

# Statistically Ordered: Gender, Sexual Identity, and the Metaphysics of “Normal”

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## Abstract

The recent call by Pope Francis for the church to develop a “theology of women” raises more fundamental and prior questions about the very nature of gender and sexual identity. Drawing on the metaphysics developed in Lonergan’s *Insight* and his heuristic structure of a scale of values found in *Method in Theology*, this article explores these prior questions in a way that avoids the extremes of either gender essentialism or of complete gender fluidity. It proposes a form of heteronormativity that is statistically structured allowing for a greater flexibility than suggested by gender essentialism, while still constraining the social and cultural construction of gender within certain biological realities. The authors also present Lonergan’s scale of values as a further heuristic for anticipating the force of this constraint in a differentiated way.

## Keywords

gender, gender essentialism, gender theory, Bernard Lonergan, metaphysics, sexual identity

The recent call by Pope Francis for the church to develop a “theology of women” raises a difficulty within the church. In speaking this way about “women,” and also about “men,” we think we have a clear idea of what we are talking about.

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The difficulty is gender itself. The question of a theology of women inevitably raises a prior question on the very meaning and construction of gender. Here we find the debate caught between two extremes—that of gender essentialism, as often illustrated in church documents and some particular theologies, and those for whom gender is purely a social and cultural construct that can be redefined and reconstructed at will. The Vatican has taken a combative stance in relation to the latter, calling it “gender ideology”:

[An] ideology of gender ... “denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without sexual differences, ... [and promotes] a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female.” It needs to be emphasized that “biological sex and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) can be distinguished but not separated.”<sup>1</sup>

While there is here recognition that biological sex and a socially and culturally constructed notion of gender may be distinguished, the implications of their inseparability remain obscure.

In an attempt to dispel this obscurity, this article spells out a metaphysical analysis for understanding the embodiment and enculturation of gender and sexuality. Though the fields of physiology and biology endeavor to understand our embodiment directly, the cultures constituting the primary, predominating, and fully human element of our worlds make for a much more wide-ranging and freewheeling object of inquiry. They call to attention a wide variety disciplines. This is especially true when one takes what Bernard Lonergan called an “empirical view of culture.” Then culture consists in “the set of meanings and values that informs a way of life,” and, indeed, any way of life.<sup>2</sup> We recognize, however, that metaphysics is not often listed among the disciplines that consider culture. This, in our view, is problematic. Cultural objects are no less real, no less “ontological” than the chemicals, cells, organs, and processes that make up the embodiment of gender and sexuality. Accordingly, when inquiry turns to how embodied gender and sexuality are enculturated—that is, taken up and made meaningful and valuable in a community with a shared way of life—some metaphysical frame can

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1. Francis, *Amoris Lætitia* (March 19, 2016), 56, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia\\_en.pdf](https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf). The internal quotes are from the Synod deliberations. See also the comments of Pope Benedict XVI: “According to this philosophy, sex is no longer a given element of nature, that man has to accept and personally make sense of: it is a social role that we choose for ourselves, while in the past it was chosen for us by society. The profound falsehood of this theory and of the anthropological revolution contained within it is obvious. People dispute the idea that they have a nature, given by their bodily identity, that serves as a defining element of the human being.” Benedict XVI, “Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI on the Occasion of Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia, Clementine Hall” (December 21, 2012), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/december/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20121221\\_auguri-curia.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20121221_auguri-curia.html).
  2. Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), xi.

guide both reflection upon the process of cultural making and, down the line, the process of cultural making itself. We have authored this article in service especially of that latter benefit.

The argument will proceed in three main parts. First, we will introduce Lonergan's account of metaphysics as heuristic structure.<sup>3</sup> We will briefly treat of heuristic structures in general and in greater detail the specific heuristic for statistical intelligibility. Second, we will argue that gender and sexuality emerge from biological dynamics regulated by norms of the statistical rather than what Lonergan calls the "classical" kind.<sup>4</sup> We are convinced that the embodied roots of gender and sexuality are not the whole story, but are rather always already caught up in what Lonergan calls a "higher integration." Human beings, to further rely upon Lonergan's basic outlook, live in a world mediated by meaning. The biological dynamics, statistically *constrained* rather than mechanistically determined, open up into a truly human world through the social structures and roles of gender and sexual identities and the cultural constructions that inform them. In this way, our account calls out for some metaphysic—which is to say, some integral heuristic structure—for analyzing the processes of cultural making in which human gender and sexuality find their concrete realization. Therefore the third section will take up Lonergan's integral scale of values to offer a preliminary heuristic for considering gender and sexuality in their full context as mediated and constituted by meaning.

Some might view our appeal to metaphysics as a boutique interest.<sup>5</sup> That we invoke Lonergan's *Insight* and *Method in Theology* may intensify the sense that we are dealing in esoterica. However, we think our heuristic merits wider consideration because of the opportunities for interdisciplinary development it suggests. The first will be the most obvious (especially to those who work in sexual ethics) but also more minor contribution. Our account takes modern scientific methods and discoveries seriously

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3. For the fully developed metaphysics see Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

4. Lonergan uses the term "classical" or its variant "classicist" in two different senses. We will be concerned with both here. First, we will encounter Lonergan's use of the term to describe a certain systematic kind of intelligibility in the natural sciences; see Lonergan, *Insight*, 60–76 and *passim*. When we turn from the natural sciences to questions of culture, Lonergan will use the term "classicist" to refer to ways of thinking about the relationship between culture and history. See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, xi; for a more detailed look at the conflict between "an empirical view of culture" and what Lonergan calls a "classicist notion of culture," see Bernard Lonergan, "The Transition from a Classicist World-View to Historical-Mindedness," *A Second Collection* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 1–10.

5. Even among Catholic theologians disinclined to postmodern gender theories, there has been a shift away from metaphysics and towards the phenomenological hermeneutics championed by John Paul II in *Theology of the Body* (John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein [Boston, MA: Pauline, 2006]). *Communio* devoted an entire Spring issue to approaches like these under the title, "Body and Gender" (*Communio* 43, no. 2 [2016]).

to provide a dynamic, emergentist heuristic for considering the relationship between our embodiment, our cultures, and our selves as gendered and sexual. But this first opportunity for development flows directly into a second. Our heuristic, because it assumes empirical methods and an emergent universe, needs to be filled in by the collaborative efforts of many different specialists in as many different fields as intersect with the question of gender and sexual identities. Rather than dictating deductively the conclusions at which ethicists must arrive, our metaphysical approach provides tools to facilitate the coordination of the various lines of inquiry relevant to this topic. In other words, this approach to gender and sexual identity is not a system to be implemented, but an intellectual framework to aid cooperative investigation.

