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Transsexualism as Transhumanism

The Rise of Transsexualism

I would like to address transsexualism, but my broader purpose is to place it in the context of a much larger movement of which most people are so far unaware: Transhumanism.

To begin with transsexualism itself. Two generations ago, no one had heard of the idea that a biological man could be or become a woman, or a biological woman, a man. Even one generation ago, most people considered the idea too absurd for discussion. All at once, this strange belief has burst into the mainstream. Although the truth of the belief is not yet taken for granted among the population as a whole, it is already considered too obvious to require argument among the opinion-forming classes. Teachers, parents, legislators, jurists, psychologists, churches, and businesses are under enormous pressure to accept it. One even hears of medical school professors who are afraid to acknowledge biological differences of sex in their classrooms.¹ Except as an abbreviation for sexual intercourse, the very term “sex” is becoming obsolete, for we are now told that nothing really matters but freely chosen “gender.”

¹ K. Herzog, *Med Schools Are Now Denying Biological Sex*, <https://bariweiss.substack.com/p/med-schools-are-now-denying-biological>.

Though sex is part of the fabric of reality, so-called “genders” are viewed as fluid and subject to human will. We are told that they are “chosen,” that they are “assigned,” and that they can be “reassigned” or changed.

This transformation of views is astonishing, and the speed with which it is taking place is even more astonishing. After all, although persons who consider transsexualism mistaken are now condemned as anti-science bigots, there is no scientific basis whatsoever for the idea that a biological man may be a woman, or that a biological woman may be a man, or that one may change into the other. All of the supposedly scientific evidence for the idea that “trans men” are really men, and that “trans women” are really women, comes down to the mere fact that they say they are, or feel they are. We are not disembodied angels, but embodied beings. Our bodies are not just containers or prisons for our true selves, but aspects of our true selves.

Psychologists used to call inappropriate feelings of discomfort with one’s own sex “dysphoria,” a term indicating a pathological mismatch between what one is and what one feels. That way of speaking made sense. Now, however, inappropriate feelings are taken to *define* reality, and if we say that feelings *cannot* define reality, but ought rather to correspond to it, then we are accused of lacking compassion. This makes no more sense than if a patient told his doctor that he was born wanting to be intoxicated all the time, and the doctor concluded that his drunken self must be his true self, so that it would be unkind to discourage his drunkenness – or if he told his doctor that he felt like a fox, and the doctor concluded that he must really be a fox, so that it would be insensitive to deny his inner fox hood. Suppose a man who thinks he is a fox has the frontal lobes of his brain cut out, his limbs surgically altered for running on all fours, and his skin stimulated to grow a furry pelt. Suppose he then leaves human society in order to live in a burrow in the wild and eat mice. Will this make him a fox? Of course not. Such a person will not be a fox, but a cruelly damaged human being. In the same way, a woman who has had hormone treatments and sexual surgery to resemble a man will not be a man, but a cruelly damaged woman.

Do you think the idea of a man who identifies as a fox is science fiction? Some people do identify as animals.² A significant number also identify as blind and ask to have their vision destroyed, or identify as paraplegic and ask to have their limbs amputated, or identify as paralyzed and ask to have their spinal cords severed. So far, in the medical literature, feelings and desires of the latter sort are considered a serious disorder, called body identity dysphoria.³ But if it is a disorder for a human to want his limbs amputated because he identifies as a paraplegic, then why isn't it a disorder for a man to want to have his male sexual organs amputated because he identifies as a woman? To cut out a tumor is therapeutic, because it restores the order of the body. To cut out a healthy organ is not therapeutic, because it destroys the order of the body.

Can Sex Really Be Changed?

Even from a merely bodily point of view, so-called sex transitioning does not really change sex. Among other things, the brain is already indelibly stamped male or female; the injection of hormones does not erase the stamp, and genital surgery does not affect the brain at all.⁴ Brain physiologists tell us that large parts of the brain cortex are thicker in women than in men. Ratios of gray to white matter vary, too. The hippocampus, which plays a role in memory and spatial navigation, takes up a greater proportion of the female brain than of the male brain. On the other hand, a certain *region* of the hippocampus is larger in the male. A variety of neurotransmitter systems work differently in men and women. The right and left hemispheres are more interconnected in female brains than in male ones, and the corpus callosum, which links them together, is larger. The amygdala, involved in emotion and emotional

² See for example the unattributed Cambridge University research paper: *Why Be Human When You Can Be Otherkin?*, <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/features/why-be-human-when-you-can-be-otherkin>.

