

How can we account for the universal subordination of women? Feminists explain it as man's abuse of superior strength. Religions say it is God's will. Gary Becker suggests it's economics. Gender roles flow logically from the Fall and result from living outside of God's abundance, not from God's will.

THE GENESIS OF GENDER, OR WHY MOTHER IN HEAVEN CAN'T SAVE YOU

Carrie A. Miles

I CAME ACROSS THIS ITEM IN PARADE MAGAZINE'S "Ask Marilyn," a column written by a woman listed in *The Guinness Book of World Records* as the smartest person in the world:

"Dear Marilyn,

I recently finished a book on the great philosophers. Why were none of them women?—George S." Marilyn replied:

"There are only two likely reasons: Either they didn't try hard enough, or they weren't capable."¹

It is shocking to hear such a statement made in 1996, but it would have been unremarkable a relatively few years ago. I recall childhood discussions with my best friend (a girl) on the same topic. If girls really were as good as boys, my friend reasoned, why is it that even the great cooks were men? Women must be lacking in either intelligence or ambition. The level of accomplishment corresponding to equality simply wasn't there.

I don't want to glorify either my childish discussions or Marilyn's column, her *Guinness* record notwithstanding, but the question asked in both instances is an important one, indeed a critical one, for understanding what it is to be a woman. Although few people are as daring as Marilyn, and the word "inferiority" is seldom heard these days, the question of women's ability still remains. Male dominance of government, aca-

demics, church, and home has implications beyond the already disturbing arguments over who should hold power. For the status differential between the sexes appears to be a *universal*—it is found in all human cultures. And whether on the lofty level of philosophy or the more homey pursuits of the kitchen, woman's universal subordination is damning evidence of her inferiority.²

In LDS beliefs, men's superior position extends to heaven as well. Not only does the LDS priesthood assign to men leadership of the home and church, but the ultimate priesthood holder, God, is also literally, physically a male. He has a wife, who is literally, physically female, but we know little of her or her roles relative to God the Father. So we are faced with the possibility that woman's subordination is not only universal, it is eternal as well. Although Church leaders consistently assure us that women are not inferior to men but just assigned a different role by God,³ the nagging implications of male dominance continue to have an impact on many of us. For if girls really are as good as boys, why is even God a male?

Given the disturbing implications of LDS doctrine, it is not surprising that LDS feminists have made much of the concept of Mother in Heaven. Establishing that God is female as well as male, and that the Mother is not inferior to the Father would be a powerful argument for elevating the status of women in this life. I believe, however, that such attempts to clarify our eternal status are dangerous unless we can first account for the existence of gender differences among us mortals. If the celestial parents are equals, then why are earthly women subordinate? With this unexplained, it is too easy for the feminist argument to be turned on itself.

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In what follows, I will review four general categories of explanations for the universal character of women's subordination and for the observed differences between men and women: (1) biological explanations, (2) socialization explanations, (3) the LDS (and traditional Christian) perspective that God wills our differences, and (4) a little known but powerful economic model that accounts for the "sexual division of labor." I will then discuss what this all means for the *eternal* status of gender, Mother in Heaven, and what we are going to be when we grow up.

BIOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

If women are naturally inferior or less moral than men, then their subjugation and mistreatment are justifiable.

Of course, the difference between men and women is a time-honored topic for those great philosophers about whom George S. wrote. Aristotle, the fourth-century B.C. Greek philosopher whose ideas dominated Western culture for nearly two thousand years, held that woman was far inferior to man, more like an animal than a human being. Thomas Laqueur recounts that Aristotle, like other medical theorists up until about the eighteenth century, believed that there was only one sex. Male and female reproductive systems, they believed, were the same, except that man's greater virtue ("heat") forced his genitals to the exterior of his body. The presence of external genitalia proved the moral superiority of any man over any woman.⁴

Aristotle was neither the first nor the last in a long line of philosophers who held that woman is *innately* inferior to man in intellect, morality, strength, and constitution. Modern counterparts tend to say that women are "different" rather than "inferior," but explanation of different social roles based on innate differences still flourish. Some researchers claim that men are genetically superior to women in critical skills, such as math, or hormonally superior in terms of aggression and drive, or recently, that men and women use their brains differently. These points of view could be called *essentialist* because they take the basic view that the difference between men and women is one of *essence*—that is, the difference is in our very nature, is in-born, and cannot be changed. (Perversely, the category of essentialism also applies to some of the trendy assertions that women are in fact superior to men—they have a different way of knowing, caring, leading, etc.—but that men's misguided, violent, and patriarchal standards do not allow them to acknowledge or appreciate this way of being.)

This type of thinking extends to the popular culture as well. Consider the best selling books like *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. This author, John Gray, simply asserts that massive natural differences separate men and women. For such writers, genetic evolution even explains why men hog the remote control to the television set.

Obviously, men and women are physically different in primary and secondary sex characteristics, and these differences are transmitted genetically. There is no evidence, however, that human behavior can be passed on through the genes. Unlike

some animals who follow physically determined, stereotyped behavior, human beings appear to have few (perhaps no) instincts. Ability and general aspects of temperament may be inherited, but complicated personality variables such as compassion or the drive to dominate others are not. It is also not clear how such traits could be passed along in a sex-linked manner, which the innate-differences theories require. That is, how are these presumed biological differences transmitted to your sons and not to your daughters? The Y chromosome, which determines maleness, is a small one that seems to carry very little information beyond the signal to turn on physical maleness. It seems unlikely that it could possibly carry the vast number of psychological characteristics, from left brained logic to channel surfing, that are attributed to manhood.

Unable to find evidence on a genetic level, biological theorists have increasingly turned to hormonal explanation of gender differences. Hormonal explanations could solve the problem of the Y chromosome's inability to carry much information, as hormones could "turn on" a trait carried elsewhere. For instance, although a genetic code for "aggressiveness"—if such a thing exists—might be too large and complicated to be carried on the smallish Y chromosome, a hormone such as testosterone could activate the "aggressiveness gene" located on another chromosome. Hence, theoretically at least, your son would inherit your aggressiveness, but your testosterone-less⁵ daughter will not.