Third, there is the most important, but also most nascent opportunity our approach offers: the development of a renewed speculative theology for understanding the church's teaching on matters touched by the question of gender and sexual identity. It is important to note that such speculative theologies do not discourse on which church teachings to affirm or reject, but begin from the affirmation of doctrine and then set out to resolve subsequent intellectual difficulties that arise in the life of the church. To the extent that the affirmed teachings express the mystery of God, such theological solutions will remain imperfect. But what we know about the world proportionate to human lives and minds can, by analogy, be fruitfully deployed for greater insight into what has been revealed to us. In this sense, the first two opportunities for development are ordered to the third. The work of biologists, social theorists, philosophers, and others are irreplaceable material for speculative theology. Many benefits may accrue to the church's life and thought from a renewed speculative theology on matters of gender and sexual identity, but we hope in the first instance for more adequate answers to the serious questions the past century has put to the church on this issue. In much the way that Aristotle's philosophy enlarged and perfected the deposit of Christian reflection in the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, we hope that Lonergan's organon for our time (as Frederick E. Crowe called it) might facilitate a similar transformation of modern theology on this and perhaps other controversial issues.<sup>6</sup>

In tandem with the above opportunities for development, we wish to make two qualifications about what follows. First, when we say that this article presents a normative metaphysics, we know that we invite certain misunderstandings. The first potential misunderstanding has to do with how we are using the term "metaphysics," especially in the context of gender and sexuality. There is ongoing conflict in Christian anthropology about whether or not there are any metaphysical principles for gender and sexuality. There is an extreme "conservative" position that finds immanent in the biology of human reproduction a fundamental and necessary division of human gender into male and female, as well as an intrinsic and necessary ordering of sexual activity (which is to say, always heterosexual interactivity) to the conception and birthing of children. On the opposite pole, the "liberal" response finds in alternative gender and sexual identities evidence that there are no metaphysical principles for this area of

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6. Frederick E. Crowe, *Method in Theology: An Organon for Our Time* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette, 1980).

human life and culture.<sup>7</sup> Instead, on this view, heteronormativity is an exclusively cultural phenomenon. It is, in other words, *merely* constructed. Gender and sexual identities are socially (not metaphysically) constituted or “performed.” Thus, any gender or sexual norms should be settled by open, democratic negotiations of power, rights, and responsibilities and not by appeal to anything like “human nature” or even, in the limit, the categories of “man” and “woman” at all.<sup>8</sup> The former approach plainly excludes the latter and, consequently, the latter approach is usually predicated on a rejection of the former.

The above disjunct, it seems to us, rests on the assumption that the only kind of metaphysical normativity on offer is an “essentialist” or “classical” kind. If, however, we can avail ourselves of a different kind of normative metaphysics, then we do not believe we have to choose between an essentialist heteronormativity and an account of gender and sexuality that is, in the limit, power all the way down. Avoiding this false disjunct means specifying what a metaphysics is, the heuristic structures in which it consists, and how it would apply to gender and sexuality. If our anticipation is that metaphysical norms are always universal and necessary principles of relation or operation, we are primed to condemn concrete instances that violate those principles as deficient, abnormal, or unnatural. Or, if we find this approach leads us into practical, social, political, and moral dead ends, we may throw out the notion of ontological norms all together. But what if we revised our heuristic structures and so our basic metaphysical commitments? This article proposes such a revision. It trades the normativity of classical correlation for *statistical* correlation, and so a metaphysical normativity the force of which is not exploded by marginal cases and so for which marginal cases are still normal, in the sense of “to be expected statistically.”

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7. The term we use to describe this outlook, “postmodern gender theory,” is borrowed from Sarah Coakley. She characterizes it as follows: “North American gender theory has been predominantly concerned with gay and lesbian rights, and with the problem of what Judith Butler has called ‘heteronormativity’—the cultural imposition of ‘heterosexuality’ as the only acceptable sexual norm in society. According to Butler, only ritualized acts of dissent from such ‘normativity’ can begin to shift this imposition” (Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay “On the Trinity”* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 65). See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993); *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997); and *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004). We will be using the term “heteronormativity” in a fundamentally different sense. For a wider survey of feminist political thought and philosophical anthropology, see Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1983).

8. For critiques of “woman” as a category, see Sheila Davaney, “The Limits of the Appeal to Women’s Experience,” in *Shaping New Vision: Gender and Values in American Culture*, ed. Clarissa Atkinson et al. (Ann Arbor, MI: VMI Research, 1987), 31–49; and “Contesting the Gendered Subject,” in *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Traditions, and Norms*, ed. Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 99–115.

Our second qualification regards what exactly we do and do not aim to achieve. First, we will not endeavor to dismantle or even, in most cases, directly engage with the positions avoided by our scheme. That kind of dialectical engagement would require a significantly longer and more involved project interpreting and responding to a small army of discrete positions on both extremes and in between. Second, though this article offers some evidence for the plausibility of the metaphysics presented, these are intended only to serve as illustrative suggestions, and not knock-down proofs. Third, though the position laid out is an element within a fully formed Christian anthropology and, indeed, may have many wide-ranging implications for such a project, it is not intended to be one, nor to presuppose any whole-cloth anthropology, Christian or otherwise. Indeed, this argument is long on metaphysics and rather short on theology. Fourth and finally, we lack the space and the expertise to develop implications for a sexual ethics here.<sup>9</sup> This article will be a work of metaphysics and sexual anthropology and *not* a sexual ethics. As our discussion comes up against topics and problems with evident ethical import, we hope our reader will bear this qualification in mind. That being said, we will offer but a single, largely indeterminate ethical rumination.

## Metaphysics as Heuristic Structure

In his major philosophical work, *Insight*,<sup>10</sup> Lonergan calls metaphysics “the department of human knowledge that underlies, penetrates, transforms, and unifies all other departments.”<sup>11</sup> It underlies and penetrates all other departments insofar as its principle is an unrestricted desire to know that which, in each department, unfolds itself according to the determinate viewpoints of each field. Metaphysics transforms and unifies all other departments insofar as it urges each to fuller development and pulls these developments into a unity. Any particular academic discipline intends some intelligible part of the universe. Insofar as that discipline has produced results and organized them into a body of knowledge, it has apprehended some intelligible element of that part of the universe. Metaphysics as a field of inquiry intends the intelligibility in each and every field insofar as it is a kind of intelligibility. As a department of knowledge, metaphysics apprehends the kinds of intelligibility in the various departments of inquiry and knowledge, aiming to organize them into an integral unity. A complete, explicit metaphysics, then, is “the whole in knowledge but not the whole of knowledge.”<sup>12</sup> It is, more precisely, the integral heuristic structure for all

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9. For the initial foundational work on ethics in a Lonerganian mode see Patrick H. Byrne, *The Ethics of Discernment: Lonergan's Foundations for Ethics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016). The path from such enriched and elaborate foundations to actual moral doctrines is yet to be explicated.

10. For an account of the same basic heuristic structure, as discussed in this section, applied to the question of evolution, see Neil Ormerod and Cynthia S. W. Crysdale, *Creator God, Evolving World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2013).

11. Lonergan, *Insight*, 415.

12. Lonergan, *Insight*, 415.

departments of knowledge, including those with which we will be concerned specifically here.

But what are heuristic structures?