³ See for example: S. Müller, *Body Integrity Identity Disorder (BIID) – Is the Amputation of Healthy Limbs Ethically Justified?*, “American Journal of Bioethics” 2009, No. 9:1, January, pp. 36–43, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19132621>.

⁴ This paragraph is adapted from the author's book *On the Meaning of Sex*, ISI Books, Wilmington, Delaware, 2021, Chapter 3. “The Meaning of Sexual Differences.”

memory, is larger in men, but the deep limbic system, which is also involved in emotion, is larger in women. Sex-related differences between the hemispheres exist for other brain regions as well, including both the prefrontal cortex, which is involved in personality, cognition, and other executive functions, and the hypothalamus, which links the nervous system with the endocrine system and connected with maternal behavior. External circumstances, such as chronic stress, act on male brains differently than on female. Brain diseases also diverge in men and women. Even the neurological aspects of addiction differ between the two sexes.⁵

By the way, although we must always be compassionate, compassion does not lie in encouraging persons suffering psychological delusions about their sex to mutilate their bodies. The evidence does not even support the claim that people who have had so-called sex change surgery are happier after the damage is done. Thinking that happiness is getting what one wants, they often believe that they will be happier, but by and large all their former psychological problems persist. A man who eventually had his sex change surgery reversed poignantly writes, “Nothing made sense. Why hadn’t the recommended hormones and surgery worked? Why was I still distressed about my gender identity? Why wasn’t I happy being Laura? Why did I have strong desires to be Walt again?”⁶ One of the best and largest studies, carried out in Sweden, found that “Persons with transsexualism, after sex reassignment, have considerably higher risks for mortality, suicidal behavior, and psychiatric morbidity than the general population.”⁷

⁵ See: L. Cahill, *Why Sex Matters for Neuroscience*, “Nature Reviews: Neuroscience” 2006, No. 7, pp. 477–484; L. Cahill, *His Brain, Her Brain*, “Scientific American” 2005, No. 292:5, pp. 40–47; D. Kimura, *Sex Differences in the Brain*, “Scientific American” 1992, No. 267:3, pp. 119–125.

⁶ W. Heyer, *Hormones, Surgery, Regret: I Was a Transgender Woman for Eight Years*, “USA Today” 2019, 11 February, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/voices/2019/02/11/transgender-debate-transitioning-sex-gender-column/1894076002/>.

⁷ C. Dhejne, P. Lichtenstein, M. Boman, A.L.V. Johansson, N. Långström, M. Landén, *Long-Term Follow-Up of Transsexual Persons Undergoing Sex Reassignment Surgery: Cohort Study in Sweden*, “PLoS ONE” 2011, No. 6:2, 22 February, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0016885>.

Social Enforcement of the New Ideology

We are now punished for saying such things.⁸ Even those who have suffered from transsexual ideology are punished for saying them. One man who sought reversal of his own sex change writes, “Overnight, I went from being a liberal media darling to a conservative pariah.”⁹ At the mention of anything so vulgar as a fact, mental barriers drop like portcullises to prevent the abhorred reality from gaining entrance to the castle of the mind.

It is not difficult to find examples of such mental barriers. For example, some would claim that my comparison between a man who thinks he is a fox and a woman who thinks she is a man is unfair, because the man has been diminished, but the woman has been “liberated.” However, such thinking is inconsistent. After all, it makes no sense to argue that a lobotomized man has been diminished unless there is a standard of comparison, and this standard is human nature. Lobotomy can be recognized as diminishing us, therefore, because it injures one of the aspects of this human nature, our rationality. But if there really is such a thing as human nature, then it is very hard to see why the polarity of biological sex is not also one of its aspects.

For another example of such a mental barrier, some would claim that manhood and womanhood are not objective realities, but merely arbitrary social constructs. But this is not true either. A man is a human being of the biological sex that *by nature* possesses the potentiality of fatherhood, and a woman is a human being of the biological sex that *by nature* possesses the potentiality of motherhood, even if these potentialities are prevented from fruition either by accident or by intention. The details of how mothers and fathers behave may vary from culture to culture, and there are of course

⁸ In one of the most infamous cases of ideological censorship by the giant bookseller Amazon.com, a best-selling book was “cancelled,” or banned, just because it meticulously documented some of these unwelcome facts. The book was: R.T. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment*, Encounter Books, New York, NY, 2019. Amazon.com says that it has “chosen not to sell books that frame LGBTQ+ identity as a mental illness,” https://www.wsj.com/articles/amazon-wont-sell-books-framing-lgbtq-identities-as-mental-illnesses-11615511380?mod=hp_lead_pos3. By contrast, Amazon.com freely sells Adolph Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*; apparently considering it unproblematic.

