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Opposite Sexes or Neighboring Sexes? C.S. Lewis, Dorothy L. Sayers, and the Psychology of Gender

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Readers of this essay may well ask what an academic psychologist is doing invading territory normally reserved for scholars closer to C. S. Lewis's own field of literary criticism or for theologians and philosophers. The short answer to that question is that Lewis had a lot to say over his lifetime about three topics of interest to me: science, social science, and gender. The longer answer to that question is more autobiographical.

In my Canadian Protestant childhood—as in C. S. Lewis's, a generation earlier in Protestant Belfast—church was still a vehicle of respectability and upward mobility, perhaps especially for my parents, who were schoolteachers and first-generation urban transplants from humble rural backgrounds. In such a setting, it was expected that teenagers would be confirmed in the church, but it never was made very clear how seriously—other than as a rite of social passage—they should take the professions of faith they were urged to make. Predictably, this led to resistance and accusations of hypocrisy from some adolescents, including myself, as I vacillated between thinking that church membership would demand too much of me and suspecting that it would demand too little. But in the end, like the adolescent C. S. Lewis, "I allowed myself to be prepared for confirmation, and to make my first Communion... eating and drinking to my own condemnation" (Lewis 1955, 130), metaphorically crossing my fingers behind my back while going through the motions of professing faith.

You will not be surprised to learn that such superficial churchianity did not survive—either intellectually or morally—my transition from high school to an elite public university. I had wanted to study psychology ever since my middle-school days, but by the time I entered university in the early 1960s, academic psychology was suffering from what might be called a bad case of physics envy. In its eagerness to be accepted as a legitimate "science" it had embraced what philosophers call the Unity of Science thesis—namely, that there is only one method that all genuine sciences employ, and that method consists of giving causal, deterministic explanations that are empirically testable. By this standard, if psychology aspired to be a "real" science it would have to become as much like experimental physics as possible. As a methodological corrective to certain past, ill-supported pronouncements about human behavior and mental life (including many from Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis) this was not an entirely bad move, but methodological correctives seldom stay within their original limits. They more often become full-blown—but usually unacknowledged—metaphysical world views, especially in times of great social change when older belief systems are being unreflectively marginalized in the name of progress.

This is in fact what was happening during my undergraduate days. We were being taught as apprentice logical positivists to regard "facts" and "values" as quite distinct. Facts—based on input

to the senses or instrumental extensions of them—were in principle totally objective, whereas values, including those arising from religious or aesthetic sources, were completely subjective. On this account of reality, as philosopher Stephen Evans has described it, "the world consists of brute facts, and values are only introduced when a subject turns up who has a personal preference" (Evans 107). Hand in hand with this epistemology went an increasingly physicalist (what Lewis would call "naturalist" or "realist") anthropology: the view that the human mind was reducible to the brain, which in turn was reducible to the sum of its physical-chemical parts and processes, as these had evolved over time following the blind forces of natural selection. If moral principles, along with everything else, are merely the result of random processes and purely impersonal forces, then humans are no more morally accountable for their behaviors than a car is "morally accountable" for having a flat tire. Individuals have no reason to observe any moral strictures, if they can get away with doing otherwise and prefer to do so.

This is not to say that complete moral anarchy had descended on the North American scene by the early 1960s. In practice people are often better than their theories, especially when, from a degree of inertia, they are living off the moral capital of their past. And there was still some sense that even public universities should somehow act in loco parentis so students were not completely abandoned to the sexual meat market or to the binge-drinking and self-promoting ethos that pervades many campuses at the start of the twenty-first century. But things certainly were heading in that direction, and I was to some extent following along.