Between what we know and what we have not an inkling, there lies the murky area of what we know we do not know. About this middle field we can at least *ask*. But when we ask, we give the unknown a name; “What is a lunar eclipse?” Such names are incipient *heuristics*. They name what we anticipate we would know if we had the answer to our question. If I ask, “What is a lunar eclipse?” and you respond by pointing to the darkened moon, the ambiguity of my question will be to blame. By pointing, you have shown me how to use the name, “lunar eclipse,” properly. If, however, I ask you, “What is *the nature of* a lunar eclipse?” and you again point to the sky, I will know to move on to brighter lights. You obviously did not understand what it is I anticipated finding out by asking my question. In other words, you did not appreciate the heuristic force of the question. I can see very well the darkened moon, but what I want to know is “*why*?” Why is the moon thus darkened?<sup>13</sup> Having attached a name or symbol to what is not yet known (“the nature of ...”), an inquirer specifies more precisely just what it is she wants to know by inferring properties or relations that pertain to it. In algebra, we do this by putting letters in the place of numerical values. But in algebra, the value of  $x$  can be solved through the mathematical operations called for by the equation at hand. In empirical inquiry, however, “the nature of ...” can be had only by apprehending the intelligibility immanent in the data of experience. In the case of lunar eclipses, the property is the darkness of the moon, and the relations that obtain are between celestial bodies. Why the moon is thus darkened, if it really is “the nature of ...,” will explain all lunar eclipses, not just this one here. This is the meaning of the ancient and medieval dictum, “similar is similarly understood.”<sup>14</sup>

Though Lonergan’s analysis of heuristic procedure vindicates these broad strokes of the ancient and medieval ideal of science, modern science leaves ancient and medieval science behind at just this point. It leaves them behind because of an ambiguity in the term “similar.” Similarities, Lonergan says, are of two kinds:

There are the similarities of things in their relations to us. Thus, they may be similar in color or shape, similar in the sounds they emit, similar in taste or odor, similar in the tactile qualities of the hot and cold, wet and dry, heavy and light, rough and smooth, hard and soft. There also are the similarities of things in their relations to one another. Thus, they may be found together or apart. They may increase or decrease concomitantly. They may have similar antecedents or consequents. They may be similar in their proportions to one another, and such proportions may form series of relationships, such as exist between the elements in

13. See Lonergan’s interpretation of Aristotle on explanation and definition in Bernard Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 24–46.

14. For Lonergan’s account of heuristic procedure and its development through ancient and medieval modes with Aristotle and Aquinas to its refinement in modern scientific inquiry, see Lonergan, *Insight*, 57–70.

the periodic table of chemistry or between the successive forms of life in the theory of evolution.<sup>15</sup>

In many modern sciences, these relations and determinations are expressed as a functional equation (e.g. the law of falling bodies,  $x = at^2$ ), and any set of data that satisfies the function is explained by it. These correlations are considered explanatory of that data when they hold invariantly: if P conditions are met, then Q consequences will follow, so long as nothing extraneous intervenes. The anticipation that similar functional correlations are understood similarly provides the heuristic force of this mode of explanation. They are the “classical” structures and norms to which we referred in the introduction.

We are not, of course, limited to understanding single classes of things or events. We can also ask whether there is an explanation for *series* of events or “processes.” Lonergan extends the “classical correlation” heuristic for single things and events to a series under the heading of “systematic processes.” A systematic process and its constituent events possess a single intelligibility that can be understood in a single insight or a unified set of insights.<sup>16</sup> As all of the data on some thing or event are explained by the classical correlation that articulates its “nature,” so all of the data on a systematic process fall into a single perspective in which exact predictions are possible. Thus, any situation in the series can be deduced from any other without explicit consideration of intervening events.<sup>17</sup> Much as the functional relationships that determine single things and events are invariant in instances that differ only in the place and time they are found, so properly similar systematic processes will proceed similarly anywhere and anytime, all other things being equal.

Classical heuristic procedures founder, however, upon some concrete processes. As an example we might consider questions about the concrete relationship between smoking and lung cancer:

Why, it is sometimes asked, do most heavy cigarette smokers fail to develop lung cancer if cigarettes are in fact a causal agent? We have no answer to this question. But neither can we say why most of the Lübeck babies who were exposed to massive doses of virulent tubercle bacilli failed to develop tuberculosis. This is not a reason, however, for doubting the causal role of the bacilli in the development of the disease.<sup>18</sup>

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15. Lonergan, *Insight*, 61–62.

16. Lonergan, *Insight*, 71.

17. Lonergan, *Insight*, 71.

18. Jerome Cornfield, William Haenszel, E. Cuyler Hammond, Abraham M. Lilienfeld, Michael B. Shimkin, and Ernst L. Wynder, “Smoking and Lung Cancer: Recent Evidence and a Discussion of Some Questions,” *International Journal of Epidemiology* 38, no. 5 (2009): 1188, doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyp289. The “Lübeck babies” refers to an incident where babies in the town of Lübeck were accidentally vaccinated with doses of virulent tubercle bacilli. See Gregory J. Fox, Marianna Orlova, and Erwin Schurr, “Tuberculosis in Newborns: The Lessons of the ‘Lübeck Disaster’ (1929–1933),” *PLoS Pathog* 12, no. 1 (2016): e1005271, doi:10.1371/journal.ppat.1005271.



While the complex processes by which one is exposed to cigarette smoke or tubercle bacilli allow for instances in which exposure does not result in lung cancer or tuberculosis, still the prevalence subsequent to exposure is sufficiently regular that both of the former can be called the “causes” of the latter. Even if each of the events in these processes may be deduced according to classical correlations, the whole series cannot be deduced, nor predicted with rigor. Some people will smoke their whole lives and never develop lung cancer. Furthermore, there cannot be determined a single combination of classical scientific laws for the whole process. The unfolding of the sequence of situations exhibits surprising and stubborn novelty. Lonergan calls these series of events, “non-systematic processes.” In a non-systematic process there is a series of events unified by their juxtaposition in some unit of space or succession in some period of time. This can mean that events are simultaneous across a single area, that the events are sequential in a selected amount of time, or both. Lonergan calls these selected collections of events “coincidental aggregates.” An aggregate is coincidental if (1) the members of the aggregate have some unity based on spatial juxtaposition or temporal succession or both, and (2) there is no corresponding unity on the level of insight and intelligible relation.<sup>19</sup> In non-systematic processes, there is no intelligible relation fixing *in a classical fashion* the relations and determinations of the things or events in the series.

The dictum, *similars are similarly understood*, at least as a principle of classical correlation, begins to lose its grip on concrete things and events at this point. One can come to recognize that classical unification is absent from some process and Lonergan calls this recognition an “inverse insight.” The insight is “inverse” because one comes to understand that there is nothing to understand. In inverse insights, an inquirer realizes that there is no intelligibility to be found where she had anticipated it. One’s heuristic runs aground. In the case of non-systematic processes, the inverse insight involves recognizing that the process at hand is not susceptible to explanation by the application of classical heuristic structures. The intelligibility of the series, as a process, lacks the invariance and generality to be applied to similar series, if similar series are forthcoming at all.<sup>20</sup> This randomness is the pivotal issue shifting us from classical heuristic anticipations to statistical structures and procedures. The differences that confound the unification of the series under a classical heuristic emerge randomly. Random differences are matters of fact apprehended by inverse insights. Where differences really are random, there is no further classical inquiry needed because there is no such explanation to be had.<sup>21</sup>

But statistical inquiry shows its mettle by attending to that which classical inquiry neglects. Statistical heuristic structures anticipate statistical intelligibility and statistical intelligibility pertains to non-systematic processes. Note that the kind of intelligibility at stake has changed. Instead of “the nature of ...,” statistical inquiries ask after, “the probability of ...” things and events within non-systematic processes. Statistical

19. Lonergan, *Insight*, 73.

20. Lonergan, *Insight*, 80.

21. Lonergan, *Insight*, 78.

inquirers want to know about past frequency and so about future likelihood. Actual frequencies pertain to non-systematic processes that have occurred. Probabilities project ideal frequencies for subsequent, similar non-systematic processes. "A probability lies concealed within the random oscillations of relative actual frequencies," Lonergan writes.<sup>22</sup> In the pivot from actual frequencies to the ideal frequencies of projected probability, the dictum *similars are similarly understood* regains its purchase. Actual frequencies differ from true probabilities only at random and only in an oscillation that yields the probability itself as a frequency over time and/or space. This random divergence, because it is random, does not need to be explained. There is no immanent intelligibility to be explained. Were there, it would not be random divergence. That is why the pivot from classical to statistical intelligibility is mediated by an inverse insight, an apprehension of a certain kind of intelligibility's absence. So long as the divergence does not become systematic, and so does not fall under the predictions of some unified insight or set of insights, it is merely a matter of fact.