Despite the assurances of those citing "scientific studies," however, the current state of knowledge about hormones and their effects on human behavior is sketchy and confused. In addition, because advocates use loaded terms, such as the "organizing" influence of male sex hormones on the brain⁶ or "strikingly different brain structure"⁷ to refer to trivial and ambiguous findings, we are further confused as to how little is known about the effect of hormones. For instance, the "organizing" of the brain mentioned above refers to the fact that prenatal exposure to testosterone turns off part of the ovulatory cycle. This is not really remarkable, since those exposed to testosterone prenatally—males—don't have ovaries anyway. This result was found only in mice, however, and similar results could not be obtained in primates. Although such a study has no meaning for human behavior, its generalized finding—that testosterone "organizes" the brain—has been used to argue the existence of basic differences between men and women.

Other commonly accepted "facts," such as the belief that men are more aggressive than women because they have more circulating testosterone, fail in the face of studies that find no correlation between levels of aggression in men and their levels of testosterone. There is also no difference in hormone levels between heterosexual and homosexual men, something one might expect if sexual behavior were entirely determined by hormones. Popular expressions notwithstanding ("He has hormones coming out of his ears!"), there is no basis for the wide generalizations made about hormones.

Another failing of essentialist theories is their inability to address the changes in sex-typed behavior that has occurred over the last few decades. If this behavior has been coded into

our genes over hundreds of thousands of years of evolution, how can it change so sharply and virtually overnight? I won't bother to list the changes in relationships between the sexes in just the last thirty years, but here is one intriguing, if trivial question for biological theorists: If men evolved to prefer women with big hips (which some researchers claim is another universal), how is it that a recent survey reported that the body feature the current generation of young men most dislike in women is large hips? The constant fluctuations in what is considered desirable prove that there must be some factors other than genetic evolution at work in determining our behavior.

Despite all of these problems, the most disturbing feature of biological theories are their social implications. In these theories, men and women are forever different. Their reproductive strategies are so at odds that they can never live in harmony.⁸ Programs designed to remedy inequities are doomed to failure because of woman's own limitations. As for male behavior, if domination is accepted as natural and inescapable, it must therefore also be moral.⁹

SOCIALIZED DIFFERENCES

If man's control over women could be eliminated, gender differences would disappear.

BIOLOGICAL explanations are often rejected either for political reasons or because they don't stand up to scientific standards. Many who reject essentialism offer instead the idea of gender as a *social construct*. According to these arguments, gender differences are not inborn but are created by society and then are taught, either intentionally or implicitly, to its individual members. In these theories, woman is not innately different from man, but has learned to play a different social role. Thus, differences between the sexes in math ability or aggression are due to socialization, not biology: boys learn to be aggressive because their aggression is rewarded; girls learn to avoid math because boys don't like smart girls.

This is a satisfying explanation on the surface, and I believe that most of the observable differences between the sexes are in fact due to socialization. But as Perper points out,¹⁰ to say that we obey sex roles because society teaches them to us is ultimately no more informative than to say we are simply born that way. Why does society structure roles in this particular way? For those who advance social construct arguments, the answer usually lies in some form of the following: Woman is vulnerable because of her need for protection during pregnancy and motherhood and/or because of man's superior size and strength. Men use their physical advantage to usurp resources for themselves, and then force women into being what they want women to be. Women, to equal the balance of power, become craven, passive, or manipulative. (Some of these explanations become biological as well, as in anthropological or sociobiological "Man the Hunter" theories, which posit that man and woman evolved differently in response to these different needs.)

Although this work provides a much-needed critique of the biased methodology of some biological theorists, its implica-

tions are often no less divisive than the biological explanations. Patriarchy is an historic development, Bleier argues, that men employ to maintain women's subjugation. At the extreme end of this perspective, Susan Brownmiller suggests that the fear of rape is the means by which some men keep all women in line;¹¹ Marilyn French states, similarly, that "*the vast majority of men in the world*"¹² exercise some kind of abusive control over women; and Adrienne Rich contends that men make heterosexuality compulsory in order to separate and control women for their own purposes.¹³ The implication of many of these arguments is that men are self-centered predators and women are innocent victims. If man's dominion and patriarchal control of women could be eliminated, these arguments imply or state explicitly, gender differences would disappear.

NATURE VERSUS NURTURE

Traits that men and women both possess cannot explain their universal differences in status.

BOTH the essentialist and socialization approaches have their own intuitive appeal. They each have points that make sense. Women may resent the claims of biological explanations that men naturally possess some critical skills, but they observe children falling, untaught, into stereotyped activities. Parents often deny encouraging their children's aggression or interest in sex-typed activities, and I believe them. But where does children's sex-typed behavior come from, if it is not innate? Besides, much gender-specific behavior feels natural to the person performing it, while the motives of the other sex can be an incomprehensible mystery.

On the other hand, the socialization model makes sense of other aspects of our experience. Men are obviously bigger and stronger than women. Women appreciate their own vulnerability and fear of physically stronger men, and they recognize it as a source of male power. They may also have had the experience of being discouraged from participating, or not being encouraged to participate, in "unfeminine" activities. Mormons also understand the potential for unrighteous dominion, which leads us to try to exert power over each other when we can; we see women as well as men trying to take the upper hand when it is possible.

