

## The Incoherence of Gender Ideology

[Michael Robillard](#) 4 Aug 2021 · 20 min read

*Diamonds still cut glass regardless of your word for “diamond,” and “cut,” and “glass.”*

~Ken Wilber

Truth matters. Words matter. What *is objectively the case* matters. And insofar as our words and concepts can be about the objective world at all, then the shared set of words and meanings that we collectively use and are permitted to use to describe, navigate, and refer to that objective world matters. Such is the case for any society worth defending. The growing rash of instances of threats, intimidation, social cancelling, and violence in the name of creeping gender ideology within academia and beyond drastically threatens this shared set of goods and values and marks the beginning of what will be a steep and rapid descent into institutionalized tyranny if left unopposed.

At first glance, this appears to be quite a hyperbolic and even alarmist claim. After all, what is wrong with referring to “Stephen” as “Stephanie” if that is his prerogative? On the surface, such linguistic accommodations appear to be perfectly reasonable and minimally costly to most language users. This surface question of proper names, however, dramatically obscures the underlying conceptual tensions, moral values, and metaphysical commitments fundamentally at stake. Indeed, as claims of “misgendering” have swelled from being regarded as instances of impoliteness, to disrespect, to phobia, to hate, to intentional harassment, to threats, to actual violence, to warranting official legal penalty, to “human rights” violations (language previously reserved for exclusive use in reference to torture, genocide, atrocity, and crimes against humanity), the moral and metaphysical landscape and the linguistic and social institutions presumably about that landscape have been run over roughshod in public discourse with alarming speed and scarce pause for serious philosophical reflection.

This article therefore sets out to make better philosophical sense of the concepts of “gender,” “transgender,” and “transgender rights.” Contra arguments espoused by gender ideology advocates, I argue that, by the starting premises of their own argumentation, the notions of both “gender” and “transgender” are

either incoherent or vacuous and therefore cannot be the conceptual grounds by which persons derive actual positive or negative rights claims. On the contrary, such false “rights” claims actually amount to severe rights violations of the vast majority of everyday language-users and citizens and cause irreparable damage to the set of shared social and linguistic practices necessary for coordinating the basic public goods of a free, flourishing, and truth-preserving society.

The social and political consequence of allowing such false rights claims to swell unopposed to the level of *positive* rights claims, eventually codifying into actual state-compelled law (as is already the case with Canada’s Bill C-16 and soon to be with America’s Equality Act) will be nothing less than the legal sanctioning of a new priest class of magical people who speak all of reality into existence, and then the rest of society who must simply obey. Consequently, I argue that such passive-aggressive tyranny warrants strong and vocal public rejection and opposition by American lawmakers, politicians, academics, and citizens alike with the greatest of urgency.

## **Truth**

For at least 3,000 years now, philosophers, theologians, and scholars alike have debated the nature of truth. Bracketing contemporary theories of truth such as Paul Horwich’s *deflationary* theory of truth and Michael Lynch’s *plural* theory of truth, and bracketing *pragmatist* theories of truth espoused by folks like James, Dewey, and Pierce, theories of truth largely fall into two main camps; the *correspondence* theory of truth and the *coherence* theory of truth.

The correspondence theory of truth posits that a sentence or proposition is true if and only if it shares some sort of correspondence relationship with the mind-independent, objective world. Hence, the proposition that “the cat is on the mat” is true if and only if the cat is indeed on the mat. If the cat is not on the mat, then the proposition “the cat is on the mat” is *false*. Put another way, the proposition “the cat is on the mat” is made true by the truth-maker and state of affairs of the cat actually being on the mat. All true propositions we refer to as *facts*.

Alternatively, the *coherence* theory of truth posits that truth is fundamentally a relationship of maximal coherence and internal consistency between and among a web of other propositions (i.e., truth-bearers) and not a relationship between

truth-bearers reaching out to make contact with mind-independent, objective truth-makers (i.e., the contours of the objective world).