Statistical similarity is of a different, more plastic kind than the rigid invariance of classical similarity, but neither is any less "metaphysical" than the other. In Lonergan's account, both of these heuristic structures organize, direct, and facilitate our investigation of the universe of being. Statistical inquiry in particular helps us not to overlook intelligible features of that universe in places where randomness might lead us to insist on "classical" regularity where the data do not evince any or to despair of understanding in its absence. If metaphysics is the integral heuristic structure for understanding our universe, then a complete, explicit metaphysics cannot exclude statistical intelligibility as one of its elements.

We will suggest below that the intelligibility of gender and sexual identity are in part a matter of biological dynamics and their constraining function on the emergence of human societies. Both of these (the biological dynamics and the force of constraint upon cultures) are statistically ordered phenomena. Consequently, we should view the normativity they exhibit from within this heuristic structure. Moreover, because within this heuristic structure divergences from biological and cultural norms are basically random, they need no explanation. They are given as a matter of fact along with the actual frequency of probable biological and cultural events. As a result, alternative gender and sexual identities should be expected, and expected as *the normal outcome of an inherently statistical process*.

A note should be made before moving on, however, about the *abstractive* nature of both classical and statistical heuristic structures and the theories to which they give rise. Efforts to determine the structure of systematic processes and the frequencies pertaining to non-systematic ones lead to "a consideration of data, not in the totality of their concrete aspects, but only from some abstractive viewpoint." Each of these heuristic structures, the classical and the statistical, indicate general abstractive viewpoints. These general abstractive viewpoints can be specified according to what one wants to understand. In other words, abstractive viewpoints are specified by the questions they ask. One can ask (as we are about to) after the intelligibility of gender and

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22. Lonergan, *Insight*, 83.

sexual identity, prescinding from all the phenomena of human being irrelevant to answering that question. Further, one can address this aspect of human being under either the heuristic of the classical correlations and systematic processes that pertain to it or according to the statistical, non-systematic processes that do. In our case, the further question about how several abstractive viewpoints—biological sciences and any number of social sciences—relate to one another on the topic of gender and sexual identity will be of the utmost importance.

## Statistical Heteronormativity

With the above heuristic scheme in mind, let us turn to gender and sexual identity. First, we will discuss some of the ways in which the biology of sexual differentiation and reproduction embodies a statistical, rather than classical heteronormativity. Second, we will try to describe how we see biological heteronormativity as itself exerting a statistical force upon the cultures in which human beings appropriate our embodiment as meaningful and valuable.

A brief note must be made also about how we are using the term “heteronormativity.” In much the same way that we have used the term “metaphysics” within a particular frame of meaning, so too we are using the term “heteronormativity” in a way that skirts common usage. We do not mean by it any of the evaluative or proscriptive things that postmodern gender theorists mean. As we hope will become clear, we are using the term in a precise sense to point out an anthropological feature of human biology and culture. We are using it simply to point out that, in human biology and culture, male–female gender duality and heterosexual attraction are highly probable, and so constitute the *statistical* norm. We are *not* using it to suggest anything about the ethical or moral normativity of that predominance.

## Biological Heteronormativity

If life begins at conception, physiological sex begins a little bit later. The ground of our physiological sex is laid early in our embryonic development. At the fourth week after conception, gonadal development begins and over the next two weeks, the body forms a population of precursor gametes along the embryo’s genital ridge. At this point, the gonads usually become either testes or ovaries. In a genetic male, the Y chromosome causes primitive testes to form from the gonads. If this does not occur, about two weeks later, ovarian differentiation will occur instead. However, if the genetic and hormonal development signals are either disorganized or incomplete, there can result the rare case of so-called “true hermaphroditism.”<sup>23</sup> Gonadal differentiation is itself

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23. Linda J. Heffner, *Human Reproduction at a Glance* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Science, 2001), 19. The terminology is shifting here. Instances of what is called genuine hermaphroditism are truly rare. But there are a variety of conditions now referred to as intersex where sexual identity is less than definite and so, in the full array of phenomena, falls along something like a “sex spectrum.” For a helpful and accessible account

only part of the story. Bipotential tissue for the development of external genitalia becomes apparent around the eighth embryonic week and the introduction of testicular testosterone initiates the development of the prostate gland and the penis. The phenotypic differentiation of the female genitalia occurs, for its part, in the absence of androgen and is not dependent on an ovary to proceed. Consequently, Heffner notes,

exposure to specific androgens beginning in the 5<sup>th</sup> embryonic week of pregnancy is critical to the development of a recognizable newborn male phenotype. Fetuses exposed to [the testicular androgen] DHT at this time will be masculinized regardless of the genetic or gonadal sex. Conversely, a lack of androgen will result in a female phenotype.<sup>24</sup>

This can result in disparate differentiation between a person’s genetic and phenotypic sexual identity. Morgan Holmes, an intersex sociologist and activist, reports an instance of a woman with external genitalia that were recognizably female (indeed, she and her husband had been trying to conceive without success), but she also had combined gonads or “ovotestes” and a dysgenic uterus. Holmes speculates that she was probably genetically undifferentiated and so technically intersexed, even though she had lived her entire life without any sense of her own genitalia as “ambiguous.”<sup>25</sup> And the above treatment prescinds from endocrine factors down the line that have much more wide-ranging, diffuse, and complicated consequences in human physiological development.

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of this spectrum, see Claire Ainsworth, “Sex Redefined,” *Nature* 518/7539 (2015): 288–91, doi:10.1038/518288a. For more on intersexuality, see Morgan Holmes, *Intersex: A Perilous Difference* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University, 2008); Elizabeth Reis, *Bodies in Doubt: An American History of Intersex* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2009); Ellen K. Feder, *Making Sense of Intersex: Changing Ethical Perspectives in Biomedicine* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

24. Heffner, *Human Reproduction*, 22. For more detail, see Olaf Hiort, “The Differential Role of Androgens in Early Human Sex Development,” *BMC Medicine* 11, no. 1 (August 2013): 1–7, doi: 10.1186/1741-7015-11-152. Recent years have produced more complicated accounts of the role of androgens in sex differentiation, their wider effect on the human organism, and even some research on the disruptive effect of anti-androgens on the process. See Melissa Hines, Constantinescu Mihaela, and Debra Spencer, “Early Androgen Exposure and Human Gender Development,” *Biology of Sex Differences* 6, no. 1 (2015): 1–10, doi: 10.1186/s13293-015-0022-1; Margaret M. McCarthy and Arthur P. Arnold, “Reframing Sexual Differentiation of the Brain,” *Nature Neuroscience* 14, no. 6 (2011): 677, doi:10.1038/nn.2834; Sofie Christiansen, Martin Scholze, Majken Dalggaard, Anne Marie Vinggaard, Marta Axelstad, Andreas Kortenkamp, and Ulla Hass, “Synergistic Disruption of External Male Sex Organ Development by a Mixture of Four Antiandrogens,” *Environmental Health Perspectives* 117, no. 12 (2009): 1839–46, doi: 10.1289/ehp.0900689. Some scientists and anthropologists are trying to situate this process within a wider evolutionary frame as well. See Stephanie L. Meredith, “Comparative Perspectives on Human Gender Development and Evolution,” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 156 (2015): 72–97, doi: 10.1002/ajpa.22660.