In the midst of all this, somewhere in my sophomore year, I was persuaded by a friend to read C. S. Lewis's autobiography, Surprised By Joy, and in it I found (among other things) Lewis's account of his own seduction by logical positivism a generation earlier as an Oxford undergraduate. He described how he and many of his unbelieving classmates had taken on an anti-romantic "New Look" and become physical realists, but how his friend Owen Barfield had then forced him to recognize the inconsistencies of such a stance:

> [W]e accepted as rock-bottom reality the universe as revealed by the senses. But at the same time we continued to make for certain phenomena of consciousness all the claims that really went with a theistic or idealistic view. We maintained that abstract thought (if obedient to logical rules) gave indisputable truth, that our moral judgment was "valid" and our aesthetic experience not merely pleasing but "valuable"... Barfield convinced me that [this] was inconsistent. If thought were a purely subjective event, these claims would have to be abandoned.... I was therefore compelled to give up realism.... [I had to] admit that mind was no late-coming epiphenomenon, that the whole universe was, in the last resort, mental; that our logic was participation in a cosmic Logos. (Lewis 1955, 166–167)

This still sounds more like Platonic idealism than Christian theism, as Lewis would acknowledge. His fuller embrace of the latter would not occur until about a decade later. Nonetheless, in Surprised By Joy Lewis did expose a central inconsistency of logical positivism and its physicalist cousin, and his argument was to stay with me on some subliminal level for almost a decade, helping eventually to prod me into the embrace of Lewis's God.

The 3:16 Bait-and-Switch

So you can see that as a young person I had reasons, both personal and intellectual, to regard C. S. Lewis as a positive role model for a robust Christianity whose scope included the life of the mind as well as that of piety and individual morality. But I now need to point out that Lewis was also a major stumbling block to my acceptance of Christianity. This was because of the mixed messages he sent about the actual and ideal nature of women, men, and their relationships in his books I read as an undergraduate. One piece that brought me up short comes from Mere Christianity (1952). It is unfortunate that everything Lewis included in that volume was implied by the book's title to be part of "mere" Christianity, because it suggests that only a clear apostate from the faith would ever challenge

any of its content. And in that volume Lewis made both an Aristotelian and a Freudian argument for male headship in marriage.

> The relations of the family to the outer world—what might be called its foreign policy—must depend, in the last resort, upon the man because he always ought to be, and usually is, much more just to outsiders. A woman is primarily fighting for her own children against the rest of the world... She is the special trustee of their interests. The function of the husband is to see that this natural preference is not given its head. He had the last word in order to protect other people from the intense family patriotism of the wife. (Lewis 1952, 100)

Both Aristotle and Freud held that women were driven more by emotion and less by reason than men. For Aristotle (and his later Thomistic followers in medieval Christendom) all things exist in a hierarchical scala naturae, or "ladder of nature," beginning with inanimate matter and proceeding through plants, animals, humans, and ultimately the "unmoved mover" that gives all objects their purpose. But on the human part of the ladder, women occupied a lower rung: in relation to men they were deemed less rational, unequal, and passive. For Freud also, "anatomy is destiny." He saw women even in adulthood as having less-developed superegos than men, and hence less capacity for a disinterested justice that extends beyond the family.

In The Four Loves, Lewis explicitly blended Aristo-telian and Pagan/Jungian terms in his analysis of sexual activity. "In the act of love," he wrote, "we are not merely ourselves... In us all the masculinity and femininity of the world, all that is assailant and responsive, are momentarily focused. The man does play the sky-father and the woman the earth-mother; he does play Form and she Matter" (Lewis 1960, 95). This archetypal play-acting—Lewis called it the "Pagan sacrament" of the sex act—was in his view quite harmless and wholesome provided that participants do not forget their first loyalty to God.

> A woman who accepted as literally her own this extreme self-surrender would be an idolatress offering to a man what belongs only to God. And a man would have to be the coxcomb of all coxcombs, and indeed a blasphemer, if he arrogated to himself, as the mere person he is, the sort of sovereignty to which for a moment Venus exalts him. But what cannot be lawfully yielded or claimed can be lawfully enacted. Outside this ritual or drama he and she are two immortal souls, two free-born adults, two citizens... But within this rite or drama they become a god and goddess between whom there is no equality—whose relations are asymmetrical. (Lewis 1960, 95–96)

For the Lewis of The Four Loves, this inequality also meant that men and women could come together in affection and erotic love, but not—or at least rarely at the same time—in friendship. The rightness of separate spheres—public and domestic—at least for middle-class men and women, once they are husbands and wives, he largely took for granted. It is bad enough, he wrote, when a leisured, culturally aspiring wife tries to make a down-to-earth, business-like husband share her artistic or literary tastes. It is even worse when a less-educated wife tries to horn in on the intellectual conversations her husband has with his male peers.