⁹ J. Shupe, *I Was America’s First ‘Nonbinary’ Person. It Was All a Sham*, 12 March 2019, <https://www.mercatornet.com/conjugality/view/i-was-americas-first-nonbinary-person.-it-was-all-a-sham/22275>.

some differences within sexes as well as large ones between sexes, but the *essential* difference between motherhood and fatherhood is a constant. That is why each child needs a mom and a dad. Mothers cannot substitute for fathers, nor can fathers for mothers.

The New Ideology as a Form of Transhumanism

Since transsexualism is not a new insight into sexual reality but rather a revolt against it, what accounts for this revolt's explosive force? With this question, I come to my theme. The revolt against the reality of sex is part of a much broader revolt against the entire fabric of human reality, a revolt that has been going on for quite some time. Although few people are fully aware of this revolt, and even fewer embrace it as a formal, systematic ideology, in an informal way almost all people in the West have been touched by it. Transsexualism is merely one of its faces, one of the forms that it takes.

This broader movement is called by several names. Most often it is called "transhumanism," a term that implies that we can transcend our shared human nature.¹⁰ Sometimes it is called "posthumanism," a term that can mean several things, but in the relevant sense means that our shared human nature is becoming obsolete, and we must move beyond it.

"Humanism," of course, means cherishing human nature, human agency, and human well-being, but for transhumanists, there are no constant elements in human well-being, and the concept of human agency itself becomes plastic because human nature can be manipulated. Transhumanists deny not just the immutability of biological sex, but *all* of the immutable realities of the human condition, *all* of the elements of essential humanity. In their view, there are *no* immutable realities, and there is *no* essential humanity. They think that all of the supposed constants are really variables. We can alter the values of these variables at whim – or, if we cannot yet do so, then at least, with help from

¹⁰ The term was popularized, although not originated, by J. Huxley. See his essay *Transhumanism in New Bottles for New Wine*, Chatto & Windus, London 1957, pp. 13–17, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160625132722/http://www.transhumanism.org/index.php/WTA/more/huxley>. For a thumbnail history of transhumanism, see E. Keep, *A Timeline of Transhumanism*, The Verge, 2015, <https://www.theverge.com/a/transhumanism-2015/history-of-transhumanism>.

nanotechnology, biotechnology, and the cognitive and information sciences, we should aspire to becoming able to do so. *I can be* a woman. *I can be* a fox. *I can be* a superman or a cyborg. This ideology is driven by a strange combination of confusion, industrial competition, military planning, scientific hubris, narcissism, and eschatological dreams. As in the days of Babylon on the plain of Shinar, men have begun to murmur among themselves, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves.”¹¹

For the transhumanists believe that we will one day be able to redesign and reconstruct human nature itself. If we wished, they think, we could even adjust people to their particular lots in life in order to “enhance” their performance and satisfaction. We could have file clerks who never got bored, shipyard workers who never went on strike, miners who preferred the heat, dust, and dark, perhaps even abortionists who didn’t have bad dreams, although that one is harder to imagine. Perhaps it is not difficult to see that such manipulations would maim and ravage us. Whereas such things as the radioactivity following nuclear accidents last only for centuries, such things as the mutilation of the human genome may last forever.¹²

But no! say the transhumanists. Life could be more to our liking! Everyone could be smarter! Everyone could be stronger! Everyone could be more musical! And why stop there? Everyone could live forever, even if this meant putting an end to children, a point a number of developed countries have almost reached anyway. No one need ever become depressed, even if he had something to be depressed about. No one need ever suffer pangs of conscience, no matter what he had done. No one need ever go mad from not knowing the meaning of his life, for our minds could be readjusted so we thought that we knew the meaning of life already, or so that we didn’t care whether we knew the meaning of life, or so that we believed that there was no meaning of life, and we didn’t care about that either.

On the other hand, the rosy “everyone” in these temptations is profoundly questionable, for if human modification or polygenic screening are used at

¹¹ Genesis 11:4.

¹² This paragraph and several others borrow from my book *How and How Not to Be Happy*, Regnery, Washington, D.C., 2022, Chapter 22.

all, then unless their use is mandatory and universal, inequality will sharply increase. The choice will be whether to employ universal coercion, or to endure deepening rifts between what have come to be called the “gene rich” and “gene poor.”