But if each approach has its appeal, each has its problems. Perhaps the most basic problem is the difficulty in explaining a universal finding on the basis of relative characteristics. For instance, the argument of either camp comes down to issues of who has more of what—whether man has more strength, intelligence, or drive; whether woman is more verbal, caring or vulnerable. Each model then explains the differences in power between the sexes in terms of those ratios. But an argument over differences does not include the basic fact that, except for physical characteristics relating to reproduction, there is nothing unique about either gender. That is, one might argue that men are stronger than women, but one can't argue that men have strength and women don't. Similarly, one might argue that men are better at math, or that women are more caring. But some women have more mathematical

aptitude than most men, and there are men who are very compassionate. The distributions of human traits overlap: one sex may have, on average, more of a certain trait than the other has, but there are no absolutes in which one gender possesses a trait that the other does not share at all. And putting the arguments this way makes it obvious that social power/status cannot be based on any one relative attribute. If men dominate women because of superior strength, shouldn't the president of the United States (or General Motors) be the strongest or most aggressive man in the country? Wouldn't status differentials be based on strength, not gender, with strong women lording it over weak men? In other words, traits that men and women both possess cannot explain the universal differences in status. A universal finding can be explained only by an absolute difference.

GOD'S WILL

To justify gender roles, Genesis 3 has been misused, but it is a correct explanation of the origin of gender.

JUST such an absolute is found in the religious explanation for the differing treatment of women and men: It is God's will. LDS explanations for gender differences generally follow this tradition. Mormon leaders say that women are not inferior to men, nor are they particularly different from men in any kind of ability; they are simply assigned different roles by God.¹⁴

For the researcher—like Perper, whom I cited earlier—this explanation also begs the question. The researcher still wants to know why God should will that particular form of social behavior. In this case, however, asking why God wills something is probably not as fruitful as asking why we think we know what God's will is. The tenet of continuing revelation makes it difficult to pin down LDS theology—it's hard to analyze the system if the system keeps changing—but one of the key scriptures used within the Christian tradition to justify gender roles is found in Genesis 3. These verses have been used both as evidence of God's will and as an explanation for the existence of gender roles.

The sexual
division of labor
arises
not from man's
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one thing
females can do
that no male
has ever done.

Genesis 3 contains a description of the first sin, what we call the Fall. I am interested in verses 16 through 19, God's judgment on the man and the woman after he has discovered their disobedience:

¹⁶ Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow [this could also be translated "pain" or "toil"] and thy conception; in sorrow [pain or toil] thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. ¹⁷ And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow [pain or toil] shalt thou eat of

it all the days of thy life; ¹⁸ Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; ¹⁹ In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. (KJV)

So we have from God's mouth woman's place in the home, rearing children; man working to support his family; and the husband "ruling over" his wife. Everything is explained.

Of course, a feminist scholar would say that the religious explanation is no more than a rationalization of the patriarchal oppression of women. I agree that, when used to justify (or sanctify) those roles, Genesis 3 has been misused. As a theoretical explanation for the origin of gender, however, Genesis 3 is absolutely and curiously correct. But understanding how the particular nature of the Curse accounts for gender differences requires an excursion into economics. For when God describes to man and woman the consequences of their actions, he curses not the people but the *ground* (vs. 17).¹⁵ As a result, the people now live outside of God's abundance, and their perfect oneness (Gen. 2) is transformed into a mutual struggle for resources. Their relationship becomes one governed by economics—"the allocation of scarce resources among competing ends."

ECONOMICS AND GENDER

Ironically, the very thing that makes a woman valuable economically also makes her dependent.

THIS economic argument is not going to sound like what you probably think economics sounds like. I am basing my analysis on work done by economist Gary Becker in *A Treatise on the Family*.¹⁶ Becker has built a Nobel-Prize-winning career using the principles of economics to understand non-market behavior, such as marriage, fertility patterns, crime, and addiction. From Becker's work on the sexual division of labor we can derive a model of gender in which it will become apparent that gender roles are *natural*, but not *innate*. This model accounts for the universality of gender roles but also offers the possibility of change, and it fits beautifully with Genesis 3.

Becker's model is an "elegant" one, meaning that he is able to derive many testable hypotheses from only a small number of assumptions. His main assumption is that the sexual division of labor arises not from man's superiority—in economic terms, his "relative advantage"—but from woman's. This area of superiority is not greater caring, cooperation, or verbal intelligence—all traits that men share—but woman's absolute difference from men, the one thing that females can do that no male has ever done. The answer lies in the biological definition of "female": the female is the sex that makes the greatest contribution to reproduction. Woman's relative advantage over man is her ability to bear children.

Although the situation has changed in the twentieth century (and perhaps had begun to change in the century prior to it), children have traditionally been a very valuable commodity. Children were both an important source of labor in rural economies, even at a young age, and the only source of support for elderly parents. Adam Smith estimated that in colonial America, a child's labor contributed 100 pounds to his family before he left home—a substantial sum in those days. If the child did not leave home but stayed and worked in the family "business" (as was typical in patriarchal societies), the child was even more valuable to his family. "Children are an heritage of the Lord," says the Psalmist. "Blessed is the man that has his quiver full of them." (Ps. 127:3, 5.) Blessed indeed. Infertility was more than a personal heartbreak—it was an economic disaster.

As an economic resource, children are as valuable to men as they are to women, and men will want to form alliances with women, who are, after all, the sole producers of children and the only ones who can feed them. Given that throughout most of history child mortality has been extremely high (so much so that Laqueur says that even affluent families were lucky if they reproduced themselves), women were often under a more or less constant obligation to bear children. Becker suggests that when there are young children in the home, a mother's time, although unpaid, is probably more valuable than that of her wage-producing husband. Thus, most women became wives and mothers, not because they were born nurturing or with maternal instincts, nor because they were socialized to live through others, but because they needed to be. They were