Another important distinction within discourse on truth is Kant's famous analytic/synthetic distinction. An *analytic* proposition, such as "a bachelor is an unmarried man" or "a male is a creature with an XY chromosome pair," is one whose truth depends wholly upon the meanings of its constituent terms. Conversely, a *synthetic* proposition, such as "John is a bachelor" or "John is a man" is true in virtue of some feature of the observable objective world. Put another way, we can know the truth of analytic propositions merely by knowing the meanings of their constituent terms, whereas for synthetic propositions we have to look out into the objective world in order to determine whether or not they are true.

## Meaning

Another indispensable contribution to discourse on truth is that made by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*. In his now famous "private language argument," Wittgenstein entertained the conceptual possibility of a completely private language. Since definitions within any language, like rules within a game, require fixity in order for the game to hang together at all, and since a wholly private language would have no such checks and balances to keep definitions fixed and stable (the private language user could just amend definitions in perpetuity with no restrictions), Wittgenstein concluded that a wholly private language was conceptually impossible and that for terms and definitions to have any fixed meaning at all required checks and balances provided by *other language users*. Later expanding on this insight, Hilary Putnam, in his essay "The Meaning of Meaning," advanced his theory of meaning known as *semantic externalism*, famously concluding that "meaning ain't in the head."

To this day, the vast majority of contemporary philosophers accept this account of how meaning and language fundamentally operates. Put another way, meaning and language is fundamentally *public*. What's more, language and meaning (and indeed the collective knowledge passed between generations via language) is not merely public with respect to just present persons but is also constituted by the deep, rich, and networked storehouse of meanings passed on from one generation of language-users to the next. As Gottlob Frege noted in his essay

“Sense and Reference,” “For it cannot well be denied that mankind possesses a common treasure of thoughts which is transmitted from generation to generation.”

And while proper names such as “Bruce” or “Caitlyn” *do* technically fall within the purview of private determination and personal prerogative, *indexicals* within a language, such as “he” or “she” indirectly connote and refer to fixed meanings deep within our overall shared network of public meanings and are not similarly revisable according to individual personal preference. Insofar as our collective meanings are about our shared storehouse of collective human knowledge and/or about the objective world in some sense, such indexical terms are effectively “load-bearing” terms that do not or simply cannot be moved or amended so easily without logically entailing a complete and total overhaul of the entire network of meaning, every proposition within that network, and every referent in the objective world that each term ostensibly refers to.

Accordingly, indexical terms like “he” and “she,” or generic terms like “male” and “female” for that matter, are held relatively fixed within our shared network of nested meanings either in virtue of the restraints of logic, conceptual consistency, and interrelatedness (on a coherence theory of truth), the contours and joints of objective reality (on a correspondence theory of truth), or some combination of the two. Hence, when it comes to truth claims about nearly anything and everything under the sun, big and small, like it or not, logic has a say in the matter, other language users have a say in the matter, language itself has a say in the matter, and the objective world itself has a say in the matter.

### **Rights and duties**

Another important set of concepts within the present gender debate is the notion of *rights and duties*. Scholars often cash out the notion of rights and duties as two sides of the same conceptual coin. To say that I have a “right to X” is conceptually equivalent to saying that someone else has a corresponding duty to me as it pertains to X. Scholars make the further distinction between *negative* rights and duties and *positive* rights and duties. Negative rights, sometimes referred to as *liberties*, are freedoms *from* something. Freedom from slavery, freedom from censorship, and freedom from religious persecution are all canonical examples of

negative rights. They engender for others corresponding negative duties of inaction and non-interference.

Positive rights, on the other hand, sometimes referred to as *entitlements*, are *freedoms to* something. Freedom to healthcare, freedom to easy rescue, and freedom to education are all examples of positive rights claims. These positive rights claims engender corresponding positive duties of *action* upon others. Since many positive duties arguably cannot be discharged individually but only collectively, so the argument goes, the state is therefore required as the institutional proxy to ensure, through law and threat of coercion, that citizens discharge their many individual positive duties to one another (most often in the form of taxes). While liberals and conservatives generally agree over negative rights and duties, there has been long and heated debate between both sides as to the scope and content of persons' actual positive rights and duties and how those duties ought to be best discharged.