The Claim of Inevitability

Transhumanists believe the future that they envisage is inevitable. Some imagine the changes in human beings that they seek being driven by individual or consumer choice, as in the transsexualist movement; others imagine them as being directed and brought about by the powerful. Proponents of the consumer-choice scenario ask you to suppose that your children are the only ones in the school without brain implants for concentration on tests; you wouldn't want them to fall behind, would you? But the consumer choice scenario is just a way to open the door to the other scenario, the authoritarian scenario, for once the door is open, anyone can walk through it. As two promoters of the hoped-for revolution write in the U.S. newspaper “The Wall Street Journal”, “even if parents don't invest in brain implants, the military will.” Challenging reluctant readers, they ask, “Who could blame a general for wanting a soldier with hypernormal focus, a perfect memory for maps and no need to sleep for days on end?”. Though the fact is not well-known, the military of a number of countries – for example the United States, China, and now France – have been investigating such possibilities for several decades.¹³ Chillingly, the authors

¹³ The authors mention that DARPA, the Pentagon's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, is looking into these matters. Actually, various U.S. government agencies and private sector organizations have been looking into them for a long time. At a conference co-sponsored two decades ago by the National Science Foundation and the Department of Commerce, papers were contributed not only by those two agencies but also by the Office of Science and Technology Policy, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the National Institutes of Health, the American Enterprise Institute, Hewlett Packard, and the Institute for Global Futures. See *Converging Technologies for Improving Human Performance: Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, Information Technology and Cognitive Science*, eds. M.C. Roco, W. Sims Bainbridge, National Science Foundation and U.S. Department of Commerce, June 2002, https://www.academia.edu/26151799/Converging_Technologies_for_Improving_Human_Performance. Chinese military publications often speak of “genetic weapons,” and Major General He Fuchu remarked in “Reference News” (24 August 2017) that “Modern technology and its

add, “of course, spies might well also try to eavesdrop on such a soldier’s brain, and hackers might want to hijack it.” But the prospect isn’t chilling to *them*. “The future doesn’t belong to the fainthearted,” they croon. “It belongs to the brave.”¹⁴ O brave new world, that has such creatures in it!¹⁵

Various aspects of transhumanism have attracted big money. Among the ultra-wealthy who have supported aspects of its agenda are Raymond Kurzweil, director of engineering of Google; Elon Musk, founder of Tesla and Space X; Peter Thiel, venture capitalist and founder of PayPal; Jeff Bezos, founder and executive chairman of Amazon; Larry Page, former CEO of Google and of Alphabet, and one of the founders of the transhumanist think-tank Singularity University. Some influential scholars are transhumanists, notably Nick Bostrom of the Department of Philosophy, Oxford University. Transhumanist ideology is even getting into the curriculum. On one occasion I accompanied the first-year students in one of my university courses to a university event designed to help undergraduates choose majors. One of the speakers was an enthusiastic physics professor who boasted that some day we would be able to do such things as upload our minds into computers, thereby living in virtual worlds without the limitations of physical bodies.

integration with information, nano(technology), and the cognitive, etc. domains will have revolutionary influence upon weapons and equipment, the combat spaces, the forms of warfare, and military theories.” Fuchu, formerly president of China’s Academy of Military Sciences, is presently vice president of the Academy of Military Sciences. See E. Kania, W. VornDick, *China’s Military Biotech Frontier: CRISPR, Military-Civil Fusion, and the New Revolution in Military Affairs*, “China Brief” 2019, 8 October, No. 19:18, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-military-biotech-frontier-crispr-military-civil-fusion-and-the-new-revolution-in-military-affairs>. For some time Russia has been working on what has been called a “zombie gun,” described as “a weapon that could theoretically render someone pliable or even drive them insane by directly attacking the brain.” D. DiSalvo, *Are We Ready for the Russian Zombie Gun?*, “Forbes” 2012, 4 April, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/daviddisalvo/2012/04/04/are-we-ready-for-the-russian-zombie-gun/?sh=28e2e40e7a81>. The militaries of other countries are also involved in such research. See for instance: I.S. Bisht, *France Gives Ethical Nod To ‘Augmented Soldiers’*, “The Defense Post” 2020, 11 December, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/12/11/france-augmented-soldiers>.

¹⁴ G. Marcus, Ch. Koch, *The Plug-and-Play Brain*, “The Wall Street Journal” 2014, 15 March, pp. C1–2, 15, online, as *The Future of Brain Implants*, at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304914904579435592981780528>. The authors borrow the quotation about faintheartedness from former president Ronald Reagan, who was not, of course, speaking of transhumanism.

¹⁵ W. Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act 5, Scene 1, Miranda speaking.

This was his argument for choosing physics as a major. It was inconceivable to him that anyone wouldn't want to get in at the beginning of such exciting developments. If such things horrify you, the transhumanist reassures you that your horrors can be readjusted.

