

The Third Sex

On Violence, Materialism, and the Knowledge of Angels

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“The Authorities came to their Adam. And, when they saw his female counterpart speaking with him they became agitated and they became enamored with her. They said, ‘Come, let us sow our seed in her.’

“And, she laughed at them for their witlessness and their blindness; and in their clutches she became a tree, and left them her shadowy form, resembling herself, and they defiled it foully, and they defiled the stamp of her voice, so that by the form they had modeled with their own image, they had made themselves liable to condemnation.”

– *An Account of the Reality of Authorities*, Nag Hammadi Bible, 4th Century C.E.

This fragment of the Gnostic text that came to be known as the Nag Hammadi Bible, reveals a vastly different story about Adam and Eve beginning with the couple existing as one hermaphroditic entity resembling an angel.

Adam/Eve, according to the text, “walked in the glory of knowledge,” while “God” was an evil illusion, possessing male gender, worshiped by the dead and the ignorant. This God, divided Adam/Eve, and they lost the glory of “first knowledge” or “original knowledge.” This loss is described in the text as “darkness falling over their eyes.” And it is through this loss of knowledge, they lost their immortality.

The Nag Hammadi text is important because it directly contradicts the idea that the original sin was caused by a woman betraying God’s orders. What cast humans out of paradise is instead the split between the genders (which, as one entity, already possessed knowledge, including awareness of God’s authority as a scam).

The above quote is particularly significant because it shows very clearly the intrusion of the “authorities” in the relationship between men and women following their split. It is a remarkable passage, this gang-rape of Eve, while Adam stands, or is forced to stand aside. Eve’s response is to change herself so that the “authorities” have not touched a woman, but an illusion the woman has “stamped with her voice,” a false image of femininity.

In defiling even this image, the authorities model a despicable form, an offspring created through domination, violence, and duplicitous illusion; this progeny of rape and ignorance, becomes the race of men. And, it is here the story of “original sin” begins to make a little more sense as an original loss of autonomy.

Paradise is betrayed by ignorance, rape, and duplicity in the face of domination. It is this, coupled with observing the defilement of a counterpart’s image, which causes the fall of man; not a woman disobeying God to gain “forbidden knowledge.”

These Gnostic philosophical metaphors ring true to the history of domination. It is through deconstructing these stories, and the stories that exist today in our own lives and cultures, that we can try to develop an anti-authoritarian approach to everyday life.

Understanding “the reality of the authorities,” may constitute less of a revolution, than a simple acknowledgment of our social and physical surroundings, an acknowledgment of the original lies that are maintained in order to keep men and women materially, socially, and intellectually dependent on authority.

The Gnostic story of Adam and Eve illustrates this by revealing a primary function of authority throughout civilized history: the control of women’s bodies to achieve domination over the actions of both sexes, subverting their ability to connect as equals capable of challenging authoritarian rule.

A Fun House Mirror

This control, which can take on various permutations, has culminated in the infantilizing of an entire culture through gross materialism and binary, imitative sexual personas, which exist not just between straight men and women but in gay, lesbian and trans relationships as well. (The idea of equality is not simply to expand the idea of “gender” by creating a greater variety of accepted roles, all enjoying “rights” of confinement in the dominant paradigm.) Paying for a spouse’s health insurance, throwing a bouquet, inheriting things, having babies with technological help, on many levels becomes simply a dynamic imitation of material, and misogynistic culture.

It is this culture that has created a third sex—a fun house mirror of the Gnostic Adam/Eve which can possess any type of genitalia, so long as it adheres to the paradigm of authoritarian power relations, and remains in constant consumer dependency, looking to the state for everything from regulating food and information, to legitimating marriage.

This third gender remains mentally and socially an infant, a cherub of techno-materialism that must be constantly fed on some reconstituted form of the original lies about men’s minds and women’s bodies.

The Fall of Man

In guaranteeing the future of the dominant culture, 12- to 18 year old males are very valuable. They will become the mass consumers, and will provide essential services. They represent the means by which state power will continue to both consume and exploit. The mythologies they adopt about themselves in relation to power, freedom and autonomy must be carefully guided for a variety of economic reasons.

There is no mystery about the targeting of this demographic by everyone from advertisers to military recruiters (which have stepped up their efforts through the new policies of the “No Child Left Behind Act” requiring schools to provide detailed information about boy’s grades, interests, health, and administrative records).

Boys’ tastes must be primed today so that they will spend, serve, and become subjects of the commodity/service culture tomorrow. Men comprise the majority of consumer, corporate, military, and prison populations.

