

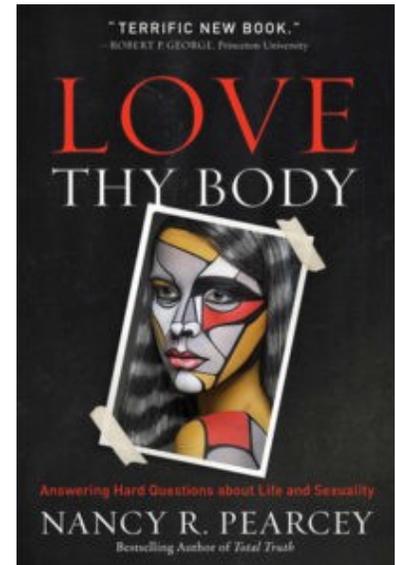
Love Thy Body: A Summary Review

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Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality is a robust and compelling cultural apologetics text. The scope is large dealing with a range of highly controversial subjects such as abortion and infanticide (chapter 2), euthanasia and embryonic stem cell research, animal rights, genetic engineering, transhumanism (chapter 3), sexuality and the “hook up culture” (chapter 4), homosexuality and same-sex lifestyles (chapter 5), transgenderism (chapter 6), and marriage and family (chapter 7).

Despite the immensity and magnitude of these topics, [Nancy Pearcey](#) does not promise an exhaustive treatment (what book could?) but instead exposes the primary weaknesses that lurk behind the secular worldview that drives them. My remarks highlight only some of the topics addressed.

The **Introduction and Chapter 1** establish the foundation for her argument and provide the apologetic footing that grounds the entire book. Those exposed to Pearcey’s previous work will find the familiar fact/value split or the [two-story framework](#) as first outlined by Francis Schaeffer. The dichotomy is used to reveal a wedge driven between what it means to be *a human being with a body* versus what it means to be *an embodied human person* with inherent value. In brief, the logic deployed by the secular worldview runs like this: 1) Values are not inherent in but conferred on material objects by persons. 2) The human body is a material object and distinct from a human person. 3) Therefore, the human body is a material object that has no inherent value. After all, “to be biologically human is a scientific *fact*. But to be a person is an ethical concept, defined by what we *value*.” Values are not facts; only facts can be known with certainty and conviction; therefore, what it means to be a person is detached from biology, is arbitrarily assigned by culture, and is not a given fact, or so goes the secular mindset. The result is a “fragmented, fractured, dualistic view of the human being” (p 19, emphasizes original). This two-story framework gives rise to the notion that the material makeup of the human is, at best, morally irrelevant or, at worst, denigrated and devalued. Pearcey argues that “if our bodies do not have inherent value, then a key part of our identity is devalued” and this “denigration of the body is the unspoken assumption driving secular views on euthanasia, sexuality, homosexuality, transgenderism, and a host of related issues” (p 20). Moreover, with the advocacy of Darwinian evolution and the rejection of design and purpose for the cosmos, Pearcey opines the pernicious effect of this ever-expanding wedge extends to the entire material universe.



Chapter 2 condemns the culture of death as portrayed by the abortion industry. Here, Pearcey unravels the pro-choice movement and levels some persuasive arguments against it. She exposes the feigned neutrality of the secular position, thus illustrating that it is not unbiased or wholly objective. The secular position

rests on a highly contentious, two-level view of human nature that involves a crassly utilitarian view of the body (lower story) along with a subjective, arbitrary definition of the person (upper story). Nothing neutral about that.

She keenly and rightly calls for transparency when it comes to exposing the presuppositions that uphold our views and deeply held convictions.

The problem is that worldviews do not come neatly labeled. No one says that bioethical controversies involve two conflicting views of human nature. Instead people fall back on stereotypical phrases—science versus religion, facts versus faith. When we hear that kind of language, we should press everyone to put their worldview cards on the table. Only then will there be genuinely free and open debate. (p 63)

In a surprising twist of irony, Pearcey contends “a culture that engages in abortion, infanticide, and sexual license is a culture that disrespects women.” Why? Because “to achieve higher goals of education and professionalism, women are required to suppress their fertility with birth control—to neuter themselves with toxic chemicals during their peak childbearing years” (p 74). While this may seem alarmist, she insists the data support her claim.

How then does one respond to a culture of death in abortion and respect women in society? By campaigning for cultural institutions to adapt to women’s desire to become mothers (through legislation?), rather than women having to adapt to those institutions designed to accommodate a single man’s pursuits.

A culture that respects women’s bodies will create more flexible career trajectories that allow women to have their families at the time that is biologically optimal. It will create education and work patterns that fit around family responsibilities. When we do that, we will reduce a major motive for abortion. (p 76)

Chapter 3 takes on euthanasia, among other ethical issues such as surrogacy, embryonic stem cell research, genetic engineering and the like. Pearcey’s thesis continues: Given a two-story view of what it means to be a human being (detaching the concept of personhood from biology), and given there is nothing standing outside humanity or the cosmos to give

material reality meaning, purpose, and value, then the human animal can do with human material whatever is expedient or financially beneficial. Dispose of, sell for profit, or mix in cells from other species with the human and what does it matter? There is no objective viewpoint from which to evaluate the morality of such actions and, therefore, no moral consequences to navigate. Nothing special, nothing sacred.