25. Holmes, *Intersex*, 47–48.

Our point in rehearsing the very basic science of sexual differentiation is to underline that it is not a matter of necessary principles or mechanical “switches.” Instead, it is a non-systematic process and a matter of aggregated genetic and hormonal signals which can tip over into maleness, eventually emerge as femaleness, or remain undifferentiated as in the various constellations of intersexed physiology. Possessing ambiguous genitalia and so being “intersexed” is not best understood on analogy with a broken machine implicitly in need of fixing. Instead, it is a relatively unusual phenomenon for which the more usual processes of sex differentiation are the precondition. To put it more simply, it is normal for, over time, some small proportion of infants to be born intersexed in some fashion or another. The normativity of a predominating gender duality is not, biologically speaking, absolute.<sup>26</sup>

Things become significantly more complicated when we turn from the physiology of gender to matters of sexual attraction and sexual identity. The biological study of human reproduction accepts as given that sexual attraction and arousal are closely tied to individual psychological factors and culture. Only two variables of sexual attractiveness appear universal, probably because they are related to reproductive success: youth and health. Incest taboos are nearly universal, probably for the inverse reason. Beyond these, textbooks defer to social psychologists interested in human sexuality.<sup>27</sup>

Others have not been so reticent.<sup>28</sup> Jacques Balthazart, a professor of neuroscience and endocrinology, evaluates the idea that certain genetic and endocrine factors interact in determining sexual orientation in homosexual men. Though he is quite clear that there is no specific gene that determines sexual orientation, he has found many studies supporting his hypothesis that several genes interact to incline an individual to one sexual orientation or another.<sup>29</sup> If hormonal signals accumulate in just the right ways,

26. Holmes’s book opens with a lengthy and sophisticated consideration of the ways in which modern medicine cannot (and has not been able to) avoid some kind of interpretive and evaluative cultural making in the process of managing the “abnormal” physiology of intersexed persons. See Holmes, *Intersex*, 23–64. Indeed, Judith Butler pushes this point to its utmost, concluding that “the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all” (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 10).

27. Heffner, *Human Reproduction*, 40. Those who do venture explanations usually pursue the speculative avenue of evolutionary psychology, rather than physiology and biology. For example, see Helen Fisher, “Lust, Attraction, Attachment: Biology and Evolution of the Three Primary Emotion Systems for Mating, Reproduction, and Parenting,” *Journal of Sex Education & Therapy* 25, no. 1 (2000): 96, doi: 10.1080/01614576.2000.11074334; and more recently Emily J. Miner and Todd K. Shackelford, “Mate Attraction, Retention and Expulsion,” *Psicothema* 22, no. 1 (2010): 9–14.

28. For a fine survey and critical review of the literature on the neurobiology of sex/gender-based attraction, see Laura Erickson-Schroth, “The Neurobiology of Sex/Gender-Based Attraction,” *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health* 14, no. 1 (2010): 56–69, doi:10.1080/19359700903416917.

29. Jacques Balthazart, *The Biology of Homosexuality*, The Oxford Series in Behavioral Neuroendocrinology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 142–43.

sexual attraction to one's own gender becomes probable, even inevitable. Even if Balthazart is wrong, the very biological indeterminacy of sexual attraction should lead us to the conclusion that, when it comes to the physiology and biology of gender and sexuality, non-systematic processes and their attendant probabilities are governing matters. If Balthazart is right, then his work offers yet more support for our account. Balthazart also notes that even if homosexuality among males is evolutionarily maladaptive, such that the genetic confluence that occasions it disappears continually through a failure to reproduce, the subtly interacting genetic and endocrine mutations themselves may be probable enough to reappear regularly.<sup>30</sup> In other words, alternative sexual orientations like male homosexuality may be a normal divergence from biological heteronormativity.

Obviously, there is an ambiguity in how the word "normal" is being deployed here. This owes to the coincidence of the two abstractive viewpoints already mentioned: the classical and statistical. For example, intersexed physiology is normal from the abstractive viewpoint of the pertaining non-systematic processes. Intersexed physiology is normal insofar as the probabilities admit, all other things being equal, of some instances in which the gender differentiation process does not produce an exclusively male or female anatomy. Over enough time and in a population large enough, intersexed persons will be born, and that does not explode the predominating probability that most children will be born male or female. Intersexed persons are normal within the biological (and so statistical) heteronormativity of sexual differentiation. We can, of course, take the other, classical abstractive viewpoint to ask, "What is the systematic process by which male or female gender differentiation is successful?" From that viewpoint, intersexed persons result from an "abnormality," a failure of the proximate finality of sex differentiation to attain. But because the classical and statistical abstractive viewpoints are complementary, that is an "abnormality" that biology teaches us to expect. In any systematic process, the conditions of which are statistically fulfilled, abstract abnormalities are concretely normal, even inevitable. Again, our reader should recall that we are quite stubbornly sticking to anthropology here, and so decidedly *not* weighing in on the moral or ethical norms at play. Doing so would require a significantly more involved enterprise.

### *Cultural Heteronormativity*

In any case, we come swiftly to the limits of what biology can tell us about how gender and sexuality are ordered. Human living is radically mediated and constituted by meaning and value.<sup>31</sup> The meanings and values held in common by a community make up its culture. In many important respects, for human living culture has the final word. But we must not suppose the final word amounts to the *only* word or that

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30. Balthazart, *Biology of Homosexuality*, 152–53.

31. Bernard Lonergan, "Dimensions of Meaning," in *Collection* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 232–45.

culture organizes the lives of our communities *de novo*. It would be a naïve dualism to suppose that the world mediated by meaning is sealed off from the world of genes, hormones, organs, and bodies. The following account presents the respect in which we believe the biological dynamics of gender and sexuality have a *constraining* effect on the forms and practices that situate them within a cultural world mediated by meaning. This section will try to show the relevance of statistical intelligibility for highlighting this category (“constraint”) to explain the relationship between our embodiment and our cultural *poesis*.