Another near universal notion within ethics, philosophy, and law is the claim that "ought implies can." In other words, if one tells me that I have a duty or an obligation to do X, then the implication is that it is physically or at the very least logically possible for me to do X. Put another way, it makes no logical or conceptual sense to say that I have *impossible duties*. I do not have a duty to walk to the moon, because I physically cannot. I do not have a duty to conceive of a three-sided square, because I logically cannot. *Conceptual conceivability* is therefore a prerequisite for any legitimate rights claim or corresponding duty claim.

### **The incoherence of special transgender "rights" claims**

Given this basic understanding of positive and negative rights and duties as well as the assumption that "ought implies can," and given our understanding about theories of truth as well as the fundamentally *public* nature of terms like "male" and "female" and "he" and "she" within our shared network of public meanings, let us now investigate the coherence, intelligibility, and content of so-called "transgender rights" claims.

To understand the coherence and moral import of transgender rights claims, we must first define what it is that we mean by "transgender." To understand its meaning, however, we must first discern what exactly we mean by "gender"

proper. The *Stanford Encyclopedia for Philosophy* entry on "[Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender](#)," for instance, captures the conceptual distinction between "sex" and "gender" as follows:

Many feminists have historically disagreed and have endorsed the sex/gender distinction. Provisionally: 'sex' denotes human females and males depending on biological features (chromosomes, sex organs, hormones and other physical features); 'gender' denotes women and men depending on social factors (social role, position, behaviour or identity). The main feminist motivation for making this distinction was to counter biological determinism or the view that biology is destiny.

Judith Butler, in her famous *Gender Trouble* echoes this distinction writing that, "Gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as 'prediscursive,' prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts."

And lastly, the World Health Organization re-articulates this conceptual distinction between "sex" and "gender" making the further distinction between "gender" and "gender identity." [They write](#):

Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time ... Gender interacts with but is different from sex, which refers to the different biological and physiological characteristics of females, males and intersex persons, such as chromosomes, hormones and reproductive organs. Gender and sex are related to but different from gender identity. Gender identity refers to a person's deeply felt, internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond to the person's physiology or designated sex at birth.

Given these definitions, the first source of confusion within the present transgender debate comes from scholars frequently conflating (biologically-determined) "sex," (socially-determined) "gender," (privately-determined) "gender identity," sexual preference, and biological instances of intersex (such as Klinefelter's and Turner syndrome) all under the same canopy term "gender."

The second source and primary culprit of confusion within the present transgender debate, however, is the notion of “gender identity.” This is so since “gender identity,” on the gender theorist’s own account, is defined entirely by one’s own wholly subjective determination. Much like Wittgenstein’s hypothetical private language, this wholly subjective and internal pointing to some referent accessible only to the speaker, fundamentally severs the connection of the linguistic term (i.e., “he”) from both its publicly agreed upon analytic meaning (i.e., “a male” is, by definition, “a living organism with an XY chromosome pair”) as well as its publicly agreed upon synthetic definition out there in the world (i.e., “that particular guy over there is a man,” “that particular cluster of things under the microscope is an XY chromosome pair”). In so doing, this wholly subjective turn renders the meaning of the speaker’s utterance (i.e., “he”) completely meaningless, in terms of its analytic and synthetic definition, or, alternatively, completely vacuous.

Catholic political commentator, Matt Walsh, captures the confusion well [stating the following](#):

The Left tells us that “gender” is a social construct. They reject the idea that women must necessarily have any particular feeling, or thought, or taste, or preference. If “gender” is an artificial construct and our physical features have no bearing on our identity as man or woman, then what the hell is a “woman” anyway? A “woman,” in that case, would not be defined by her feelings, her thoughts, her ideas, her preferences, her body, her reproductive organs, her DNA, her chromosomes. Well what is she defined by? What is she? When a man says that he is a woman, he now makes it that that phrase means nothing, and it doesn’t mean anything to be a woman. He might as well say that he is a whos-a-whats-it or a thing-a-ma-doodle.”

This re-defining of publicly shared meanings like “male” and “female” solely in terms of a speaker’s own subjective feelings generates a host of internal contradictions, intractable questions, and system-wide confusion.

