and enjoyment. In discussion with the Lady, he learns that this idea extends to the body. For Lewis, this givenness functions as the foundation for worship and ties everything back to creation (which partly explains why Lewis is interested in telling a new creation story along the lines of Genesis

and *Paradise Lost*). This chapter builds on prior scholarship—Justin Buckley Dyer and Micah Watson's *C.S. Lewis on Politics and Natural Law*, David McPherson's *The Virtue of Limits*, Michael Ward's commentaries on Lewis, and Monica Hilder's examinations on Lewis and gender—and proceeds into *That Hideous Strength* to further clarify Lewis's theory, showing that the dance of complementarity reveals Lewis's vision of how men and women interact within marriage.

Chapters Four and Five trace Lewis's theory of givenness and gender in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The Narnia stories are built around male and female characters (almost always in pairs); the harmony and conflict between men and women propels Lewis' plots, while providing images of the way men and women work together. These chapters are organized around eight distinct principles Lewis illustrates through his characters, and they deepen Lewis's ideas through story application. We could do likewise with the Ransom Trilogy, which we will certainly refer to, but space forbids it.

The conclusion brings the argument full circle, arguing that Lewis's writings and ideas reveal the need for a kindly re-enchantment. Literature, with its power of mythologically revealing the hidden meanings of reality, invites readers to comprehend the nature of the given and their need to receive it with gratitude. The answer to the problem of transgenderism lies in a return to the doctrine of creation and understanding all of reality as God's gift; our task is to receive the gift and submit to it. In that submission lies joy.

While this book applies Lewis's thought to the specific area of gender, Lewis's theory applies much more broadly than to this singular issue. Broadly construed, gender theory in contemporary thought derives from the critical tradition inaugurated by the men Paul Ricouer called the "masters of suspicion": Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. These thinkers taught their disciples that reality is hid-

den behind what is perceived, and critique is the method to reveal the real. Lewis begins not with critique, but with receptivity. Reality is not some deceptive prison meant to oppress, but the rich gift of a superabundant Creator whose love overflows into a bountiful reality. In that sense, Lewis's theory of the given is a theory-of-everything. The attitude of receptivity and gratitude becomes, for him, the proper human response to all aspects of creation. Such an attitude is not naive, but rather the same beginning point Plato articulated in the *Theaetetus* dialogue: "Philosophy begins in wonder."[2] Wonder, as Peter Kreeft argues, leads to understanding and evaluation.[3] Critique still has a place, but as a subsequent step following acceptance and appreciation of what something *is*. Lewis's approach, therefore, functions as a Christian philosophical response to critical theory in a variety of forms. Rather than beginning in an assumed Marxist dialectic, Nietzschean power dynamic, or Freudian sexual desire, a proper response to encountering reality begins with feminine receptivity towards the gift and then working out the implications of what is given.

THE BACKDROP OF GENESIS

Behind Lewis' theory of gender, *Perelandra*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and much of Spenser's thought lies a crucial biblical passage: Genesis 1-3. The following exegesis does not fit in the chapters which follow, but this book requires a familiarity with the major movements of the biblical Creation and Fall narratives.

2. Plato, "Theaetetus" in *Great Books of the Western World* v. 6, ed. Mortimer Adler. (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1993), 519.

3. Peter Kreeft, *Socratic Logic: A Logic Text Using Socratic Method, Platonic Questions, and Aristotelian Principles* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2010).

Genesis begins with "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (1:1 ESV). While the passage proceeds to detail an orderly creation, the method of creation and the one who creates are foregrounded in the text. God pre-exists his creation; he makes by speaking, and all that exists begins in Him.[4] Over vv. 2-25, God replaces the emptiness of "the earth was without form and void" (1:2) with a vast variety of life: light, day, night, heaven, land, plants, sun, moon, stars, birds, fish, livestock.[5] "And God saw that it was good" (1:18) The goodness theme repeats through the account, highlighting for the reader the nature of this creation: vitality, variety, and goodness. Verses 26-27 merit full quotation:

> Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'
>
> So God created man in his own image,
> in the image of God he created him;
> male and female he created them (1:26-27).

The first man and first woman are made in the divine image; their look and appearance, their being, in some ineffable mystery, recalled their Creator. They were given rule and dominion over all that God had created. Both male and female bear the divine image. This grants them ontological equality, yet draws a sharp dis-

4. Mark Dever, *The Message of the Old Testament: Promises Made* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006), 68.

5. Chad Owen Brand, "The Work of God: Creation and Providence" in *A Theology for the Church: Revised Edition*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2014): 207-208.

tinction between the way they bear that image. Just as Genesis 1 draws a distinction between land and sea, day and night, heavens and earth, it notes a distinction between man and woman. Both bear the divine image, yet each does so in different ways. They are then given a direct command: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (1:28). The first command they are given pertains to their masculinity and femininity; to be "fruitful and multiply," the man and woman will have to come together and each play their part. They complement each other, and through their complementarity have the capacity to obey the divine command. "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (1:31). This climactic judgment elevates the "good" to "very good," reflecting the capstone of creation. All creation is good, and the image bearers of God rightly ruling over all is "very good."