more productive and rewarded in that role than in any other.¹⁷

Child rearing, then, becomes the woman's most important task. But women have rarely had the luxury of only raising their children; they can—and usually must—perform other tasks. With this in mind, Becker notes that it is most efficient for the parents to divide up tasks so that mothers have those that are compatible with child rearing. Throughout history those domestic tasks included keeping the house, preparing food (according to the *Women's Bible Commentary*,¹⁸ preparing grain for cooking could take up to two hours a day), vegetable gardening, and keeping dairy animals. In some cultures, women did the farming as well.¹⁹ Spinning was the consummate female task, as it was easy to put down when a child needed to be picked up. Women were rarely hunters or warriors, but, according to an economic analysis, they were protected so much not because they were weak or incompetent, but because they were valuable. It did not make economic sense to expose the producer of valuable resources to physical danger or for her to pursue work that took her away from her infants (again, as much as the family or culture could afford it—women have always worked, often at heavy, dirty, and dangerous jobs). Any work in which woman did not have a competitive advantage became men's work. In any case, it is women's competitive advantage over men in "domestic" tasks that accounts for the sexual division of labor, not patriarchal conspiracies or man's superior strength. If women were bigger and stronger than men, they would still be more valuable in the home.²⁰

Given these constraints and opportunities, most women no doubt accepted the domestic lifestyle freely. But even women who had other skills to offer, or who were not interested in marriage or childbearing, had no real choices in life. A particular girl may not be biologically predisposed to childbearing or "women's work," but her parents can't know that when she is born. Efficient parents train their children to fulfill the role they are mostly likely to play in life. That means that a girl will be trained to fulfill the domestic roles as defined by her culture's physical circumstances, even if she has no interest or facility in them.

Becker explains the constraints on the parents to educate their children within stereotypic boundaries by noting that education and training are expensive. This was particularly so in the past. And since skills are more efficiently acquired young, parents can't wait to test a child's predilections before socializing her to her future role in life. I think Becker's model is more elegant than this, however, and this assumption is not needed. Training a daughter to be a wife was the smart thing to do even if education had been free.

Consider this perverse example: Suppose a young woman in some pre-industrial society decided that she wanted to enter the marketplace. This is not unreasonable—even in subsistence economies, there were jobs that did not depend on brute strength alone. So a woman might find an occupation in which she could excel despite being, on average, smaller than a man—trade, law, philosophy, education, or a skilled craft such as cooking. Suppose also that she acquired the necessary training and had financial support. Let's make it even easier for her and assume that she does not have to deal with discrimination,

sexual harassment, or fear of assault. Under these optimal circumstances, is she better off in the marketplace than she would be in a domestic role?

Probably not. Compare her to a man in similar circumstances. Even a man with significantly less valuable market skill than our non-traditional woman can have children and a domestic partner. As discussed earlier, children were a valuable resource in themselves, but the other things women did were also important. In pre-industrial societies, food and clothing did not just appear in the shops. What women produced in the home were vital necessities. Our non-traditional woman is at a disadvantage already. Because she is not married, she does not have anyone to take care of her domestically. Becker points out that men who are relieved of all domestic responsibility have an advantage in the marketplace over men who are not, and there is no reason why this observation would not be true of the market-woman as well. Perhaps our independent woman could live with her mother, or hire servants. Unfortunately, neither of these solutions provide her with other important resources, such as an emotional and sexual relationship, and children. The non-traditional woman can enjoy a romantic relationship only if she finds a mate who is willing to forego sex—for in a world without reliable birth control, sex leads to children. Once a woman has children, she will not be able to carry on her market activities, as she is then more valuable at home with the children. Perhaps our woman could find a truly liberated man who would be willing to switch roles with her, but men, no matter how liberated, make poor wives, being trained for the market and having no competitive advantage in childbearing. If our pioneering woman wants to remain in the marketplace, then, she gives up domestic partnership, marriage, sex, and children. A man or a traditional housewife can have all of the benefits of marriage—a domestic/market partnership, sex, and children—but a woman who tries to specialize in the market, even under the best of circumstances, gives up a major portion of the resources that would be available to her otherwise.

Men's competitive advantage against women in the workplace, then, comes not from their greater physical strength, but from their ability to marry women. No wonder the feminist movement became so strongly associated with lesbianism. It is

Feminine gods have not worked to women's advantage, historically. The worship of female gods is usually a worship of female biology.

not that the woman can't compete with men, or that her objective performance as chef or philosopher is inferior, but that she can't compete with her own alternatives. In response to "Ask Marilyn," woman is quite capable, but it doesn't make sense for her to try hard enough. Marketplace activity required the traditional woman to give up too much personally. Usually the women who did engage in market activities were those who did not have women's resources available to them, either because they were never married or because their husbands were absent—dead, at war, traveling for trade, or in jail.

To add to the irony, the very thing that makes a woman valuable also makes her dependent. Becker notes that wives and mothers become "specialized"—that a wife is valuable mostly to one

particular man and one particular household. After all, her greatest resource, children, are most valuable to their own father. She can change "employers" only at the price of a major and risky disruption in her life. She and her children could be valued by other households, but since they cannot offer those households the life-long loyalty of family, their value would be as servants, not as mistress and heirs of the household. The amount of power and discretion they could be given in households not their own would always be limited.

In contrast, the market skills of the husband have value to a wide number of potential employers; even as a peasant, more than one employer could benefit from his labors. This broader base of demand for male labor gives the man more power in the marriage relationship. It would be easier for him to replace the woman than it would be for the woman to replace him.

IMPACT ON PERSONALITY *Our potential for wholeness or for simply being ourselves is diverted into gender role playing.*

AS a social psychologist, I extend Becker's socio-economic model to show how the expectations for girls, as opposed to those for boys, will affect a child's personal and spiritual development, further compounding the power differential between the sexes. Knowing their son will grow up to compete in the marketplace, how do a boy's parents hope their son will be described? Here is a partial list:

strong
intelligent
competitive
independent
aggressive

The boys who "succeed" are those who strive for power, who have the drive to subdue and master, the will to conquer, to be the best. They will have an edge on the competition if they are self-centered, task-oriented, insensitive, and tough.