By deferring to social psychologists on much of what constitutes sexual attraction, the biologist implies something the metaphysician should acknowledge explicitly: human beings are not reducible to biology. Human beings are social animals and social selves. Moreover, human beings mediate our sociality to ourselves in the form of shared culture. Cultures are constitutive of selves, and so are also constitutive of the relationships that persons form and in which persons are formed. At the same time, cultures are the products of human understandings and decisions. Cultures make us and we make cultures. The elements of our culture that pertain to gender and sexuality are likewise constitutive of our selves and also constituted by our communities. Thus, when we advert to the inextricable enculturation of persons, we should expect that persons do not leave behind their biological bodies when they enter into the cultural frame. Indeed, the intersubjectivity at the root of society is impossible without embodiment. All human beings share a biological inheritance and so the concrete structures and norms of that embodiment have a statistically constraining effect upon the kinds of cultural forms that emerge to mediate the meaningfulness of our bodies in our cultures. It makes certain forms quite probable, and so a large swath of merely possible forms unlikely. By extension, our bodies play a constraining role in the constitution of those cultural forms that mediate our gender and sexuality to ourselves.

Constraint is statistical. It makes certain things and events likely and others unlikely. The biological heteronormativity of sex differentiation and of heterosexual orientation also exert a statistical force on the constitution of selves in a society. There emerges a sense of gender and of sexuality irreducible to physiology. Consequently, there exists in human cultures a statistical heteronormativity that is grounded in and analogous with, but irreducible to, our biological heteronormativity. The last makes more likely heteronormative cultural forms, like gender-differentiated social roles and institutions. Our statistically heteronormative physiology primes sexual practice and expression to be enculturated heteronormatively, but according to the elasticity that the process of meaning-making affords. The cultural forms carry forward our biological structures into a new, much larger, much richer context of practices, symbols, social structures, political entities, and interpersonal roles. Dining, after all, is never just eating and a shared meal is never just food.

Thus, we can expect that human cultures will create structures and practices that make gender meaningful. Often these take the shape of a division of social roles and, in many cases, a difference in power between these social roles. The work of historians and anthropologists reveals the wild diversity of gender roles, identities, and power

dynamics in cultures across time and space.<sup>32</sup> But neither the metaphysics of statistical heteronormativity in general nor the physiology of gender differentiation in particular gives us enough information to anticipate much more than that we should expect nearly all cultures to generate them in some form or another. Still, we can at least determine that a society that makes nothing of the predominant gender binary would be quite improbable. Moreover, the conscious effort to create a culture eschewing gender-differentiated social roles, structures, and practices entirely would be fighting an uphill battle against the probabilities constraining the often unreflective dynamics of cultural making, particularly at the level of folk and popular culture. This is not, we would reiterate, to weigh in on whether such efforts are impossible or undesirable.

A similar expectation would hold for sexual attraction and interaction. Because heterosexual attraction predominates, we can expect that cultures across history and geography will have created structures, practices, and institutions that mediate the meaningfulness of sexuality to themselves. Moreover, since heterosexual sex makes reproduction probable, we can also expect that cultures will incorporate that procreative power into the relevant cultural makings. Again, this does not tell us exactly—or even broadly—what these structures, practices, and institutions will look like. Marriage, for instance, looks very different from one culture to the next across history and geography. The Bible alone, from Genesis to 1 Corinthians, offers a taste of the diversity within early Israelite and Christian cultures. We have already mentioned the wide variation in how sexual arousal (to say nothing of sexual disgust) is constructed from culture to culture. Still, it would be surprising to find a culture that simply ignored sexual attraction and its attendant concerns altogether. And because these attractions and interactions will be predominantly heterosexual, we can expect that most of these cultural appropriations of sexuality will be heteronormative.

We would also expect that, because these two aspects of human anthropology are statistically rather than classically normed, there will appear persons whose gender and/or sexual orientation does not conform to the cultural forms that have emerged under the constraining force of biological and cultural heteronormativity. Such persons will emerge regularly enough that cultures may take account of their presence, either by “othering” them through disgust reactions or moral condemnations, or by creating integrated social roles.<sup>33</sup> Both responses evince the pressure to locate persons with alternative gender and sexual identities on a social and cultural map, and so to

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32. See Frances E. Mascia-Lees, *Gender & Difference in a Globalizing World: Twenty-First Century Anthropology* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2010); and Peter N. Stearns, *Gender in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

33. For an anthropological account of integrated social roles for those with alternative gender and sexual identities, see Will Roscoe, *Changing Ones: Third and Fourth Genders in Native North America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), and Sharyn Graham Davies, *Challenging Gender Norms: Five Genders among Bugis in Indonesia* (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2007). The Bugis in Indonesia recognize five different genders, roughly speaking: heterosexual female and male, transgender female and male, and androgynous.



make them meaningful within the community. As a result, there may emerge tropes and other social forms for such marginal identities, and these may interact with the physiological endowments described above to further shape forms of marginal gender or sexual identity in particular individuals. Cultures make us and we make cultures. Via exclusion or inclusion, we can expect cultures to create mediating forms to account for those persons who challenge any myth of absolute, classical heteronormativity in human gender and sexuality. These extraordinary cultural forms will exist precisely because the persons they account for are normal.

A final question should be briefly considered before moving on to our third section on the differentiation of the notion of culture via Lonergan's scale of values. Is the emergence of these alternative gender and sexual identities *too* regular? Is this normal occurrence *so* normal that it constitutes a systematic process rather than a non-systematic one?<sup>34</sup> It is instructive that Gallup polling has found people in the United States tend to overestimate the percentage of the population that identifies as LGBTQ. Their 2012 polling suggests that approximately 3.4 percent of the US population identifies as LGBTQ, though that number is subject to some debate.<sup>35</sup> Increasingly, however, the sociological study of alternative sexual and gender identities favors the fluid label, "Queer" (as in LGBTQ), because it is "a concise word that people may use if they do not feel like shifting their language along with their ever-evolving gender, politics and/or sexuality."<sup>36</sup> The umbrella term allows for wide diversity in gender and sexual practice, performance, and identification beneath it. The categories deployed in the contemporary sociology of alternative gender and sexual identities (often under the heading, "queer theory") exhibit a trend towards internal multiplicity that shows no signs of slowing.<sup>37</sup> The established categories of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender may continue to prove too classical in their efforts to unify these identities under rigid labels. We would suggest, then, that this preference for the appellation "queer" indicates how our culture, both popular and scholarly, is coming to terms with the respect in which alternative gender and sexual identities emerge with the randomness we would expect from a non-systematic process. In a further respect, though, we can speculate that both the theoretical tools of queer theory and the material identities and subcultures they analyze are themselves cultural efforts to make systematic and dramatic meaning out of this essentially statistical process. From a Lonerganian perspective, this should not be read as ideology, but rather as just one more example of the natural emergence of the human world constituted by meaning.

34. Thanks to John Dadosky for raising this question and occasioning the following insight.

35. Gary J. Gates and Frank Newport, "3.4% of U.S. Adults Identify as LGBT Inaugural Gallup findings based on more than 120,000 interviews," Gallup.com (<http://www.gallup.com/poll/158066/special-report-adults-identify-lgbt.aspx?>).

36. "A Definition of 'Queer,'" pflag.org (<https://community.pflag.org/abouttheq>).

37. See Maureen Giffney and Michael O'Rourke (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2009), an enormous resource for surveying the development of queer theory.

