

Toxic Feminism

The Genesis of Gender: A Christian Theory by Abigail Favale

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reviewed by Hans Boersma

THE RAPID SPREAD of gender dysphoria is an urgent problem—not just because of the tidal wave of teenagers, most of them girls, struggling with their sexual identity, but particularly because our medical establishment generally avoids asking the hard questions and instead has decided simply to affirm our kids' self-identification. Parents are often without recourse when, to their own spiritual and physical detriment, their girls insist on testosterone treatment followed by a double mastectomy and other surgical steps deforming their growing female bodies.

Truth be told, once kids have decided that they want a medical transition, parents are mostly powerless. Indeed, children get overwhelming

support—socially and medically—affirming them in their so-called new-found identity. Parents often feel be-

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wildered, wondering what happened to confuse their children so thoroughly as to reject their sexual identity.

All too often, answer tion are hard to come by, leaving parents who oppose their children's physical mutilation fearful and frustrated, while the parent-child relationship gets strained and often breaks down.

Still, the search for answers need not be elusive. Abigail Favale's page-turner, *The Genesis of Gender: A Christian Theory*, explains how it is that children are tempted to make their ill-fated choice of transgender surgery. The answer is twofold—feminism and bodily self-hatred. As we will see, the two responses are linked, even though the first is a broad philosophical stance originating in the nineteenth century and the second is a social media-driven pathology that takes the form of negative self-perception.

Favale brilliantly exposes transgenderism as the successor to anorexia and bulimia. Just like anorexia, so transgenderism is a rejection of the body, resulting from hyper-sexualization, especially of girls—heavily promoted through internet and social media. Both girls suffering from anorexia and girls that undergo transgender surgery have rejected their female bodily identity. "These young

women,” states Favale, “are rebelling, understandably, against the hypersexualization of the female body, but in doing so, they are turning against the body itself.” Sadly, whereas one can turn to a psychologist to find healing from anorexia, the medical profession mostly affirms those seeking transition in their self-destructive path.

Feminism’s Offspring

Favale writes as a scholar of feminism who has undergone a twofold conversion: from evangelicalism to Catholicism and from feminist dogma to a recognition of its inherent flaws. Her academic background gives a feel of authenticity to the book that makes it difficult to ignore or discount. Favale speaks both from personal experience and with scholarly expertise—a winsome combination that will, I suspect, win over many initially skeptical readers.

Perhaps Favale’s most remarkable claim is that feminism naturally led to the so-called “gender paradigm.” Feminists often oppose transgender activists because the latter, by destabilizing gender, undermine the gains made by feminism—or so it is often thought. The truth, however, is more complex and more unsettling. The self-loathing of transitioning young girls can be traced to feminist theorists. Margaret Sanger insisted that women are oppressed by their own bodies. Simone de Beauvoir resented the oppression of women, not just by social forces but also by their biology. As a student, Favale was drawn to feminism because she wanted to embrace her dignity as a woman. She found out, however, that for feminism, dignity could be found only by rejecting the idea of womanhood altogether. The ironic truth, as Favale points out, is that “the gender paradigm is feminism’s offspring.”

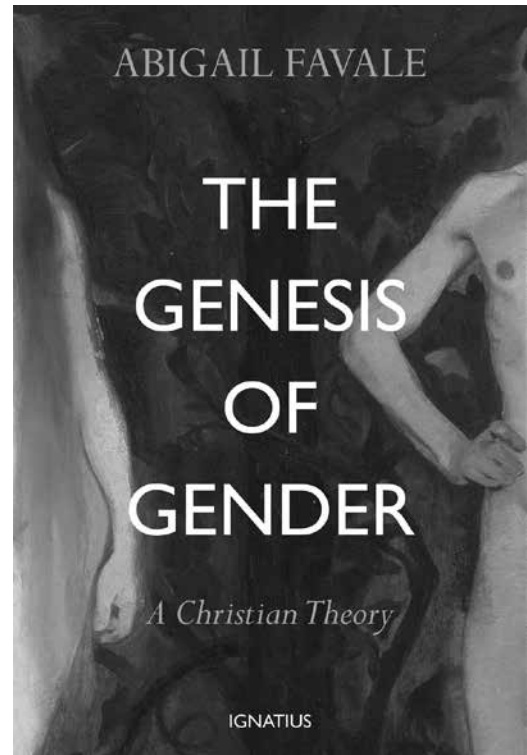
Favale has not lost all sympathy for feminism. Using the well-known classification of feminism in three waves, she still maintains that the first

wave, which was tied to the Temperance Movement and gave women the right to vote, corrected certain patriarchal excesses. I remain unconvinced. Favale admits that even early feminism suffered from a weak metaphysic. Indeed, we should perhaps face the truth that universal voting rights reflect an atomizing of human beings, shorn of all organic connection—the natural outcome of the nominalist metaphysic that Favale rightly scorns. The organism of the family is much more than the sum total of its individual members; traditional household votes recognize families as real unities and are, therefore, superior to purely individual votes, which strip people of the organic links that shape their identities.

Sacramental *Despite* Deviations

Favale is also still much too culturally conditioned when she talks about the intersex body as carrying divine dignity. To be sure, her discussion of the intersex body is, in many ways, exemplary. She helpfully points out that intersex conditions occur *within* the male-female binary and are not exceptions to it. Her focus on gamete production rather than on external bodily elements is illuminating. Intersex activists have typically tried to end mutilating surgeries, while transgender activists promote them. The two are in radical opposition.

But when Favale wants us to accept the intersex body as a sacrament precisely in its intersex character, we should resist her demand. Though admittedly she has the backing of Flannery O’Connor’s story “A Temple of the Holy Ghost,” she is wrong—as was O’Connor—to suggest that the



intersex body is a sacrament and that in its rejection we can see a parallel with the rejection of Christ: the human body is sacramental not in its shortcomings or disabilities but in its wholeness and integrity. Yes, also, an intersex body is sacramental—but this despite, not because of, its bodily disability.

Favale is similarly mistaken when she argues that gays and lesbians should accept themselves *in* their same-sex desires. She is not making a plea for homosexual relationships, and instead suggests that we learn how to channel our desires to a higher good. But it is not clear how same-sex erotic desires can be so channeled. Same-sex desires are against the creator’s loving intentions for humans, and for that reason they are not amenable to a sacramental transposition to a higher good. To channel our desire to Christ, the Song of Songs presents a male groom and a female bride. Like intersex deviations, so homosexual longings are part of the fallen condition—not sacramental gifts to be accepted as such.

The Primary Cause

Still, Favale's book is a gem. She relentlessly points out the numerous circularities and contradictions of the gender paradigm. For example, we have come to define gender based on whether one "feels" like a woman. "But," asks Favale, "what does it mean to feel like a woman, if being a woman is defined as feeling like a woman?" The circular logic necessarily opens up to identities other than that of a woman: to feel like a cat would mean to be a cat; to feel like a black person

would mean to be a black person. Similarly, it is nonsensical to claim that one's gender is not necessarily based on one's sex, while at the same time to redefine sex as a spectrum of gender identities.

The Genesis of Gender is a must-read, particularly for parents and teachers as they faithfully try to steer young people through the maze of today's sexual identity politics. The chapter "Artifice" should open the eyes of even the most naïve as to what is going on in the transgender pandemic.

Should you not have time to read the book, here is my own, quick take-away for young parents: handing a cell phone to your child is tantamount to abuse, for it is the primary cause of gender dysphoria. ♦

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