In the spirit of our most ancient traditions and legends, we might say to transhumanists that we cannot displace the Creator, because we cannot reinvent our humanity. But transhumanists reply: Why can't we? Why can't we provide ourselves with an improved human nature, not this old Paleolithic hand-me-down, but one we make for ourselves? Rather than thinking of human nature as *what we are*, transhumanists think of our nature as a shackle on what we are – and what we are can be anything. We can even be different things at different times. I will be a man this year, but a woman next year, and a hermaphrodite the year after that. Reality must bow to our choices.

Why Not Be Transhuman?

Three incoherencies lie at the murky heart of the transhumanist program. First: According to transhumanist ideology, the time has come for “man” to decide what “man” shall become. But as C.S. Lewis pointed out, such language is misleading, for it is really a proposal for *some* men to decide what *other* men shall become.¹⁶ Even in the most democratic, consumer-oriented version of the ideology, the present generation arrogates to itself the power to decide what portion of the human inheritance future generations shall be allowed to retain. We see this already, with parents who are under the spell of transsexualism using powerful drugs to block the onset of what they call “the wrong puberty” in their sexually dysphoric children. But here too, we may expect individual choices will be set aside in favor of the choices of the powerful, for suggestions are already made that such devastating hormone treatments be inflicted on children even without parental consent.¹⁷ Imagine

¹⁶ C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1943, Chapter 3.

¹⁷ See, for example, *Minors May Get Sex Changes Without Parental Consent, If California's Teachers Union Has Its Way*, “Citizens Journal” 2020, 19 February, <https://www.citizensjournal.us/minors-may-get-sex-changes-without-parental-consent-if-californias-teachers-union-has-its-way>.

a future in which the school authorities decide that your child needs a change of sex, call your resistance “child abuse,” and take your child away from you.

Second: If we humans really do lack any essential nature – if humans can be turned into anything – then no possible basis is left for deciding what they *should* be turned into. For if the natural law itself can be rewritten, then how can any plan for rewriting it be judged better than any other? The very standard for judgment has been abolished. First we erase the slate, and then we write on it – but a blank slate cannot tell you what should be written on itself. Having set aside human nature, the redesigners could have no other guide for their actions than the impulses that they happened to feel at the moment of making their plan. And the *next* generation of redesigners, programmed differently, could have no other guide for *their* actions than the impulses that *they* happened to feel at the moment of making *their* plan. The prospect makes one think of what mathematicians call a “random walk,” or perhaps even more precisely, a drunken walk.

Third, and most fundamental: The idea that a creature could evolve into the Creator, that dependent beings could turn into absolute Being, is so muddled that one hardly knows how to argue with it. It is like saying that if only my powers become great enough, I will some day become my own father and beget myself on my mother. Do not reproach me for bringing in theology. The transhumanists have already brought in theology. In their theology, “you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.”¹⁸

I oppose transsexualism for the same reason that I oppose all forms of transhumanism, for I respect the beautiful order of human nature, not only in its sexual aspects but in all its aspects. How has it come about that we have at last become so confused about what a nature is that we have come to believe that we can invent one? I do not suppose that the proponents of these ideologies could achieve what they desire. I do think they might do great damage by trying to do so, and the damage has already begun. The technologies, the so-called enhancements, and the so-called therapies of the transhumanists would enable man not to transcend himself, but only to ruin himself.

Like the enchanters and bewitchers of another day and time, today the enchanters of culture and the bewitchers of thought encourage us to believe

¹⁸ Genesis 3:5.

that our freedom depends not on our humanity, but on our power. Just as we seek to subject stone, steel, plastic, and livestock to our will, so we suppose that we will be more free if only we can subject our own nature to our will. Regarding ourselves as artifacts – regarding our bodies, our minds, and our sexes as *made-things* or constructs, like television sets or digging machines – this does not make us more free, but less.

Every artist knows that to make beautiful things he must respect the laws of his medium and not violate them. The artist in the medium of wood must respect the laws of wood; the artist in the medium of paint must respect the laws of paint. This necessity is even greater when we practice the artistry of living, for the glory of a human being is that he is free to work out his life and attain virtue according to his natural design, not against it. Since our nature is our substance, the very form of our being, the language in which we are written, how could we get outside it and have some other being? It is as though blue demanded the liberty to be red, odd demanded the liberty to be even, or vegetable demanded the liberty to be mineral. It is like demanding to have our thirst relieved, but by some means other than drink, or demanding to have our sickness done away with, but by some means other than cure.

Our rationality, our embodiment, and our sex – these things are not fetters and manacles that bind us, but lovely gifts. They are the very conditions of our human liberty as finite creatures under a gracious God.

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