> She can never really enter the circle because the circle ceases to be itself when she enters it... She may be quite as clever as the men whose evening she has spoiled, or cleverer. But she is not really interested in the same things, or mistress of the same methods... She does not realize that the husband she has succeeded from isolating from his own kind will not be very worth having; she has emasculated him... The sensible women... have other fish to fry. At a mixed party they gravitate to one end of the room and talk women's talk to each other... It is only the riff-raff of each sex that wants to be incessantly hanging on to the other. (Lewis 1960, 70-72)

My own reaction as a young woman to these passages from some of Lewis's best-selling works was to feel trapped in a version of what one of my colleagues (a scholar of rhetoric) was later to call "the 3:16 bait-and-switch." She meant by this that many evangelistic preachers expend much effort first addressing their audiences, in a disarmingly generic fashion, by proclaiming the universal good news of John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Then, having successfully drawn women as well as men to Christian commitment by stressing how level the ground is before Christ's cross, they proceed to emphasize Genesis 3:16: "To the woman [God] said, I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Sterk 184–221).

Though certainly less inclined to such crude proof-texting, it still seemed that what Lewis gave with one hand—the possibility of a Christian intellectual life with like-minded believers—he took away with the other. My mind was almost certainly unfitted for such fellowship by virtue of my sex, according to him, and if it wasn't, marriage would soon probably even put an end to any intellectual pretensions I might have as one of the fortunate females to have gone on to higher education.

A Residual Platonism

Years later, when I returned to Lewis's works as a young Christian academic, I confirmed that for much of his life he did indeed promote both an essentialist and a hierarchical view of gender. He regarded stereotypical masculinity and femininity as timeless, metaphysical archetypes, deeper even than biological sex and apparently more significant for the right organization of social life than any "mere humanity" shared by women and men. Moreover, especially in his Preface to Paradise Lost (1942) and in Perelandra (1942) and That Hideous Strength (1945), the second and third novels respectively of his space trilogy, he portrayed God as representing the highest ideal, or form, of masculinity. For the Lewis of the 1940s, humans were so inescapably gendered—in their creation, their fallenness, and the implications of their redemption—that man and woman were almost different species. They were metaphysically opposite sexes, not the "neighboring sexes" that his contemporary, Dorothy L. Sayers, proposed in one of her own essays in the 1940s (Sayers 1975, 37).

Thus in his 1945 science fiction novel, That Hideous Strength, Lewis (speaking through the trilogy's hero, Elwyn Ransom) asserted that:

> Gender is a reality, and a more fundamental reality than sex. Sex is, in fact, merely the adaptation to organic life of a fundamental polarity which divides all created beings. Female sex is simply one of the things that have feminine gender; there are many others. Masculine and feminine meet us on a plane of reality where male and female would be simply meaningless. Masculine is not attenuated male, nor feminine attenuated female. On the contrary, the male and female of organic creatures are rather faint and blurred reflections of masculine and feminine (Lewis 1945, 314–315).

Lewis's residual Platonism is very evident here. He regarded the eternal, metaphysical "forms" of masculinity and femininity as higher spiritual realities of which material maleness and femaleness are mere "shadows," a Platonic term Lewis used often to describe the earthly in comparison to the heavenly. And for the younger Lewis, these polarized forms were not merely Platonic opposites; they were also hierarchically ordered.

In his 1948 essay arguing against opening the Anglican priesthood to women, Lewis wrote that a woman can be a competent pastoral visitor, church administrator, or even a preacher. It is not the case that she is "necessarily or even probably stupider than a man" (Lewis 1970a, 235). What she cannot do, wearing the "feminine uniform," is sacramentally represent the people of God at the Eucharistic altar, because God represents ultimate masculinity, beside whom everything and everyone is less masculine and more feminine by contrast. Lewis wrote:

> To say that men and women are equally eligible for a certain profession is to say that for purposes of that profession their sex is irrelevant... This may be inevitable for our secular life. But in our Christian life we must return to reality... the kind of equality which implies that equals are interchangeable (like counters or identical machines) is, among humans, a legal fiction. It may be a useful legal fiction. But in the church we turn our backs on fictions. One of the ends for which sex was created was to symbolize for us the hidden things of God... [Thus] only one wearing the masculine uniform can... represent the Lord to the Church; for we are all, corporately and individually, feminine to Him. (Lewis 1970a, 237–38)

Here we also see that Lewis's theology of gender relations was complexly intertwined with a creation theology that, from a Calvinist point of view, is very questionable. From the time of the Protestant Reformation, Lutherans and Calvinists have shared the view that human work—in whatever station—neither debases us to the level of animals nor elevates us to the status of gods. On the contrary, God uses human work both providentially (as God's means for caring for the earth and each other) and redemptively (as in its challenges and sometimes its burdens we imitate Christ's suffering in a small way). Calvinists and Lutherans may differ in their views as to how fallen—and therefore how reformable—the various God-ordained spheres of culture and society are: the academy, the marketplace, the political forum, and so on. But both reject the kind of sacred/secular dualism that regards some kinds of occupations as holier than others.

Lewis, despite his Oxford donship and his early history of romantic pastoralism, turns out to be just such a dualist. He drew a sharp line between "secular" and "church" life and was disinclined to give any creational status to what we today would call the structures of civil society, including economics and government. Unlike turn-of-the-century neo-Calvinists such as Abraham Kuyper, and indeed unlike some British Anglicans of the nineteenth century who viewed these arenas of human activity as rooted in creation and no more or less fallen than any other, Lewis saw them mainly as products of the fall. If "secular" arenas of life are at best secondary goods and at worst products of the fall that merely restrain evil rather than accomplish anything positive, Christians should ignore as much as possible those social institutions that we do not find ourselves working in (as Lewis so proudly claimed to ignore politics by valuing nothing in newspapers except the crossword puzzle), bloom where we are planted, with however much suffering that station entails, and urge others to do the same. That, for Lewis, was how Christians achieve sanctification and practice agapic love.

Escaping the Sword between the Sexes

Lewis's views on gender and class relations certainly were not unique for his era, even though they were packaged and popularized as "merely" Christian more successfully than most. And yet those views changed as he grew older, and those changes are visible not only in his letters but in his later and much less-read works. In the 1950s, Lewis ruefully acknowledged what he called his "expository demon"—that is, his tendency to make characters in his earlier adult fiction sound like C. S. Lewis delivering a sermon—and he hoped that writing children's stories would discipline him against this temptation (Lewis 1975, 22–34). In Till We Have Faces (1956), the expository demon is likewise subdued. Even more, "the misogyny of some of Lewis's earlier works seems to be reversed in this novel told from a woman's perspective" (Hannay 216). Its story is a recasting of the classical myth of Cupid and Psyche which, in Lewis's adaptation, focuses on the strong woman ruler of a small nation. She is a person struggling against idolatry and toward belief in a way that parallels Lewis's own faith journey and the resentment it inspired in some of his colleagues and family members.

This period also coincided with Lewis's work on The Discarded Image (1964), an introduction to medieval and Renaissance literature. It is an engaging, detailed portrait of the medieval worldview and one that clearly illustrates its hierarchical cosmology, but with one significant difference. In a volume where one would expect Lewis, given his earlier writings, to include an exposition of gender hierarchy

in the Aristotelian ladder of nature and its descendent, the medieval "great chain of being," there is not a word on this topic. Indeed, his only explicit mention of gender relations was a leveling one, when he challenged the modern illusion that medieval persons of both sexes led static lives. On the contrary, Lewis wrote, "Kings, armies, prelates, diplomats, merchants and wandering scholars were continually on the move. Thanks to the popularity of pilgrimages, even women, and women of the middle class, went far afield; witness the Wife of Bath [in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales] and Margery Kempe" (Lewis 1964, 143). Kempe was a fifteenth-century religious mystic who was also married and the mother of fourteen children.