Men and boys are the greatest buyers of technology, electronics, real estate, cars, games, equipment, gadgets, sex toys, boats, planes, medical care, alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, pornography, art, media, and yes—food, clothes and shoes. They spend more on education and travel, and they have the largest debts. This is not simply because men make more money than women. There is evidence that working class men have shopping habits that rival upper middle class women and are more financially irresponsible.

Despite these facts, men are unequivocally represented in nearly all forms of media as being simpler and less materialistic than women, less concerned about status and appearance, and better with money. Male consumption is represented as the result of necessity or reward—a thing deserved.

As a means of social exploitation, men are also taught that they get along with one another better than women do, and that they are less complex emotionally, despite overwhelming contradictory historical evidence (rates of murder, litigation, male-on-male violence, corporate exploitation, the murder and torture of male “enemies” during war). Competition and violence are represented as the results of protecting others, preserving honor, or in comic fashion, succumbing to reasonable frustrations. Again—disaccord is represented as necessity or reward.

The myth of male camaraderie is extremely important in setting the stage for the myth at the heart of authoritarian control, the myth of freedom, and that men are “free” until they are attached to women. Again the statistical and historical evidence is similar to what is seen in the myth of female materialism.

The evidence on female loss of autonomy through intimate attachment to men is overwhelming and violent. Socially, intellectually and materially the history of “relationship” for women has meant an engulfment in masculine neurosis.

Control and violence in domestic relations for women is not an anomaly but a well established historical fact. Throughout time, Adams stood passively by, not just while Eves were raped, but also while Eves were prevented from every form of expression, education, economic and employment opportunity, and physical or sexual freedom.

Threats Work as a Means of Control

Within domestic relations men have been responsible for micro versions of these very repressions, maintained through the same psychological and emotional manipulation and implicit threats of violence used by the state.

Threats work as a means of control, because actual violence is often committed by men against intimates and strangers alike, for everything from repressing undesired speech to maintaining physical subjugation. Six out of ten women who are murdered, are murdered by partners, or former partners, and 68 percent of rapes are carried out by men who had relationships with their victims.

The old bachelor’s tale of “losing freedom” would simply be laughable in the face of statistical evidence if it were not for the fact that men continue to infringe on the intimate, intellectual and social rights of women with the same zeal they exhibit for shopping. And just as in the myth of “female materialism,” it is important to depict intimate control, as something men just don’t do. Shopping is taken for granted by the ownership class, just as Domination is for the slave-owner’s son.

Focusing on camaraderie, the acceptability of over-consumption, false sacrifice, the legitimacy of violence, and the loss of freedom through intimacy, are essential for making large groups of people kill or support the exploitation of others.

Maintaining the psychic split between the actual and fictional story of male materialism and autonomy is the product of centuries of social engineering and revisionist history. Development of fictional characters and news stories, that must be generated daily to express the responsibility and prowess of men, is as common as buying a blue rattle for a baby boy. But the hill on which this unquestioning and dedicated hero stands is comprised of female bodies, their faces obscured behind masks.

Concerning “Angels”

We are told constantly from an early age that human life is important, even sacred. We see the vehemence in the anti-choice movement to save “infants” and “babies” from the “abortion holocaust.” It is beating a dead horse to discuss the scientific error or the varied hypocrisies of evangelical Christians in the face of serious human rights abuses affecting living children (such as, the deplorable poverty and hunger rates of children, the rates of rape worldwide for girls and women, and the living conditions of children in Iraq, fully supported by American evangelicals and their president.) The Christian Right is currently trying to prevent girls from being vaccinated to prevent the HPV virus, a sexually transmitted disease which causes cervical cancer, because they believe it will encourage girls to have sex.

Concern for mothers and children is not a part of Christian reality. It was not a concern during the original lie and it is not a concern now. The “reality of authority” is that Christians hold up infants and “innocence” the way governments put daycare centers in federal buildings, or near munitions factories. Women and Children act as human shields meant to obscure technological and military domination while simultaneously representing state intentions as pure. The object of the Anti-abortion movement has always been to control women’s bodies, not to save “babies” lives.

The rhetoric of pure intentions, God's wishes, and women's bodies dominates the news.

Such as in the case of a Seattle couple who elected to have their nine-year-old, brain-damaged daughter surgically altered to remain prepubescent and never grow taller than four feet nine inches.

The little girl, Ashley, was born with a birth defect that has prevented her from developing mental or physical abilities beyond those of a three-month-old. She cannot move or speak and must be fed with a tube. Without the help of medical technical intervention, Ashley would have died very early in life. Her parents write that "The God they know" wanted their daughter to undergo this procedure.