## Culture and the Scale of Values

Statistical heuristic structure has provided a metaphysic for modeling how biological heteronormativity constrains the probable meanings and values constitutive of the various human cultures. This allowed us to indicate in broad terms the kinds of cultural forms to expect from human communities. If we would offer more determinate heuristic anticipations, we need another heuristic apparatus, one specially derived for considering this higher context we have been calling “culture.” After all, culture in the sense used above envelops the entirety of human living. Some differentiation of its internal elements is called for. Moreover, when we turn to consider culture, we are considering the products of both human understandings and human decisions. For this reason, we cannot completely bracket questions and topics of ethics and morality. The relative autonomy human cultural making has from its biological origins is grounded in the liberty of human persons asking questions, finding answers, and committing themselves to courses of action. However, it has been our desire to bracket as much as possible the further questions of sexual ethics and morality and to stick to the metaphysical elements we believe provide clarity to the conditions under which such ethical and moral determinations are made. As promised, we have but a single, rather indeterminate ethical conclusion: *persons and cultures should take cognizance of and responsibility for the ways in which the statistical constraint of heteronormativity is likely to dominate unreflective cultural making.* This conclusion does not inveigh for or against this constraint, but only asks that it be made an explicit consideration in any community’s deliberations about sexual ethics and morality.

The following section sketches a heuristic structure for differentiating various ways in which the statistical constraint of heteronormativity can affect the deliberative processes and value judgments of communities. For this, we turn to Bernard Lonergan’s five-stage “scale of values”: vital, social, cultural, personal, and religious.<sup>38</sup> Ormerod has argued elsewhere that this scale represents a transposition into the modern context of the classical nature–grace distinction, moving beyond an abstract metaphysical notion of human nature to one that can recognize the socially and historically conditioned elements of human existence.<sup>39</sup> In other words, the scale of values provides a heuristic for addressing the different constitutive elements of culture in a way that makes sense of their reciprocal relationships of constraint and indeterminacy, of limitation and transcendence, and of horizontal and vertical finalities. In what follows, then, we will indicate some of the ways in which the constraint of statistical heteronormativity is manifest at the vital, social, cultural, and personal levels of value.

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38. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 31–41. For a discussion on the significance of the scale of values as heuristic, see Byrne, *Ethics of Discernment*, 280–84. The scale itself is an outcome of what Lonergan refers to as moral conversion.

39. Neil Ormerod, “The Grace–Nature Distinction and the Construction of a Systematic Theology,” *Theological Studies* 75 (2014): 515–36 at 515, doi: 10.1177/0040563914538718.

### Vital Values

As we have seen, gender and sexual orientation emerge from the structures of biological sex differentiation and reproductive drives. They are, therefore, clearly linked with human vitality. Sexuality feeds into and is fed by our sense of well-being and of being at home in our own skin. The gendered and sexualized aspects of human vitality have a “finality,” that is a normative statistical orientation towards reproduction. But there is an ambiguity that results from the nature of “finality.” It is an upwardly but indeterminately directed dynamism. Finality does not hit its goal with the regularity of a classical law, but with that of a statistical law. Various outcomes can arise according to a schedule of probabilities. As we argued above, the complex process of development from fertilized ova to sexual differentiation is affected by multiple factors, leading to not only male and female individuals, but to a percentage of persons who simply do not fit into that binary division. The complex processes of sexual attraction and interaction lead to not only the predominating heterosexual attraction between males and females, but also to generalized same-sex attraction in some persons. Thus, finality’s indeterminacy is evident in those dimensions of human vitality we call sexual differentiation and sexual desire. Variations within this determinacy arise, not at the accidental periphery of the persons who embody them, but quite near the center of their life—that is, near the center of their sense of being-alive. That such lives are lived within our societies can hardly be denied. The constitution of fully human living by meaning and value calls out for their existence and vitality to be made meaningful and valuable. Societies decide whether or not to consider persons with alternative senses of their own gender and/or sexual orientation to be persons at all and whether or not their lives matter. Moreover, they make these decisions under the operative, but not often explicit constraint of statistical heteronormativity. On this last point we will have more to say in our conclusion.

### Social Values

Social values do not relate primarily to particular goods, whether those pertain to vital values like sustenance, shelter, sex, reproduction, and so on, or other values, like fine furniture and ornate clothing. Social values relate to the value of the order that makes various particular goods available with regularity. Social values pertain to developments of practical intelligence in areas of technology, economy, and polity and to the place we hold among them. A fundamental principle within a social order is the division of labor.<sup>40</sup> These divisions allow for the development of greater expertise and skill, increased efficiency and productivity within the economy and polity. Communities erect social scaffolding to maintain and facilitate this order in the form of organizations, associations, societies, guilds, institutes, governing bodies, and the like.

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40. See for example Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: Free, 1997).

We have already mentioned some ways in which the constraints of statistical heteronormativity make probable the establishment of social institutions and roles around gender differentiation. One of the most basic and highly probable divisions of labor within human society arises from the practical necessities of child-rearing. Females bear children and, absent some technological intervention, provide the newborn child with its basic sustenance. The sheer physical demand of this role introduces a powerful constraint on the construction of social values. For much of human history, this cycle of birth and nurture dominated the lives of a large percentage of women, almost as a matter of civic necessity. As Peter Brown points out, in the ancient Mediterranean world, unless women gave birth to an average of five children each, societies went into population decline.<sup>41</sup> It is in relation to these social divisions of labor that we enter what Pope Francis calls the "sociocultural role of sex (gender) [which] can be distinguished but not separated" from biological sex. The division of labor is not wholly "natural" but socially constructed (as evident in the variety of forms it takes in different societies), albeit under constraint by the statistical heteronormativity of biological sex. Societies have had to make decisions about how to create social roles and institutions that not only facilitate this basic division of human labor, but also allow for extensions beyond it into non-familial economies, politics, and so on. A modern decline in infant mortality has changed the situation significantly, but only very recently. That change, together with some ability to control human fertility, gives occasion for a radical reconsideration of the constraint placed on our social divisions of labor by statistical heteronormativity. This is not to say that such a radical social renegotiation is without its tensions and difficulties, nor is it to weigh in on which direction(s) societies should take.

### Cultural Values

Cultural values, in Lonergan's specific and technical sense, refer to something narrower than the all-encompassing sense deployed above. Cultural values are concerned specifically with the meanings and values themselves by which we make sense of our meaning-mediated and meaning-constituted living. Where social values refer to the matter of making our worlds and our societies run with regularity, smoothness, and integration, cultural values refer to our notions of the kind of world we want to live in and kind of society we want to make together. In terms of gender identity and sexual orientation, it is at the level of cultural values that we ask and answer the questions, *What does it mean to be a gendered person? What does it mean to be a sexually oriented person? What does it mean to be a man or a woman or something else? What does it mean to be straight or to be gay or to be something else?* Gendered divisions of labor cannot exist without attempts to make meaning about these divisions,

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41. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia, 1988), 6. While Brown's comments pertain to the Mediterranean world in antiquity, the same observation would hold throughout most of human history where high infant mortality has been the norm.

identities, and roles. Cultures “tell a story” about gender that incorporates divisions of labor as its presumed background, its assumptions about the “way the world is” and hence the “way things should be.” “Man” and “woman” are then symbolically imbued with particular idealized moral qualities that make the division of labor in that world most apt, with certain characteristics defining the gender roles, and by extension, gender identities. Reciprocally, then, these characteristics make each respective gender identity most suited for their particular gender roles—what we might call gender “stereotypes.”