- *It is a grave wrong to not first ask for a person’s personal pronouns. It also is a grave wrong to ask for a person’s personal pronouns because it is too personal and invasive.*
- *What do the indexicals “Ze” and “Zir” even connote or refer to?*

- *If one can be trans-gender then why can't one be trans-racial, trans-age, trans-height, trans-species, or trans-Napoleon?*
- *If gender identity has nothing to do with biological sex whatsoever, then, similarly, why can't one's gender identity simply be Latino, 6'3", a giraffe, or 87 years old?*
- *What does it mean for a speaker to report subjectively feeling "like a man" when the stipulated definition of the term "man" is determined wholly by the speaker?*
- *If gender identity is wholly determined by the speaker's subjective determination, then why would cosmetic surgery or arbitrary levels of hormone treatment have any bearing whatsoever on affecting or changing that person's gender identity?*
- *If gender identity is wholly determined by each person's subjective state, then how can parents get to decide that their child is "non-binary" or "gender-fluid"?*
- *If gender identity is wholly subjective and inaccessible to others' knowledge, then how can so-called "trans" people know that they are actually standing in solidarity with real trans persons versus fake trans persons?*
- *If a woman stipulates that she has transitioned from a woman to a man, and we are therefore obligated to retroactively change all records of the past to report that she was always a man, then if she was always a man, what did she transition from?*
- *Furthermore, if this very same woman who claims to be a man was therefore always a man, and this person is a US citizen, does that mean she/he has failed to sign up for selective service all these years and can be retroactively charged as a felon?*
- *If gender identity is wholly subjectively determined, then how can an individual ever be said to be mistaken about his or her own wholly privately and internally stipulated definitions as in reports of persons being so-called "ex trans" or "former trans"?*

- *And if such persons themselves can be so fundamentally mistaken about their own internally-stipulated gender identity, then how on Earth can we possibly have laws and legal penalties that require everyone else to know such a thing and to adjust their behavior accordingly, moment by moment by moment?*

This confusion culminates in the simple question that each and every one of us can pose to the gender theorist: “what do you mean by *male*?” And it is here where they will not be able to give either a substantive analytic or synthetic definition of the term without risking their claim’s truth conditions being evaluable under some set of public criteria. All they will ever be able to say is that “it is the thing that I feel that I am.” Which is to say *nothing at all*.

For claims or propositions to be true or false at all, they must first be “truth-apt” and therefore must rise to a level of basic intelligibility in order for us to be capable of evaluating them as true or false. Accordingly, claims about special transgender rights do not get off the ground to begin with, because claims about “gender identity” don’t get off the ground to begin with, since such claims fail to rise to the level of being truth-apt or minimally coherent. Claims about transgender rights are therefore as intelligible and truth-apt as claims about “flip-flop” rights, or “Jabberwocky” rights, or “schmerkle” rights. And just because someone happens to utter the noise “rights” after a particular word or set of words, doesn’t mean that such claims actually grip the moral or metaphysical joints of the world. Consequently, if ought implies can, and we cannot conceptually make basic sense of the concept of “gender identity,” then such blatant conceptual incoherence cannot be the proper grounding of our actual rights or duties.

To be clear, this isn’t to make light of or to suggest that persons suffering from actual mental disorders in this arena are lying, pretending, or acting in bad faith. Indeed, there are many medical reports of persons suffering from gender dysphoria who report the sense of “being in the wrong body” or not feeling like their internal sense of self was in alignment with the social behavioral norms of their biological sex. This felt sense of something being perpetually “off” has, according to the [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#), led to over 40 percent of gender dysphoric men and women in the US having attempted to take

their own life, nearly 10 times the national average. What's more, according to the most thorough [follow-up study](#) of post sex-reassignment surgeries to date, extending over 30 years in Sweden, the suicide rate of persons who had undergone such surgery rose to 20 times that of comparable peers. I do not therefore deny or question the internal mental anguish such persons suffering from these very real mental disorders are facing. Rather, the point that I am driving at here is not one concerning persons with actual, diagnosable gender dysphoria, but instead a critique of the necessary and possible metaphysical commitments and moral demandingness present-day gender ideology seems to entail. And as we have seen here, nothing less than system-wide incoherence and a radical breakdown in public meaning seems to result from persons indexing the definition of "gender identity" to their own moment by moment, wholly private subjectivity.