Parents know that their daughters, on the other hand, are competing not for the best market jobs, but for the best domestic jobs, i.e., the best husbands. Parents hope for their daughters to marry advantageously, to wed men with valuable market skills; they hope for husbands that will bring resources into the family, or at least not take too much out of it. Instead of hoping for strong and intelligent daughters, parents hope that their girls will be:

pretty
skilled at attracting
nurturing
sweet
accommodative
sensitive
patient
socially aware
aesthetically oriented
interested in children

From the beginning of their lives, girls are valued for very different things than boys are, even though their innate personal dispositions and capacities may be identical to those of a brother. One gender is trained to compete for power; the other is taught to submit. Girls are allowed to be competitive only in attracting men. How then could the traditional girl ever be expected to hold her own against boys, whether as a philosopher or a professional chef?

Or how could a person of either sex ever be expected to become a whole human being? In a world of scarce resources, whatever gifts or talents a child is born with must be judged and coded as appropriate or inappropriate. Sensitive boys get beaten by their better-socialized peers. Intellectual girls are taught to play dumb. Our potential for wholeness or for simply being ourselves is diverted into role playing. We are not simply male or female; we must be masculine or feminine, too.

NATURAL VERSUS INNATE

Gender roles flow from the one natural difference between men and women, but they are not innate.

THE model proposed by Gary Becker makes sense of the differences in status and personality between men and women without having to draw from the far more complicated biological explanations or the conspiracy theories of socialization/oppression. Becker's implications are also less divisive than those of other models: the forces that drive traditional gender differences are not male aggression or female incapacity but the relative advantage that women have over men in domestic tasks. Neither men nor women emerge from this explanation as either virtuous sufferers or domineering brutes. The model also avoids the logical problem of explaining universal differences on the basis of characteristics that vary only relatively. In Becker's model, gender roles are *natural*,

GENESIS 3	ECONOMIC REALITY (BECKER'S MODEL)
Woman condemned to sorrowful toil	Woman must work to survive Sexual division of labor
Woman brings forth children in sorrow	Woman valued for childbearing
Woman will "turn" to her husband	Girls raised to be dependent on and concerned about attracting men—all of the "feminine charms"
Husband will rule over wife	Mothers are financially dependent Rule of men. Husbands will have more power in the relationship
Curse on ground	Economics—scarce goods must be allocated among competing ends
Man condemned to sorrowful toil	Men must work to survive
Eats by the sweat of his brow	Anxiety, concern about competition, pressure to be the best
Will return to the dust	Mortality, death

because they follow from the one natural difference between men and women, but they are not innate.

Becker's model further accounts for what the biological theories do not—the massive changes in women's roles in the last century. Becker suggests that technological changes have resulted in both a decrease in the value of children and an increase in the market value of women's labor. In developed countries, children are no longer an economic asset to their families, but are instead a major cost. Education, always expensive, is no longer an option but a requirement for employment in the modern world. Probably the greatest cost of children, however, is the value of the time of the parent who cares for the child. As women's employment options rise, staying home with children and foregoing potential income becomes a serious price to pay. Although people still have an emotional need for children, economic factors once again outweigh emotion; the birth rate, correspondingly, has dropped steadily throughout the last two centuries.

From the perspective of Becker's model, I would like to turn around a couple of culturally held beliefs. The first is that the development of the birth control pill was responsible for the decline in the birthrate. But in fact, fairly effective methods of birth control, and a decline in the American birthrate, existed for decades prior to the pill. I suggest instead that cheap, reliable and socially acceptable birth control was developed because, for the first time, great numbers of people wanted fewer

children. The second commonly held belief is that feminism is to blame for the breakdown of the family. But when children are not valuable economic assets, the optimal behavior for the producers of children—women—changes. With the decline of children's economic value, many of women's traditional functions have become luxuries rather than necessities (consider, for example, the stereotype of the housewife at home eating bonbons and watching soap operas). Housewives began to experience what Betty Friedan called the "problem that has no name," a feeling of restlessness and lack of fulfillment, the sense that women's work was no longer valuable,²¹ that women had to find something else to do. The women's movement—the undoing of the rational norms of the traditional world—was the response to this ennui, not its cause. Feminism did not cause the breakdown of the family. The breakdown of the family caused feminism.

Anyone who
has tried to
live her life
solely within
the gender box
knows that there
is not enough
room in there for a
whole person, let alone
a god.

THE ECONOMICS OF REDEMPTION

Christ's atonement frees men and women from the effects of the Curse.

LET'S now return to Genesis. After sin and mortality are introduced, the ground is cursed. It now brings forth thorns in abundance and the necessities of life only with "painful toil." Note the parallels between Genesis 3 and my expansion of Becker's model in the box on page 22.

The ideal relationship between Adam and his wife, which Genesis 2 portrays as one of equality and intimacy, changes immediately after the Fall. Only after the Fall does Adam name the woman, and her name reflects not her personhood or their unity, as the words Adam used for her in Genesis 2:23 do (roughly translated, "Here at last is someone like me!"), but her biological role: "Eve—the mother of all living." It doesn't matter how much Adam and Eve love each other, or how committed they are to equal rights, or how much they remember the oneness for which they were created—after the Fall, they

have to allocate resources efficiently, or die. And as we have seen, that efficient allocation of resources will include gender roles, which God tells them will be a consequence of mortality.