Pearcey concludes the chapter with some inspiring examples and practical solutions to combat a culture of death. They are well worth pondering and are sensibly practicable.

The “hookup” culture, or what I would dub promiscuous sex, is the subject of **chapter 4**. I found this especially alarming because “hooking up” so radically and poignantly expresses the body/person duality that is at the heart of the secular worldview. It’s clear upon reflection that without a solid line drawn between body and person, hooking up would be something more, something deeper. And yet, the hookup culture insists that emotional ties or personal commitments constitute an investment that goes well beyond the goal of merely having sex. Seemingly, the only values shared in a hookup culture are the pursuit of physical pleasure and consent. This naturally stems from a materialist view of human nature that insists “our bodies are products of purposeless, amoral Darwinian forces and therefore they are morally neutral” (p 121). “Have at it!” seems the attitude of those who hook up.

I was astonished to learn what occurs physiologically when two people hook up. Essentially, Pearcey insists that, despite one’s intentions to disassociate all emotional connections with a hookup partner, the sheer act of a sexual union entails making an unintentional “promise” with your body that necessarily involves emotions. She writes

even if you *think* you are having a no-strings-attached hookup, you are in reality creating a chemical bond—whether you mean it or not....Sex involves our bodies down to the level of our biochemistry....The main neurochemical responsible for the male response in intimate sexual contact is vasopressin. It is structurally similar to oxytocin and has a similar emotional effect. Scientists believe it stimulates bonding with a woman and with offspring. Vasopressin has been dubbed the monogamy molecule. (p 127)

“The Body Impolitic: How the Homosexual Narrative Demeans the Body” portrays the subject matter of **chapter 5**. Spring-boarding off Nietzsche’s slogan “facts do not exist, only interpretations,” Pearcey extends this philosophy to the current culture of homosexuality stating that “biological facts do not exist, only interpretations.” It follows that, if we interpret “our identity as persons ... with the freely choosing self,” then “anyone who experiences same-sex desires has discovered their authentic self, and they will be most fulfilled by openly affirming it as their true identity” (pp 165- 166).

Of the many problems about this “gay narrative,” Pearcey observes that far too much traction has been gained by sexual attraction. It’s as if our sexual desires define us as human beings. More importantly, the deeper issue is in promoting *choice* to the status of a god where the autonomous individual decides what is authentic and true. Where biology, tradition, or even culture may say otherwise, it is *choice* at the end of the day that rules and reigns one’s sexual identity.

Echoing noted author and pastor Tim Keller, Pearcey avers:

we do not get our identity simply from within. Rather, we receive some interpretive moral grid, lay it down over our various feelings and impulses, and sift them through it. This grid helps us decide which feelings are ‘me’ and would be expressed—and which are not and should not be....Humans are not self-creating, self-existent, self-defining beings. We all look to outside sources to inform us about who we are and how we should live. (p 168)

Although I agree with this reasoning, it should be noted that it is as a Christian theist that I am able to do so. The secular atheist or radical agnostic might not so readily agree. Seemingly, a preliminary belief set — reasonable belief in the existence of a God who has communicated moral standards on human sexuality — must first be in place before one can follow Pearcey’s conclusion. Still, given the existence of a God who is intimately involved in his creation and deeply cares about value, dignity, and sexual identity of his creatures, and given that our identity is to be interpreted through a biblically responsible worldview, this line of reasoning should resonate with many and be used to engage substantive discussions about human sexuality.

Chapter 6, “*Transgender, Transreality*” should be read in tandem with the previous chapter. The body/person duality motif continues, bringing to light postmodern culture and even laws now supporting the notion that a person can be born into the wrong body. Biological facts do not matter, birth certificate pronouncements are inconsequential, and traditional social boundaries are irrelevant when it comes to the autonomous choosing self who is solely authorized to declare one’s gender identity. The objective body is subordinate to and under the rule of the subjective subject. Gender is not “a fixed attribute but a free-floating variable that shifts according to personal preference” (p 201). Once again, choice has been promoted to godlike status; if individuals are empowered to choose gender, then they can equally change it.

Numerous (in my estimation, shocking) examples are given and won’t be rehearsed here. An apologetic strength in this chapter is the progression Pearcey traces in how we got to the contemporary trans narrative (see her [*Total Truth*](#) for a fuller treatment of this

progression). From biological evolution comes a cultural evolution where ideologies are ever-changing with no fixed truth or moral principles. In fact, there is no “stable, universal human nature.” The trans script heartedly insists

if you claim that any moral principle is congruent with nature, you are committing what [is called] the fallacy of “naturalizing.” It is a fallacy because...*no* morality is natural. All morality is a historical construct, a product of a particular culture at a particular period of history.