Most telling is his reflection on his wife's death, A Grief Observed (1961). It was written when Joy Davidman—an award-winning American poet and writer—died of cancer in 1960 after just four years of marriage to Lewis. The start of Lewis's friendship with Davidman (in the early days of which he once referred to her as "our queer, Jewish, ex-Communist American convert…" In Lewis 2007, 450) coincided with his 1954 move from Oxford to a professorial chair at Cambridge. This move coincided with his first serious bout of writer's block. It was due largely to Joy Davidman's help and inspiration that he eventually wrote Till We Have Faces, which he then dedicated to her. Lewis's biographer and former student, George Sayer, who knew them both well, noted that "[h]er part in the book, and there is so much that she can almost be called its joint author, put him very much in her debt. She stimulated and helped him to such an extent that he began to feel that he could hardly write without her" (Sayer 220).

"There is," Lewis wrote in A Grief Observed, "hidden or flaunted, a sword between the sexes till an entire marriage reconciles them" (Lewis 1961, 40). In a pointed rejection of his earlier insistence that gender, as a spiritual ideal, is a more fundamental reality than sex, Lewis concluded:

> It is arrogance in us [men] to call frankness, fairness and chivalry "masculine" when we see them in a woman; it is arrogance in them [women] to describe a man's sensitiveness or tact or tenderness as "feminine." But also what poor, warped fragments of humanity most mere men and mere women must be to make the implications of that arrogance plausible. Marriage heals this. Jointly the two become fully human. "In the image of God created he them." Thus, by a paradox, this carnival of sexuality leads us out beyond our sexes. (Lewis 1961, 40–41).

As he struggled with his grief and reflected on what he had learned from his short-lived marriage, Lewis also reversed his earlier assumptions about gender hierarchy as well as his view that women and men could not be both friends and lovers at the same time:

> A good wife contains so many persons in herself. What was [Joy] not to me? She was my daughter and my mother, my pupil and my teacher, my subject and my sovereign; and always, holding these all in solution, my trusty comrade, friend, shipmate, fellow soldier. My mistress, but at the same time all that any man friend (and I have had good ones) has ever been to me... Solomon calls his bride Sister. Could a woman be a complete wife unless, for a moment, in one particular mood, a man felt almost inclined to call her Brother? (Lewis 1961, 39–40)

Clearly Lewis's marriage in his mid-fifties to a gifted and feisty woman helped to advance changes in his thinking about gender relations. And, in fact, Lewis was always a better man than his theories in his actual relationships with women, especially those who, like himself, were intellectuals and serious Christians. I note in passing his long association with Stella Aldwickle, pastoral advisor to the women students of Somerville College. He also corresponded for twenty-five years with an Anglo-Catholic nun, the theologian Sister Penelope Lawson (whom he referred to as his "elder sister" in the faith), and for the last fifteen years of his life had a mutually-mentoring relationship with the celebrated and much-honored English poet Ruth Pitter.

C. S. Lewis and Dorothy Sayers

But Lewis had an equally long relationship with a woman colleague who was even closer to him in terms of age, background, education, intellectual interests, and Christian writing projects. That woman was Dorothy Leigh Sayers, whom Lewis once described as "the first person of importance who ever wrote me a fan-letter" (Lewis 2007, 1400). Sayers, like Lewis, grew up in the shadow of an Anglican rectory. By the time of their first correspondence in 1942 she was, like Lewis, an Oxford MA. Both had won scholarships to Oxford as undergraduates: Sayers to Somerville College in 1912, and Lewis to University College in 1916. She was also, like Lewis, a published poet, author of several novels in a popular new genre (detective novels in her case, science fiction in Lewis's), and a BBC broadcaster recruited to help strengthen Christian faith in the dark days of World War Two (doing radio drama in her case, popular theological talks in Lewis's). Sayers also had written and directed two plays for the Canterbury Cathedral arts festival, published essays on Christian doctrine and creativity, and was soon to become a distinguished translator of Dante's Divine Comedy from Italian into English verse.