### **Political, social, and legal implications**

As we have noted, language and meaning are deeply networked, deeply public, and held in place by things like history, collective knowledge, linguistic precedent, logical consistency, and the contours of the objective world (i.e., truth). To claim total control over one proposition within such a network is therefore to control them all. For the state to attempt to grant monopolistic control over both the analytic and synthetic definitions of terms like "he" and "she," to a privileged and exclusive class of language-users, terms perhaps no more fundamental to the human condition, would be, in essence, to attempt to grant control over truth itself.

The logical implications of the passing of the US Equality Act would therefore constitute nothing less than the legal canonization of a new priest class of magical persons who speak all of reality into existence and a subordinate class of everyday citizens held hostage by state compulsion to be unwilling stage-actors in their never-ending, incoherent game of pretend. What is at stake here is therefore not simply one of politeness and etiquette having to do with proper names. Rather, what is fundamentally at stake are the very *reasons* we ought to regard claims about reality as being true or false at all.

There is perhaps no greater evidence of this newly emerging priest class than in the recent case of actress, Elliot Page. For Elliot, she merely stipulates that she is a

biological male and we must regard her as a biological male in all respects. Record of the past must be amended to reflect that she was always a biological male. All historical records, biomedical records, biomedical theory, all notions of health, social institutions, etiquette, law, public meanings, and objective reality itself must be gerrymandered around the fixed pivot point of her moment-by-moment subjective prerogative. That is, until she changes her mind. Then, at such a point, the frantic process of revising each and every proposition under the sun, past and present, must begin anew for us proles lest we offend. But for that young man in Georgia who must sign up for selective service the moment he turns 18, biological essentialism suddenly and strictly applies to him. Such are the metaphysics of this brave new world.

Such a legal canonization of a protected class of magical “trans” people would actually constitute a severe violation of the actual rights of everyone else not fortunate enough to be let into this new exclusive club. Indeed, the logical implications of such wrong-headed legislation would be totalizing in scope, affecting nearly every law, institution, social practice, linguistic practice, area of knowledge, custom, record, word, concept, and thought that directly or indirectly related to the concepts of “he” and “she,” “male” and “female.” In other words, it would affect nearly all of our shared propositions about reality.

In biology, we would have to change the definition of “human,” “male,” and “female,” as well as amend our taxonomy for all sexed organisms. In medicine, we would have to overhaul all theories and practices of what constituted “health” and “function” for human males and females, boys and girls. In law we would have to adjust all legislation that specifically referenced men and women. In language, we would have to overhaul or abolish all languages, to include all romance languages, that had gendered conjugations. With respect to freedom of religion, all religions, especially Abrahamic religions, would have to subordinate or abandon their theological commitments concerning man and woman’s special and divinely created nature. With respect to freedom of association, all previously-exclusive men and women’s groups would have to open their membership to such new magic persons. With respect to women’s sports, biological males would now have to be allowed to compete if they simply believed themselves to be female, effectively ending all women’s sports.

With respect to feminism, all legal and social progress ostensibly made by and exclusively for women (i.e., protective laws, exclusive spaces, business loans, scholarships, educational opportunities, etc.) would all effectively have to be undone. With respect to penitentiary assignments, men could simply declare themselves to be women and would have to be moved to female jails or, alternatively, have their own personal jails built for them on account of the unique gender. With respect to the military draft, all men of fighting age could opt out of selective service simply by deciding that they are a woman on their 18th birthday. With respect to the nuclear family, the language of “father,” “mother,” “daughter,” “son,” “sister,” “brother,” “uncle,” “aunt,” “grandfather,” “grandmother,” would have to be phased out since they connote offensive biological essentialist categories. And with respect to all recorded history and all social knowledge, any and all truth claims that directly or indirectly reference males or females would have to be placed in a perpetual state of indetermination, contingent exclusively upon the final say the special “trans” speakers.

The *coup de grace* of such madness of course, of legally sanctioning this special caste of persons who can enter and exit all social and legal groups at will, is when they themselves slam shut the door of entry in the faces of the uninitiated, announcing stridently, “we can tell, you aren’t *really* trans!” It is here where the loop of the metaphysical encirclement fully closes and The Party now gets to tell us commoners both the contents of our outer world in its entirety and the contents of the private inner world of our own heads as well.