Postmodern theorists say their goal is to “de-naturalize” gender, which means to deny that it has any grounding nature. (p 206, emphasis original)

How does one respond? Pearcey offers much wisdom and grace. First, it should be pointed out that the trans script “undercuts itself.” If sexuality and gender are merely social constructs and there is no truth to be claimed here because it is ever-changing, then how can this claim itself be true? Second, in feigning high regard for women’s rights, those in favor of the trans script actually cut off their intellectual nose to spite their ideological face. After all, sex-based oppression presupposes the distinct gender and sexuality of women! “To protect women’s rights, we must be able to say what a woman is.” (p 211). One can hardly stand hard against that which is fluid and amorphous. Third, to “de-naturalize” parenting, replacing terms like “father” or “mother” with “parent” or the like, is to leave the status and definition of family to the state. Perhaps most astonishingly, “*no one* has a natural or biological sex now; *all* citizens are defined not by their bodies but by their inner states and feelings” (pp 210-214). It is to recognize legal rights as the sole rights with no regard for any natural rights. When this move is in full swing and adopted by societies, then, Pearcey warns, human rights are no longer “unalienable” but are at the whim of the state.

Many more implications are annotated in this chapter and should not be missed. The conclusion makes a brief appeal to all Christians to ensure “casualties from the sexual revolution can find hope and restoration,” rather than the often tragic responses (pp 225-227).

Following on in **chapter 7**, Pearcey makes some important pronouncements about the reductionist view of relationships as mere social contracts driven by choice, instead of using biology and commitment as a baseline for relationships. Leveraging biology with regards to adoption, she astutely notes that “the reason adoption works is that parents take the natural family as the norm. They strive to treat their adopted children *as if* they were biological offsprings. Adoption does not deny the value of biological bonds but presupposes it” (pp 229-230, emphasis original).

In a contractual view of relationships, choice and emotional commitment are what binds a connection between adults. Biology is irrelevant and even irreverent. Nature, and the biology that undergirds it in the ability to procreate, is a negative constraint on independence. The *Obergefell* decision of the Supreme Court essentially legitimized not only same-sex marriages but demotes all marriages to an emotional commitment with legal recognition. Therefore, the state defines marriage and detaches it from its natural element (viz., procreation).

One alarming and ironic implication, Pearcey argues, is that “every forward movement of the secular moral revolution is hailed as an advance for freedom from the oppressive moral rules of the past. But in reality, every step empowers the state” (p 254). Consider: with abortion, the state defines personhood. With marriage, it is the state that severs it from biology and re-defines marriage. With gender, it is the state that is increasingly declaring gender to be a state of mind. With parenthood, the state gets to decide who qualifies. And the irony is that “the concept of contract is sold to the public as a way of expanding choice. But in reality it cuts us off from natural, created [and pro-creative] relationships and hands over power to the state” (p 255).

Before offering some sober and important solutions, Pearcey nails the gist of the problem and it’s not the state or politics. It is competing worldviews.

In every decision we make, we are affirming a worldview. We may think we are just acting on our feelings of the moment, but in reality we are expressing our conditions about the cosmos. Either we are expressing a biblical worldview or we are being co-opted by a secular worldview. The secular moral revolution is built on the conviction that nature has no moral meaning, and that we are inherently disconnected, autonomous atoms connecting only by choice. (p 256)

One of the main strengths of *Love Thy Body* is Pearcey’s utilization of reason and analysis to make her case *rather than* Scripture. To be sure, her case is a biblical one, but she does not use the inspired text as a hammer or the only tool in her toolbox. Instead, her thesis is grounded in a vigorous philosophical system first introduced to her through the [L’Abri Fellowship](#) and its founder, Francis Schaeffer. She has honed and refined his framework and made it her life’s work to bring those Schaefferian constructs and presuppositions that have proven to withstand the strongest opponents. Too often, Christians’ only weapon of choice is Scripture when in fact many or most unbelievers have not even adopted a belief in the existence of the God of Scripture, much less one who has spoken! It is my hope that believers will see the value of reason and research, analysis and critique, and choose to fight fire with fire (so to speak). Unbelievers must be met on their own turf to win an ear for dialog and

encourage a heart of understanding. Pearcey's book is a tremendous resource to these ends.

I'll conclude by saying that *Love Thy Body* provides a rigorous analysis of secularization and the resulting secularism of Western culture. Nancy Pearcey takes on some of the most vexed and disputed topics of our day and she masterfully and convincingly defends the inherent dignity and value of all. The book is well-documented with a helpful study guide that would be ideal for small group discussions. It is my hope that it will be read not only by likeminded people, but especially by those who are *not* in agreement. Here there is no hurling of rhetoric or thoughtless polemics so often present in these controversial topics. Instead, her thesis is well-reasoned and her work deserves careful consideration. Sincere learners may not come away persuaded by everything, but rest assured they will come away informed!