Genesis 2 recounts the same creation story, but in a different, more narrational way. The text describes the man being made "of dust from the ground." The LORD God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (2:7). The man is then put "in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it" (2:15). While keeping the garden, the man is commanded, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (2:16b-17). Adam then names the animals and discovers that "for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him" (2:20b). God then took a rib from Adam's side as he slept and "the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man" (2:22). Adam then breaks into poetic joy: "This at last is bone of my bones / and flesh of my flesh; / she shall be called Woman / because she was taken out of Man" (2:23). In this

context, Genesis presents marriage as a pre-political institution: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (2:24). Both men and women are made of the same substance, are given breath by God, and are called to "become one flesh." To that task they bring differences; their complementarity allows them to fulfill the divine command. Genesis presents obedience to the command within the institution of marriage. It is significant that marriage is located before the Fall in the Genesis narrative; marriage is not an evil to be fixed or superseded, but a good gift that requires both man and woman to come together to fully image God within it.

Genesis 3 introduces the serpent as an agent of temptation in the garden; he asks the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" (3:1b) Their conversation continues, eventually reaching the fateful moment when "the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate" (3:6). The woman's vision of what is good shifts, and she acts according to her corrupted vision; she then shares her corruption with her husband, who had been present but said nothing during that moment. Both Milton and Lewis reimagine this scene by removing Adam. Milton has Adam working on the other side of the garden, and in *Perelandra* Lewis removes Tor (the Adamic figure) to the other side of the planet during Tinidril's temptation. Genesis records the man standing there next to his wife and then sharing in her disobedience. Immediately, "the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked" (3:7). This verse contrasts directly with the closing verse of Chapter 2:[6]

6. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, Michael Waldstein trans. (Boston: Pauline Books & Media), 172.

"And the man and his wife were both naked, and not ashamed" (2:25). Genesis portrays their easy complementarity through nakedness; that ease would be gone on the other side of the Fall. Sin and shame replaced natural nudity. The exuberance of "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (2:23) is replaced with "The woman you gave to be with me" (3:12) as both man and woman blame each other for their own choices. God metes out punishment along gendered lines: The woman will have greater "pain in childbirth" and her "desire will be toward your husband, but he shall rule over you" (3:16). The man receives punishment as well: "cursed is the ground because of you; / in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life" (3:17). Rather than the easy working of the garden, the man's life will be characterized by toil: "By the sweat of your face / you shall eat bread. . . ." (3:19) The woman's punishment is an inward punishment, focusing on childbirth and her marital relationship; the man's punishment is outward, focusing on his work in the world. The Fall concludes with an act of grace: "And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them" (3:21) before exiling them from Eden.[7]

Genesis 1-3 shows a perfect reality exchanged for a broken world; it also shows the original goodness of creation. That goodness is decayed but not destroyed; the "good and very good" proclamation of the Creator still remains. So too does the gendered experience of humanity. Humans have two sexes, two genders that reflect biological sex. Men and women come together in marriage, and through their complementarity they bring forth more life, more image bearers to proclaim the goodness of the Creator in a fallen world. Even in the midst of the Fall, of the rule of sin

7. Eugene H. Merrill, Mark F. Rooker, and Michael A. Grisanti, *The Word and the World: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 182.

and death over creation, God places a promise of coming hope: In the punishment to the serpent, God says, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, / and between your offspring and her offspring; / he shall bruise your head, / and you shall bruise his heel" (3:15). Jesus the Christ came to fulfill the promise of the *protoevangelion*, and in his life, death, and resurrection he proves that the goodness of creation remains; it is redeemed and will one day be fully restored in the return of Christ.[8]

Living well in this world requires perceiving the world as a gift, and ourselves as contingent beings in the creational order. Eve's sin was pride, and it caused her to trade what was given to her for a false promise. The transgender lie works on a similar premise: Through the false promise of satisfying the longing for the right body as represented in gender dysphoria, transgender ideology urges people to give away the health and vitality of their bodies for a lifetime of medical dependency. Instead, we must learn from Eve's mistake. She was already "like God" as an image bearer. What she needed was to rightly perceive herself, and perceive the lie of the serpent for what it was. Through his work in fiction and non-fiction, C.S. Lewis helps confused moderns rightly perceive themselves as recipients of the rich gift of reality. Through his writings, our vision becomes more true (to quote Lewis's oft used phrase), and our lives follow the path to *eudaimonia*.

8. Thomas F. Torrence, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ* (Downers' Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 239. Torrence writes that "Humanity in Christ is the creation God made it to be and may not now cease to be what it is. It is humanity in living communion with the creative source of life. The resurrection of Jesus and of human nature in him is therefore the foundation and source of a profound and radically new Christian humanism."