The surgery performed on Ashley removed her breast buds, reproductive organs, and started her on massive doses of estrogen to cause her bones to compress.

Ashley's parents contend she will be easier to move and care for if she does not develop into a woman. Her dignity, they have written, is being preserved by this process, as it would be disturbing to see a fully developed female with the mental age of a three month old, unable to control her bodily functions, and of course "sexualized" and "made uncomfortable" by the presence of breasts and reproductive organs. This "sexualization," they say, would make her a potential victim of abuse.

The parents posted pictures of Ashley on their blog, "The Ashley Treatment," (which is also the name given this new surgical/chemical stunting procedure). The couple wanted to publicize this surgical procedure and give it a name so that other families who are similarly affected, could opt for this procedure for their children.

Hyper-Sexualized Commodity

According to the blog, the couple calls Ashley, their "pillow angel" because she has a "pure, innocent and angelic spirit" and spends most of her time lying on a pillow, and placed in various positions to prevent her from developing bedsores. Her parents also describe their daughter as "a bonding factor" in their relationship.

I write about this not simply to question the ethics of an individual decision, but because the story of The Ashley Treatment parades hatred of life and of women expressed as its polar opposite, love and protection.

The technological intervention that transformed the stunted Ashley, who has essentially no gender, and no complex thoughts, has its corollary in the third sex, a product of material and authoritarian intervention.

A month after Ashley's treatment became public, the death of Anna Nicole Smith became an international media story, with greater coverage than the United Nations most definitive report yet on the reality and dangers of global warming.

Smith, a playboy model who became a millionaire through marriage, was a hyper-sexualized commodity whose image, even after death, has been used for the purposes of masturbation, comparative morphological analysis, and romantic speculation primarily by men. Her personal history has been used by the media as a tale of superficiality, greed, faithlessness, and scandalous tragedy.

Like Ashley, Smith underwent surgical procedures to make it easier for people to care for her. She was altered to reflect the tastes of her audience, to remain always just post-pubescent, to enhance her breasts, lips and hips. She is an icon of hyper-masculine neurosis, another "pillow angel," as photographs of her are moved from bed, couch, pillow, floor, images that also provide a "bonding factor" in male relationships. They are Images produced by men, sold to men, and like the "shadowy form" resembling the Gnostic Eve they are images of a false femininity.

Despite the volume and explicitness of photographs that have been produced and distributed of Smith, she is unknown as a person.

Whether women are being kept tiny so that they can be better cared for and appreciated, or kept sexualized so they can be better cared for and appreciated, they reflect the psychosis of those who claim to "love" them. Both of these processes are seen as acceptable forms of altering gender relationships around possession, ignorance, materialism and convenience. The convenience, for example, of moving around a smaller brain-dead human or one that is more difficult to care for because of size; or the convenience of having a "perfect" image, with no corporeal body, (like the Gnostic Eve) to expedite ejaculation.

Knowing women's bodies, but finding their characters and intellects a mystery, is a part of an ongoing narrative in popular culture as well as news coverage. Unlike the media-socialization process for boys, girls have few if any fictional characters representing the reality of their lives, let alone their fantasies of autonomy.

In this way, mediated socialization for both boys and girls functions to further divide them from one another and from the truth, casting them as polarities whose interest in one another is primarily biological, not intellectually driven.

If girls are not taught to be dependent on boys for various forms of attention, they are taught that they are in competition with boys, and that their personal achievements represent those of the whole gender. This model of thinking is despicable, as its failure to achieve a good outcome for men, in their extreme subjugation to authority, illustrates.

These polarizations prevent women (who possess direct experience and understanding of repression) from helping men recognize and fight their own violent and non-violent exploitation by authority.

Broadcasting Its Subjugated Role

The split between genders and the division of sexual relations into "roles" is as false as the split between body and mind, humanity and environment. The polarization may look as if it has created two extreme representations of beings with different body parts, or two distinct sets of contrived behaviors, but in essence it has created one gender with two forms, a third sex.

Not recognizable as "men" or "women," the third sex is more easily revealed as a kind of commerce, beings who are exchanged, traded, and collected in order to amass a power, things that are counted, regulated, served, sold, protected, taxed, can be killed or defiled.

Oblivious of its impoverished character, its role as a tool of greed, the third sex becomes an echo chamber, constantly broadcasting its subjugated role through imitative behavior. Like the story of the original lie, the third sex becomes a shadowy image, silent and passive or "stamped with the voice" of the autonomous being it once was.

Fully immersed in a "loss of knowledge" that spans centuries, the third sex finds its place today as a hollow vessel through which only "the authorities" speak.

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