In this light, Genesis 3:16 clearly is not an expression of God's will. These verses are God's description of what life will be like outside of his abundance. Gender roles are not God's will, let alone a description of God's own nature. God created sex, but sin created gender.²² Where we have gone wrong is in reifying the concept of gender, treating it as if it were a real thing. Gender is only a description of the behavior that emerges in response to outside pressures. It is not part of our essence. But the forces that create gender are so powerful that it is hard not to view it as something real. It's as hard to overcome the pressures, roles, and traditions as it is to overcome death. If, however, we bow to these forces, and follow norms and ideals that are not at all godly but a response to the need for economic competition, we are obeying a curse. We think we

are being righteous when, in fact, we are propagating sin, and there is a lot of sin associated with gender. Think of all of the things that our culture considers a "successful" man to be: rich, powerful, never wrong, masterful. And a "successful" woman: thin, beautiful, well-dressed, and maybe really skilled at getting her way without threatening her man. There is nothing spiritual in either of these images, but aren't they valued by everyone? Don't we admire these people? Don't we feel shamed and envious when we are with people who fulfill their roles better than we do? Don't we feel an obligation to be that way, too? Or that we are somehow lacking in virtue if we are not?

The heart of the gospel is believing that Christ's atonement redeems us from death. Consider that the Atonement may also free us from other effects of the Fall. The idea that redemption reverses the Curse is explicit in John's revelation of the Holy City, in which are recreated the circumstances of the Garden of Eden:

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying,

Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. . . . In the midst was there the tree of life, which . . . yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse . . . (Rev. 21:3–4; 22:2–3).

This redemption from the Curse is not just for the next world. Recall what Jesus says about sparrows and lilies; he asks if we really need to continue to eat bread by the sweat of our brows (Matt. 6:20, 25–34). A careful reading of the New Testament will reveal a great deal of teaching against gender-typed behaviors—patriarchy, macho honor, power seeking, and limiting women's participation in the spiritual community—and against the anxieties that come with them. Both Jesus and Paul taught that with redemption our earthly status and biological nature no longer matter. When Paul wrote, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28), he meant it literally. No worldly economic status has any meaning within the community of Christ. Unfortunately, centuries of translation bias often make it difficult to see the extent of our salvation. It can be hard to find one's way through some scriptural passages when the bias in favor of obeying the Curse is so pronounced that even statements such as "For woman is the glory of man" (1 Cor. 11:7) are used to argue women's inferiority. But redemption is there nonetheless.²³

Christ redeems us from death, from thorns, sorrow, hunger, and pain, and from gender obligations. But until the Lord comes again, we still die, we still have to eat, and we still face constraints based on sex: as Christians we are not freed entirely in this life. We still need money and have to pay attention to how we look. It's no sin (that I know of) to seek a promotion or to wear lipstick and high heels. Do what you need to do (although you might consider if you really need to do it), but don't think that these earthly constraints define what you are. Our obligation to be a "successful" man or woman is not a religious one, but is, in fact, steeped in sin and the Curse. We don't have to be enslaved to it. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1).

WHY MOTHER IN HEAVEN CAN'T SAVE YOU God must be more than all the metaphors we use to describe him/her.

ACCEPTING the full power of our redemption means rethinking the Mormon notion of gendered gods. Reifying gender is far from being only an LDS problem, but Mormonism, in teaching that God has a physical body, has the potential to confuse the issue. In many ways, Mormons have not only reified gender, we have deified it.

When LDS feminists began to speak of a mother god several years ago, it was apparent that they thought that the notion of a female deity would help them in their struggle to elevate the status of women in the Church. Recent papers, however, have begun to question whether the current understanding of Heavenly Mother is capable of achieving that goal.²⁴ I subtitled this paper, "Why Mother in Heaven Can't Save You" because I do not believe that feminine gods have worked to women's advantage historically. There have always been female deities. In the Old Testament, the judges and prophets continuously battled the people's worship of the female god Ashtaroth. The Greek and Roman pantheon was full of female gods. The great Artemis of Ephesus was a female. But the worship of female gods is usually a worship of female biology. Many of these "goddesses" were fertility idols, and their temples were places where the devotees (men) sought spirituality through sexual ecstasy with enslaved temple prostitutes.²⁵ That the female, not the male, gods were represented by prostitutes suggests just how uplifting goddess worship was for women. For the most part, such practices were not the worship of a transcendent, loving mother who lifted women up, but were rather an attempt to assure the continued provision of the feminine economic product—sex and children.²⁶

I doubt if mainstream Mormonism in the twenty-first century will get into anything too radical in honoring Mother in Heaven. But what little has been said of her suggests the same pagan tendency to see a female god solely in terms of female biology. Indeed, some of the problems LDS feminists are having with the idea of a mother god come from the limitations of defining her work as solely feminine.²⁷ Although many of the general authorities' descriptions of Mother in Heaven come from the last two decades, the terms used to describe her—"the ultimate in maternal modesty" and "restrained, queenly elegance," gracious, maternal, dignified, and putting on a really good party to welcome us home²⁸—are simply reification of nineteenth-century Victorian feminine ideals. In addition, we have a list of what she is not—not God the Father, not a priesthood holder, not to be named or prayed to, and either unwilling or incapable of speech. She is defined in terms of her differences from God the Father, not her similarities to him. Like Eve, Mother in Heaven is stripped of her wholeness and named only in terms of her biological, stereotyped functions: *mother of all living*.

Perhaps this is why some LDS women feel such pain in "living in a motherless house."²⁹ They have spent their lives trying to contain themselves within the gender box, with messages that tell them that they aren't as good as the boys (although they mustn't even try to be *like* the boys), and, failing to find redemption within roles that are no longer valued, they look to heaven to see how it is possible. But there we apparently find the Mother God in the same box. And anyone who has tried to live her life solely within the gender box, lovely though the box may be, knows that there is not enough room in there for a whole person, let alone a god. To project either this crippled femininity or an earthly masculinity³⁰ onto God is a mistake, for when we strive to achieve worldly gender

ideals we become more anxious, more subject to the Curse, and less like God. We need to strip gender of its claims to morality, let alone divinity.