On the other hand, those who transgress the divisions founded at this “deep” cultural level are often viewed as “unnatural” and a threat to the social order. One of the difficulties here is that the pace of cultural change is much slower than that of social change. Culture reflects on the meanings and values that hold a social order together, and this process of reflection (in philosophy, art, literature, sociology, etc.) of necessity lags behind the practical agility often demanded by our divisions of labor. Traditionally dominant Western cultural understandings of gender identity and sexual orientation have largely remained in place while social organization has undergone a major renegotiation.

This disjunction between current cultural situations and shifting social realities may well be the root cause of the present contest between metaphysical gender essentialism and postmodern gender theories. Gender essentialism, for its part, seeks to define the “natural” cultural meaning of masculinity and femininity in terms of a particular social arrangement. To call that social arrangement into question in light of a transformed situation appears to the gender essentialist as so much moral relativism. To that extent gender essentialism is an instance of what Lonergan calls “classicism.” For Lonergan, the “classicist” mentality is a label for any mentality that would appeal to norms that universalize a very particular time and place in sociocultural history. Classicism makes *a* culture into “Culture per se.” Lonergan instead argues for the kind of approach to culture we have taken here: an empirical view of culture and so an appreciation that there are cultures, plural. In brief, Lonergan calls for a shift from classicism to the historical consciousness for which cultures are understood as the set of meanings and values that constitute a way of life.<sup>42</sup>

This empirical notion of culture should not be confused with an *empiricist* notion. The latter would eliminate any sense of normativity at all. One can find an empiricist approach in some kinds of postmodern gender theory, those forms of gender ideology being criticized by the Vatican. In the face of the empirical data about the fluidity of gender identity and sexual orientation, an empiricist view of the role of culture in these matters appeals to no sense of normativity at all. Those who propound such empiricist theories might view any appeal to normativity as an arbitrary exercise of power by one person or group over another. Our approach here, as we have said already, avoids this disjunct by suggesting a mode of normativity that is at once very real, but also statistical. It is not threatened by marginal or alternative identities and/or orientations,

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42. Lonergan, “The Transition from a Classicist World-View to Historical-Mindedness,” 4–7.

because it expects them as part of the normal course. Moreover, it makes explicit the kinds of constraints and pressures our embodiment places on cultural making, but still respects the freedom of communities to construct societies and social roles according to their shared cultural values. Indeed, whether those societies and roles are good or bad is a matter of discerning the cultural values to which the community will commit itself.

### Personal Value

Loneragan speaks of personal value as “the person in his [or her] self-transcendence, as loving and being loved, as originator of values in himself [or herself] and in his [or her] milieu, as an inspiration and invitation to others to do likewise.”<sup>43</sup> If cultural values refer to our vision of the world in which we want to live, personal values refer to the person we would choose to be in that world. Our choices always operate within a social and cultural context which constructs a range of possible or at least imaginable options for our life story. What sort of person do I wish to become in the process of self- and world-constitution?<sup>44</sup> The philosophical and theological anthropology of gender identity and sexual orientation takes on its greatest intensity at this level of value. Here matters of self and of one’s self for and with others are imagined, interrogated, negotiated, and pursued. In a way, on matters of gender and sexual identity—because they are matters of *identity*—personal value is nearly the whole ball game. In fact, distinguishing this level of value as the culmination of the previous three might shed light on why controversies around gender and sexuality are so fraught. They raise questions about the value that each person concretely is as they concretely are.

An authentic sense of one’s personal value is essential to the development of a sound sense of who and what one can contribute to a community. Though we are invited to take responsibility for making ourselves into something that we hold worthwhile, much of our sense of personal value originates in our desirability to others, from our importance to our parents and family, from our achievements in the eyes of our peers, and so on. As Sebastian Moore has argued, our desirability is our desire-ability; from a firm sense of our own desirability grows our own sense of desire for the good around us.<sup>45</sup> This is at least one reason gender identity and sexual orientation are so deeply connected to the matter of personal value. They are closely linked to the powerful force of sexual desire and our sense of self-worth. As we move out of sexual latency into puberty and adulthood, our sense of self-worth is woven into the dynamics of sexual desire and desirability in complex and perhaps poorly understood ways. Being able to, on the one hand, distinguish this personal aspect of human meaning-making

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43. *Method in Theology*, 32.

44. The implications of this stance are fully explored in Byrne, *Ethics of Discernment*.

45. Sebastian Moore, *Let This Mind Be in You: The Quest for Identity through Oedipus to Christ* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1985), 14: “This sense of myself as desirable is the basis of all my relating. For it is the heart of desiring. It is because I am desirable that I am desire-able.”

and value-pursuing and, on the other, keep in view the constraint of statistical heteronormativity upon it is fundamentally important for the ongoing negotiation of these topics in our communities.

### Religious Values

As we warned in our introduction, we will not be offering properly theological reflections on the topics of gender and/or sexual identities. The extension of this discussion into the realm of religious values is beyond the scope of what we could reasonably accomplish here. It would require a study of gender patterning in religious experience across cultures, as well as study of various religious traditions and their stances on gender and sexuality. Further, a properly systematic theological treatment would require beginning, not from the best science and philosophy available, but from the dogmatic context and from interpretation of Scripture. We hope that our initial, anthropological reflections here have provided some helpful material for those who tackle those questions.

### Conclusion

Finally, let us review the basic metaphysical and anthropological position spelled out above. If one supposes that metaphysical norms are only of the classical kind, then the present disjunct between “classical” heteronormativity and radical forms of postmodern gender theory is unavoidable. If, however, we can carry Lonergan’s account of the complementarity of classical and statistical intelligibility into our understanding of metaphysical norms as they pertain to gender and sexuality, then the disjunct can be avoided. Lonergan’s metaphysics of statistical intelligibility allows us to recognize ontological norms that admit of non-systematic divergence within the very force of the norm. This intelligibility is characteristic both of the heteronormativity of human biology and of the constraint placed by that biology upon the emergence of cultural forms. We can say, anthropologically speaking, that alternative gender and sexual identities are a normal divergence from biological and cultural heteronormativity and so they are *included within* their normative force. Lonergan’s scale of values offers a way of distinguishing interlocking levels—vital, social, cultural, personal, and religious—at which this constraining norm can be felt and considered in the process of social and cultural making.

The above has been an article in metaphysical analysis and we have been careful to avoid transgressing into the area of ethical and moral determination any more than our heuristic structures demand, even where it may seem to some that the moral implications are obvious. We have remained content to underline a number of loci where communities and individuals can and do make such moral decisions while under the constraints of statistical heteronormativity. Nonetheless, we offered a single ethical judgment that we believe is prompted by the overall thrust of our analysis. In our view, *persons and cultures should take cognizance of and responsibility for the ways in which the constraint of statistical heteronormativity is likely to dominate unreflective*

*cultural making*. If we are right that alternative gender and sexual identities are marginal and normal at the same time, and moreover that the people embodying them are normally going to be a part of all cultural communities, even if always in marginal numbers, then there seems implied a moral opportunity to attentively, intelligently, reasonably, responsibly, and (with God’s help) lovingly generate social and cultural structures and roles that touch on gender and sexuality directly and the place of gender and sexuality in our communities. Part of being attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible on this matter demands that we do not allow the constraining force of statistical heteronormativity to operate blindly, but instead to make that force itself meaningful through reflection and discernment. We hope we have been able to provide some preliminary resources for that complex, delicate, and timely task.<sup>46</sup>

### Author Biographies

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