

**Gender, Identity, and Love:  
Understanding the Complexities of Being Human Theologically**

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**1. Two Bifurcations**

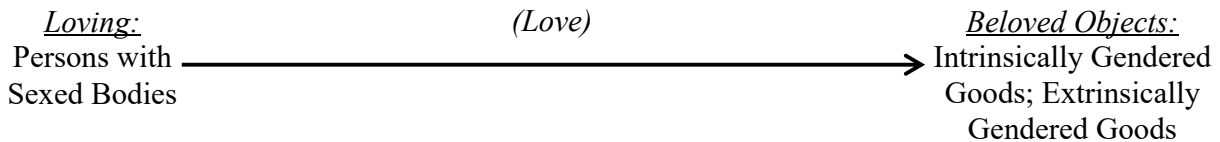
- a. The Sex/Gender distinction (biology/culture). Raises foundational question: *is there relationship between the possession of a certain kind of body and the ordinary roles, attitudes and goods usually associated with gender, and what is the nature of that relationship?* Or: what is the bridge between biology and culture?
- b. Bifurcation #1: Gender Essentialism vs. Social Constructionism about Gender
  - i. Biological Essentialism: Sex = Gender *or* Sex = Gender + Theory of Human Action (i.e., hormones, natural law, evolutionary psychology)
    - Objection: Universal ≠ Natural
  - ii. Social Constructionism: The conditions for being a member of a certain gender are constituted by the norms, practices, expectations, roles and other cultural activities of human beings.
    - Objection: Context-specific
- c. Bifurcation #2: Gender is Important, Theology is Not vs. Theology is Important, Gender is Not.
  - i. Nicholas Wolterstorff: “It is my impression that a fair amount of what is not so good, and even whimsical, in theology is the completely predictable response by theologians [and churches] to this indictment by our cultural elite. The theologian looks around for developments in the contemporary academy that seem to be generally esteemed, and tries to sail a bit of theology under those colors... So the theologian looks to see what language the world is currently speaking, and tries to speak in that language. Ironically, I think the result of most such attempts to be relevant is irrelevance... There is an opposite response, equally predictable. Because the world is ‘going to hell in a handbasket,’ it is best to ignore it, construct one’s own little theological ghetto, read a few safe old texts from one’s own tradition with one’s students, and when they give the appearance of having been well indoctrinated, send them forth to propound what they have been told while railing against liberalism, postmodernism, or whatever happens to be the current demon.”

**2. Gender as Love**

- a. Big idea: if identities are constituted by the objects of our love, then our *gender* identities are constituted by the *gendered* objects of our love.
- b. Augustine:

- i. “The central part of a human being is the heart”; “One becomes conformed to that which one loves”; A person “is that which they love”; “Do you want to discern the character of a person’s love? Notice where it leads.”
- ii. Love is both natural and social, both deeply theological and true to all human beings.
- iii. Love is like glue. Rightly ordered love has God at the top and sees all things as gifts from God. Wrongly ordered love is the *libido dominandi*, or “lust for dominating.”
- iv. Love shapes social identities: “even though there are a great many peoples spread across the world, living under various religious rites and moral customs and distinguished by a wide variety of languages, weaponry, and dress, *there are actually only two types of human society*; and following our Scriptures, we may rightly speak of these as two cities”; “Two loves, then, have made two cities. Love of self, even to the point of contempt for God, made the earthly city, and love of God, even to the point of contempt for self, made the heavenly city.”

c. Love as a relation (office of love):



### 3. Case Studies

a. Sexual Assault:

- i. Elaine Storkey: “Power inequalities...often go along with incidences of rape...When sin corrupts those who have power, the effects on the powerless can be overwhelming, leaving them dehumanized and objectified...Sin eliminates love, and fuels loathing.”
- ii. Augustine on the *libido dominandi*: “a dark drive to control, to appropriate, and turn to one’s private ends, all the good things that had been created by God to be accepted with gratitude” (Peter Brown); “there is hardly anyone who is free of the love of wielding power or does not long for human glory,” a ruinous love “which creeps like a cancer”; “anyone who wants domination and power will generally seek to obtain what he loves by even the most blatantly criminal acts.”

b. Gender Dysphoria

- i. “Take away death, and the body is good. Let death, the last enemy, be removed, and my flesh will be forever my friend.”