If gender roles are the consequence of sin and deprivation, and Christ's redemption takes us back into God's abundance, then gender has no eternal meaning. And if gender has no spiritual significance for us, what possible meaning can femininity or masculinity have for God? Perhaps we know nothing of a heavenly mother because gender becomes completely transparent through the eternities of progression. If it exists at all, it looks like nothing we can comprehend. The individualities of a perfected couple would also disappear. They are what we are intended to be—*one* (see Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:6). We do not see the junction between the two. Once again, to focus on the ways in which male and female are dissimilar, to turn away from wholeness and draw an immovable line between masculine and feminine, is to become less god-like, not more.

If the contemporary Christian world speaks only of God as masculine, I suggest it is because we don't understand metaphors and how poetry is used in scripture. Science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke once wrote a story called the "Nine Billion Names of God."³¹ In the story, Tibetan monks employ a computer to speak all of the names of God, at which time the world comes to an end. God has more than one name, and we must never cease to explore them all, because God is more than we can comprehend with just one word. We need those metaphors to help us begin to grasp the complexity of God. The many terms used for God in the Old Testament is again obscured by our translations, but they include not only *Elohim* and *Jehovah*, with which Mormons are familiar, but also *El Shaddai*, *El Elyon*, *El Olam*, *Adonai*, *Jehovah Sabaoth*, and others.³² "Father" is only one name, used rarely in the Old Testament, and used almost exclusively by Jesus in the New.³³

Not all the Biblical images and names of God are masculine.³⁴ The *Wisdom of God* in Proverbs is feminine. A particularly intriguing example of feminine imagery is the name *El*

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Shaddai, which God uses with Abraham. This name is usually translated "The Almighty" or "God of the Mountain" (Gen. 17:1, 28:3, 35:11, 43:14, 49:25; Ruth 1:20, 21; throughout Job [starting at Job 5:17]; and the Revelation [starts at Rev. 1:8]). But *shaddai* means "mountain" in the same way that "Grand Tetons" means mountains—*shaddai* comes from "shad," a Hebrew word meaning a woman's breast. Thus, *El Shaddai* means "the breasted one."³⁵ Does this mean that God has breasts? Have we found God the Mother? Or, as Andrew Jukes suggests, is this name of God, like all others, a metaphor, best translated as "the pourer forth," "the nourisher," "the satisfier," "the all-sufficient one," the God who was everything, including a nursing mother, to Abraham? In any case, the Bible is full of imagery for God—male, female, and inanimate (e.g., "The Lord is my Rock" [2 Sam. 22:2]); to take any of those images literally and exclusively robs them of their wholeness. When Jesus called God *Abba*, it was not a formal "Father," but a "Papa" so intimate and nurturing that one Aramaic scholar suggests it could be rendered something like "motherly father."³⁶ In using so intimate a name for God, Jesus invited us into a new type of relationship with the abstract and transcendent god of the Jews. To insist that Jesus addressed God as Father because God was literally his physical parent, and only his, and because God was literally male, and only male, leaves us outside of that intimacy, certainly the opposite of Jesus' intention.

Marriage itself is a "mystery," a metaphor for the relationship between Christ and the perfected Church (Eph. 5:32 and also most of Revelation). Surely that marriage is the one-flesh union spoken of in Genesis 2, not the economic partnership and competition of Genesis 3. But we cannot be one with anyone, spouse, Christ, God, or fellow Saints, if we continue to enslave ourselves to the consequences of the Curse. It is only by accepting our full salvation and giving up the roles that limit us, by renouncing our fears, competitions, and manipulations, that we can begin to work toward the oneness for which God created us.

NOTES

1. Marilyn Vos Savant, "Ask Marilyn," *Parade Magazine*, 9 June 1996, 18.
2. Feminist researchers have searched in vain for cultures in which women, not men, were dominant. Failing that, they reinterpret anthropological findings to show that women made the major contributions to society despite the fact that men had all the public roles. (See P. Draper, "Kung Women: Contrasts in Sexual Egalitarianism in Foraging and Sedentary Contexts," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. R. R. Reiter [New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975]; R. Rapp, "Gender and Class: An Archaeology of Knowledge Concerning the Origin of the State," *Dialectical Anthropology* 2 [1977]: 309–316; and Karen Sacks, *Sisters and Wives: The Past and Future of Sexual Equality* [Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979].) Nora Ephron's facetious comment in her novel *Heartburn* ("This reminded me of those feminists who are always claiming that male domination is not the natural state because there's one tribe in New Guinea where the men lie around weaving and the women hunt bears," [New York: Pocket Books, 1983] 59–60) suggests that these attempts are not always persuasive.
3. For example, see David O. McKay, "The realm of women," *Improvement Era*, Aug. 1965, 676–677; F. S. Jacobsen, "Women, this is our time," *Ensign*, Mar. 1972, 36–39; Boyd K. Packer "The Equal Rights Amendment," *Ensign*, Mar. 1977, 6–9; Barbara B. Smith, "The Lord as a role model for men and women," *Ensign*, Aug. 1980, 66–68. See also reference in note 12.
4. Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).
5. This kind of explanation also has difficulty, in that both sexes have all the same hormones, although in varying amounts. Thus the gene could not just "turn on" in the presence of testosterone. It would have to be sensitive only to levels of testosterone that crossed a certain level threshold.
6. Ruth A. Bleier, *Science and Gender: A Critique of Biology and Its Theories on Women* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1984).
7. San Jose Mercury News, 2 Nov. 1995.
8. David M. Buss, *The Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).
9. Bleier, *Science and Gender*, 118; and Susan Brownmiller, *Men, women, and rape* (Fawcett, 1993). Boyd K. Packer has said that a man cannot fulfill his masculine role unless he feels dominant ("The Equal Rights Amendment," *Ensign*, Mar. 1977, 6–9).
10. Timothy Perper, *Sex Signals: The Biology of Love* (Philadelphia: ISI Press, 1985).
11. Brownmiller, *Men, women and rape*.
12. Marilyn French, *The War against Women* (New York: Summit, 1992); emphasis in original.
13. Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5 (summer 1980): 631–60.
14. Carrie A. Miles, "Saints and Society: The Effect of Social Change on the Mormon Church," unpublished doctoral dissertation, the University of Chicago, 1982. Laurence R. Iannaccone and Carrie A. Miles, "Dealing with Social Change: The Mormon Church's Response to Change in Women's Roles," *Social Forces* 64 (1990): 1231–50.
15. Joy Elasky Flemings, *Man and Woman in Biblical Unity*, (St. Paul: Christians for Biblical Equity, 1993).
16. Gary Stanley Becker, *A Treatise on the Family* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).
17. Note that value is not necessarily the same as honor. A cow may be valuable without being honored.
18. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds., *The Women's Bible Commentary* (London: SPCK; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).
19. Bleier, *Science and Gender*.
20. Why, then, are men, on average, larger and stronger than women? The answer may lie, once again, in woman's role as childbearer amid conditions of deprivation. If calories are scarce, it is not biologically advantageous to have large or heavily muscled childbearers. The caloric demands to sustain the mother's body weight would divert calories away from the fetus, or, conversely, the demands of the growing fetus would weaken the mother.
- Thus the smaller mother (up to a point) has a better chance of having a healthy baby while being adequately nourished herself. Interestingly enough, the genetic determinants of physical size are not sex-linked. Rather, bone growth is shut off by hormones released at puberty. Boys, who go through puberty later than girls, have more time to grow and so end up larger.
21. Again, don't confuse economic value with social honor.
22. From the questions I am asked when I speak on this topic, I suspect that some people worry that eliminating gender roles will result in sexual confusion and androgyny. "This confusion, traditionalists claim, can only result in church, home, and sexual disaster" (Jim Banks, "Einstein, Androgyny, Michael Jackson, and One Big Buffalo," *Mutuality*, Aug. 1996, 1). This is not a new concern, as a 1967 medical text reveals:

An important feature of sex desire in the man is the urge to dominate the woman and subjugate her to his will; in the woman acquiescence to the masterful takes a high place (Sir Norman Jeffcoate, *Principles of Gynaecology*, 3rd edition [London: Butterworth, 1967], 726).

- To which I can only say: Yuck. I believe that the basic mechanism that tells us who to find sexually attractive is built into the organism. An analogy is the linguistic concept of "deep structure": Since human beings are born with the potential for language, all human language follows certain common rules. But the actual tongue that a child learns—French, or English, for example—depends on his/her environment. Applying this idea to sexuality, the capacity to recognize and desire a particular sex may be inborn, but the details of what we find attractive, and what to do about it, we learn from our environment. Thus heterosexual men will recognize and be attracted to human females regardless of the current fashions for "feminine," and vice versa. The desire for dominance or submission is such a fashion.
23. If you are interested in working through this, I suggest beginning by listening to a talk given by Scott Bartsch at the 1994 Sunstone Symposium, "Jesus, Power, and Gender Roles," tape #SL94-190.
24. See Lynn Matthews Anderson, "Issues in Contemporary Mormon Feminism," *Mormon Women's Forum* 6:2, (summer 1995); Margaret Merrill Toscano, "If I Hate My Mother, Can I Love the Heavenly Mother?" Paper presented at the 1996 Sunstone Symposium, tape #SL96-135.
25. Eric Fuchs, *Sexual Desire and Love: Origins and History of the Christian Ethic of Sexuality and Marriage* (Cambridge, Mass.: James Clark and Co., 1983).
26. Modern readers should be careful not to project Judeo/Christian notions about God into their understandings of pagan worship practices. The Greco-Roman gods, for instance, were not concerned about human welfare, and humans generally did not want to attract the gods' attention—they might end up raped by Zeus or turned into a spider by a jealous Athena. At best, the gods could be bribed into helping their devotees. The Judeo-Christian notion of a god who loved humanity was novel (see Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*. [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996]).
27. See Lynn Matthews Anderson and Margaret Merrill Toscano.
28. Cited in Linda P. Wilcox, "The Mormon Concept of a Mother in Heaven, SUNSTONE, 5:5 (Sept.–Oct. 1980): 9–15; also in Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson, ed., *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987); also in Maxine Hanks, ed., *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992).
29. Carol Lynn Pearson, *Mother Wove the Morning: A One-Woman Play* by Carol Lynn Pearson (Walnut Creek, Cal.: Pearson Publishing, 1992), 20.
30. The need to escape from gender obligations applies to men as well as to women. The demands of worldly masculinity are a terrible burden, perhaps worse than the restraints placed on women. Certainly some of the most unhappy people I know are men driven by pressure to be the best, by the demand on them to master and control every situation. People under such pressure produce unhappy families, unhappy businesses, and even unhappy congregations. In noting that this is primarily a masculine problem, however, I do not mean to say that women are immune from it. Perhaps one of the effects of changes in gender roles in the twentieth century is that our anxieties are more equally distributed. Women are now worried about business success, while men increasingly worry about being attractive.
31. Arthur C. Clarke, "The Nine Billion Names of God," in *The Best Short Stories of Arthur C. Clarke* (New York: New American Library, 1987).
32. Andrew Jukes, *The Names of God in Holy Scriptures*, American ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1967; originally published in 1888). See also the appendix of the Companion Bible.
33. Paul R. Smith, *Is It Okay to Call God "Mother": Considering the Feminine Face of God* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publication, 1993).
34. Mormon scripture doesn't say much about women at all, and so doesn't provide much variation in images of the divine. If the Book of Mormon's naming of God as father is to be used as evidence against the appropriateness of feminine imagery, however, consider that Mormons have no problem ignoring the Book of Mormon's pervasive trinitarianism.
35. Smith, *Is It Okay to Call God "Mother"*; Jukes, *The Names of God*; Parkhurst, Hebrew Lexicon, date unknown, cited in Jukes; Scofield Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 1917).
36. Joachim Jeremias, *Prayers of Jesus* (New York: Scribner, 1963), 11.