Though most of their correspondence was of a scholarly, literary-critical nature, some of it also concerned gender relations. For example, in 1948, when Lewis became exercised about the possible ordination of women in the Anglican church, he tried to persuade Sayers—a well-known Christian author of longer standing than he—to join him in protest (Lewis 2004b, 860). However, Lewis's attempt to co-opt this famous woman writer backfired. Though Sayers was, if anything, even more Anglo-Catholic in her leanings than Lewis, she politely declined to "give tongue" in the debate over women's ordination. She agreed that it might "erect a new and totally unnecessary barrier between [Anglicans] and the rest of Catholic Christendom," but she pointed out that it would also decrease differences with those Protestant free churches that emphasized preaching more than the sacrament of communion (Sayers quoted in Reynolds 359).

In some ways it would be too simple to call Sayers a feminist. Like Lewis, she had too robust a view of the human capacity for sin to romanticize any class or gender group just because it had a history of marginalization. But unlike the Lewis of the 1940s, she believed gender was an incidental, not an essential trait, and that women and men's common humanity was more fundamental than any differences between them. Moreover, despite sharing a common background with Lewis in terms of class and intellectual brilliance, Sayers went through a species of baptism by fire at Oxford that Lewis, as a privileged male student and later an Oxford don, was quite incapable of understanding at the time. It was only two years before Sayers went to Oxford in 1912 that the university officially had recognized the presence of women in its midst. When Sayers arrived in 1912, women still could not receive Oxford degrees, even after meeting all the qualifications and (not infrequently) outperforming men in the same programs. Only in 1920, when Oxford degrees were retrospectively opened up to females, did Dorothy Sayers and several hundred other women return to the university to receive their long-denied degrees.

In 1927 the faculty and administrators at Oxford voted to limit indefinitely the number of women students who could be admitted and to prohibit the establishment of any more women's colleges. Lewis supported this proposal (Lewis 2004a, 702–3). Though Lewis and Sayers did not know each other at this time, her reaction to Oxford's retrograde move was pretty clear. Her most complex detective novel (and her own favorite) was Gaudy Night, which she set in a fictitious Oxford women's college in the mid-1930s. The plot of the novel turns on the resentment that tradition-bound male academics—and their female supporters—harbor towards women scholars whose commitment to intellectual integrity will not be compromised by submission to social norms about women's "natural calling" to support and defer to men, no matter what they do (Sayers 1935). Later, in her 1946 essay "The Human-Not-Quite-Human," she mocked the view (going as far back as Aristotle) that women are not complete persons:

> [People believe women] lie when they say they have human needs: warm and decent clothing; comfort on the bus; interests directed immediately to God and his universe, not intermediately

> through any child of man. They are [either] far above man to inspire him, far beneath him to corrupt him; they have feminine minds and feminine natures, but their mind is not one with their nature like the minds of men; they have no human mind and no human nature... They are "the opposite sex"—(though why "opposite" I do not know; what is the "neighbouring sex"?). (Sayers 1975, 32)

"I do not know what women as women want," Sayers declared in a 1938 lecture. "But as human beings they want, my good man, exactly what you want yourselves: interesting occupation, reasonable freedom for their pleasures, and a sufficient emotional outlet. What form the occupation, the pleasures, the emotional outlet may take depends entirely on the individual. You know that this is so with yourselves—why will you not believe that it is so with us?" (Sayers 1975, 17–36, quotation 32).

Gender and Modern Social Science

C. S. Lewis was no fan of the emerging social sciences. He saw practitioners of the social sciences mainly as lackeys of technologically-minded natural scientists, bent on reducing individual freedom and moral accountability to mere epiphenomena of natural processes (See Lewis 1943 and 1970b). And not surprisingly (given his passion for gender-essentialist archetypes), aside from a qualified appreciation of some aspects of Freudian psychoanalysis (See Lewis 1952 (Book III, Chapter 4) and 1969). "Carl Jung was the only philosopher [sic] of the Viennese school for whose work [Lewis] had much respect" (Sayer 102).

