

# GENDER REVISITED



A TRACT BY JOHN POTTER

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In the 1990s I worked amongst a group of feminists at a University in Johannesburg, South Africa. 'Gender', they said, 'is a social construct'. Well of course it is; the Oxford Dictionary says that 'gender is a classification system embracing three categories: male, female and neuter. By observation and by common consent, humans have, throughout time, agreed that males and females exhibit sufficient difference to be classified as specific types in a gender system of classification. When a baby is born, it is normal to announce: 'It's a boy' or 'It's a girl' purely on the basis of its pelvic anatomy. So, what was my feminist colleague's point?

The modern feminist agenda has taken us down numerous strange pathways. In recent times we arrived at a point where some of them are pushing for pre-school children to not say 'him' or 'her', and for schools to have unisex toilets. The idea behind this, we are told, is to avoid the problem that by emphasising gender we are forcing people to adopt stereotypic roles. I find this argument very obtuse; if males and females are different psychologically as well as somatically, why pretend that such differences do not exist?

I attended my grand-daughters 21" birthday recently and was privileged to say a few words. I began by thanking the assembled company. 'You have helped me a lot tonight', I said, 'for you have demonstrated that men and women are different after all'. I recalled that Victor Borge was fond of saying that he had seen Mozart in a museum and found that he was just a bust, having no arms and legs and did not reach to the ground. (And it is a fact that you can remove a person's arms and legs and they will retain their identity). At the party aforementioned it was obvious, thanks to the current fashion of very short 'skirts, that females had legs to reach the ground, while men had trousers that served the same function.

But difference between the sexes goes beyond such superficial observation, as one anonymous commentator said recently: 'Men are Just Happier



People'. And the reasons are obvious: 'Your last name stays put; the garage is all yours; wedding plans take care of themselves; you can never be pregnant; you can wear a white T-shirt to a water park (you can wear NO shirt to a water park); car mechanics tell you the truth; you don't have to stop and think which way to turn a nut on a bolt; same work, more pay; wrinkles add character; a wedding dress costs \$5000 while a tuxedo can be rented for \$100; people never stare at your chest when you're talking to them; new shoes don't cut, blister, or mangle your feet; phone conversations are over in 30 seconds flat; a five-day vacation requires only one suitcase; you can open all your own jars; you get credit for the slightest act of thoughtfulness; if someone forgets to invite you, he or she can still be your friend; your underwear is \$8.95 for a three-pack; three pairs of shoes are more than enough; you are unable to see wrinkles or spots on your clothes; everything on your face stays its original colour; the same hairstyle lasts for years, maybe decades; you only have to shave your face and neck; you can play with toys all your life; one wallet suits all seasons; you can wear shorts no matter how your legs look; you can 'do' your nails with a pocket knife; you have freedom of choice concerning growing a moustache; and you can do Christmas shopping for 25 relatives on December 24th in 25 minutes (women go shopping, men go to get something)'. No wonder men are happier!



'Consider nicknames: if Laura, Kate and Sarah go out for lunch, they will call each other Laura, Kate and Sarah; if Mike, Dave and John go out, they

refer to each other as Fat Boy, Bubba and Wildman. And eating out: when the bill arrives, Mike, Dave and John will each throw in \$20, even though the bill is only \$32.50 - none of them will have anything smaller and none will actually admit they want change back. When the girls get their bill, out comes the pocket calculators. Attitudes to money are also dissimilar: a man will pay \$2 for a \$1 item he needs, a woman will pay \$1 for a \$2 item that she doesn't need but it's on sale. In the bathroom, a man has six items - his toothbrush and toothpaste, shaving soap, a razor, a bar of soap, and a towel. The average number of items in the typical woman's bathroom is 337; and a man would not be able to identify more than 20 of these items'.

'It is also an established fact that a woman has the last word in any argument - anything a man says after that is the beginning of a new argument. And marriage: a woman worries about the future until she gets a husband; a man never worries about the future until he gets a wife. A woman marries a man expecting he will change, but he doesn't; a man marries a woman expecting she won't change, but she does. A married man should forget his mistakes - there is no use two people remembering the same thing! Men wake up as good-looking as they went to bed; women somehow deteriorate during the night. A woman will dress up to go shopping, water the plants, empty the trash can, answer the phone, read a book, and get the mail. Men dress up for weddings and funerals'. And children: 'A woman knows all about her children; she knows about birthdays, dentist appointments and romances, best friends, favourite foods, secret fears and hopes and dreams. A man is vaguely aware of some short people living in the house'.

The question remains: to what degree is all of this the result of enculturation? Oswald Spengler (1918) saw gender as something profoundly basic in our nature. The separation into two sexes he saw as the 'fathomless secret of the cosmic flowings'. What did he mean by this? First of all, in the plant world, he saw the sexes parting from one another in 'the symbol of the flower, and in the animal kingdom he saw 'the dual directions of dual being manifesting itself more decisively as species became more complex.

The feminine Spengler saw standing 'closer to the Cosmic... rooted deeper in the earth (and) more immediately involved in the grand cyclic rhythms of Nature', particularly in pregnancy and childbirth. Men he saw to be more mobile as to sensation and understanding, more awake; more tense.

The male he saw 'experiences Destiny and comprehends Causality'. The female on the other hand 'is herself Destiny and Time, and the organic logic of the Becoming; the principle of Causality is alien to her. In primal societies, the 'woman is the seer, not because she knows the future but because she IS the future. The male interprets the oracle, the woman is the oracle'.

Similarly, the male makes history while the woman is history. Here, says Spengler, 'we have a dual significance of all living happenings - on the one hand we sense cosmic flow as such; and on the other hand the chain of successive individuals as the recipients, containers and preservers of the flowing. It is this second history that is characteristically masculine. It reaches back and receives highest symbolic expression in the great Cultures. Femininity, on the contrary, is the primary, the eternal, the maternal, the cultureless history of the generational sequence, which never alters and is synonymous with Life itself'.

'In men and women', says Spengler, 'the two kinds of history are fighting for power. Woman is strong and wholly what she is; she experiences Man and her Sons only in relation to herself and her ordained role. In the masculine there is a certain contradiction; he is this Man and something else besides which woman neither understands nor admits, which she feels as robbery and violence upon that which to her is holiest. This war of the sexes has gone on ever since there were sexes, and will continue - silent, bitter, unforgiving, pitiless - while the sexes continue'.



From this view, modern feminism is nothing more than a recent manifestation of an on-going cosmic battle. In the work place the battle for equality of opportunity and pay seems to say so. The reality is that, if a woman takes a senior management job, a man does not have that job; and if a woman takes a senior post, she is likely, by Spengler's view, to impose her innate world view on the work force. The question arises: if a woman has no understanding of causality, can she take a business forward to financial success or will she use position to impose on it her own identity, herself as history'?

Clearly, connection to the cosmic flow is important, and it is noticeable in Christian circles that women tend to be more prophetic than men. And they should be valued as such. Men on the other hand, with their insight into causality are more likely to comprehend the meaning and outworking of prophetic utterance. This view suggests that gender, under God, may lead to a balanced partnership where respect for each other's gifting may bring about powerful outcomes. The challenge is to stop fighting for supremacy in front of our children and for both parties to come to submission under God. And let's stop promoting such nonsensical things as unisex toilets and arguing that we should do away with male and female personal pronouns, and apply ourselves to things that really matter.



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