The above claims are neither hyperbole nor slippery slope alarmism, nor hypothetical conjecture. Indeed, in just the past few years we have already begun to see the tragic and unjust fallout of such conceptual incoherence playing out under the illogic baked into Canada’s Bill C-16. From a BC man being held in jail for objecting to his teenage daughter’s gender transition, to a “transgender” female inmate sexually assaulting other inmates at an all-female penitentiary, to “trans” female, Jessica Yaniv, taking more than a dozen esthetician businesses to a Human Rights Tribunal for refusing to Brazilian wax his scrotum, the madness of this incoherent ideology is only just beginning.

Rest assured, under the logical implications of Bill C-16, the cinching of the rainbow police state will only tighten and the situation in Canada for the average

citizens will only worsen in the coming years. And so will be the case in the United States if the Equality Act passes. In essence, the legal implications of such a bill will be nothing less than making it illegal for one to say true things, consistent things, logical things, or even to attempt. Conversely it will make use of hard state power to compel persons to say or believe things that are patently false, incoherent, or conceptually impossible. It will be political correctness on steroids, on a fast road to communist dystopia. To quote [Theodore Dalrymple](#):

Political correctness is communist propaganda writ small. In my study of communist societies, I came to the conclusion that the purpose of communist propaganda was not to persuade or convince, not to inform, but to humiliate; and therefore, the less it corresponded to reality the better. When people are forced to remain silent when they are being told the most obvious lies, or even worse when they are forced to repeat the lies themselves, they lose once and for all their sense of probity. To assent to obvious lies is in some small way to become evil oneself. One's standing to resist anything is thus eroded, and even destroyed. A society of emasculated liars is easy to control. I think if you examine political correctness, it has the same effect and is intended to.

This is how you subvert a nation and a people.

## **Conclusion**

A single line of code, buried within millions or even billions of lines of code, can turn any computer program, no matter how sophisticated, completely inoperable or completely upside down. Such is the case with the present discussion and legislation surrounding so-called "transgender rights." As we have noted here, despite the utterance of the sound "rights," it turns out that no matter how much one subjectively feels that he or she is being disrespected, attacked, or oppressed, one simply does not have a legitimate rights claim that the objective world is what he or she says it is. Rather, it turns out that *the objective world just pushes back*.

If we are to understand transgender rights claims to be meaningful utterances at all, capable of being true or false, then on the most charitable of interpretations we should regard such claims to be at most nothing more than linguistic shorthand for the negative right of freedom of expression and freedom of religion

already protected under the First Amendment of the US Constitution. Accordingly, we should regard such ideological expressions as a kind of secular religion reserved exclusively to the *private* sphere; not something publicly imposed, in all domains of human activity, by state compulsion and threat of force. Otherwise, we should treat such claims as evidence of conceptual confusion, dishonesty, pretending, or a genuine case of gender dysphoria warranting proper medical treatment and counseling.

Or, perhaps I am totally wrong here and there is a huge error and blind spot in my argumentation that I have completely overlooked. I challenge and encourage any advocate of gender ideology to explain to me where exactly I've made an error in my argumentation and I look forward to future debate and discourse on the matter. If I'm wrong, then show me where I'm wrong. Regardless, even if I am wrong and mistaken in my reasoning, I and every other citizen in this country should be allowed the freedom to make such mistakes openly; to strive to know truth, to seek truth, and to speak truth, in earnest, however clumsily and however imperfectly.

That being said, this pernicious and deeply wrong-headed ideology will not suddenly stop on its own if people remain silent and complicit. This can only be achieved if people find the courage to speak out publicly, to keep speaking, and to remember, above all, that they are not alone. For there has never been a time in human history when Traditional Catholics, to Protestants, to Muslims, to Jews, to Black Panthers, to Libertarians, to 3rd Wave Feminists have found such common agreement over something so obvious, and when stating the obvious was so very simple. For if freedom is to mean anything at all, it is the ability to worship freely, to live freely, and to speak freely. It is the ability to openly say, without fear, that  $2+2=4$ , that there are only two sexes, that "gender" is a nonsensical concept, that The Party is mistaken, and that the Emperor indeed has no clothes.

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