But the social sciences concerned with the psychology of gender have since shown that Sayers was right, and Lewis and Jung were wrong: women and men are not opposite sexes but neighboring sexes—and very close neighbors indeed. There are, it turns out, virtually no large, consistent sex differences in any psychological traits and behaviors, even when we consider the usual stereotypical suspects: that men are more aggressive, or just, or rational than women, and women are more empathic, verbal, or nurturing than men. When differences are found, they are always average—not absolute—differences. And in virtually all cases the small, average—and often decreasing—difference between the sexes is greatly exceeded by the amount of variability on that trait within members of each sex. Most of the "bell curves" for women and men (showing the distribution of a given psychological trait or behavior) overlap almost completely. So it is naïve at best (and deceptive at worst) to make even average—let alone absolute—pronouncements about essential archetypes in either sex when there is much more variability within than between the sexes on all the trait and behavior measures for which we have abundant data. This criticism applies as much to C. S. Lewis and Carl Jung as it does to their currently most visible descendent, John Gray, who continues to claim (with no systematic empirical warrant) that men are from Mars and women are from Venus (Gray 1992).

And what about Lewis's claims about the overriding masculinity of God? Even the late Carl Henry (a theologian with impeccable credentials as a conservative evangelical) noted a quarter of a century ago that:

> Masculine and feminine elements are excluded from both the Old Testament and New Testament doctrine of deity. The God of the Bible is a sexless God. When Scripture speaks of God as "he" the pronoun is primarily personal (generic) rather than masculine (specific); it emphasizes God's personal nature—and, in turn, that of the Father, Son and Spirit as Trinitarian distinctions in contrast to impersonal entities... Biblical religion is quite uninterested in any discussion of God's masculinity or femininity... Scripture does not depict God either as ontologically masculine or feminine. (Henry 1982, 159–60)

However well-intentioned, attempts to read a kind of mystical gendering into God—whether stereotypically masculine, feminine, or both—reflect not so much careful biblical theology as "the long

arm of Paganism" (Martin 11). For it is pagan worldviews, the Jewish commentator Nahum Sarna reminds us, that are "unable to conceive of any primal creative force other than in terms of sex... [In Paganism] the sex element existed before the cosmos came into being and all the gods themselves were creatures of sex. On the other hand, the Creator in Genesis is uniquely without any female counterpart, and the very association of sex with God is utterly alien to the religion of the Bible" (Sarna 76).

And if the God of creation does not privilege maleness or stereotypical masculinity, neither did the Lord of redemption. Sayers's response to the cultural assumption that women were human-not-quite-human has become rightly famous:

> Perhaps it is no wonder that women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man—there never has been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered or coaxed or patronised; who never made arch jokes about them, never treated them either as "The women, God help us!" or "The ladies, God bless them!; who rebuked without querulousness and praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously; who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no axe to grind or no uneasy male dignity to defend; who took them as he found them and was completely unself-conscious. There is not act, no sermon, no parable in the whole Gospel which borrows its pungency from female perversity; nobody could possibly guess from the words and deeds of Jesus that there was anything "funny" about women's nature. (Sayers 1975, 46)

It is quite likely that Lewis's changing views on gender owed something to the intellectual and Christian ties that he forged with Dorothy L. Sayers. And indeed, in 1955—two years before her death, Lewis confessed to Sayers that he had only "dimly realised that the old-fashioned way... of talking to all young women was v[ery] like an adult way of talking to young boys. It explains," he wrote, "not only why some women grew up vapid, but also why others grew us (if we may coin the word) viricidal [i.e., wanting to kill men]" (Lewis 2007, 676; Lewis's emphasis). The Lewis who in his younger years so adamantly had defended the doctrine of gender essentialism was beginning to acknowledge the extent to which gendered behavior is socially conditioned. In another letter that same year, he expressed a concern to Sayers that some of the first illustrations for the Narnia Chronicles were a bit too effeminate. "I don't like either the ultra feminine or the ultra masculine," he added. "I prefer people" (Lewis 2007, 639; Lewis's emphasis).

Dorothy Sayers surely must have rejoiced to read this declaration. Many of Lewis's later readers, including myself, wish that his shift on this issue had occurred earlier and found its way into his better-selling apologetic works and his novels for children and adults. But better late than never. And it would be better still if those who keep trying to turn C. S. Lewis into an icon for traditionalist views on gender essentialism and gender hierarchy would stop mining his earlier works for isolated proof-texts and instead read what he wrote at every stage of his life. ✠

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