

PAUL'S ARGUMENT FROM NATURE FOR THE VEIL IN 1 CORINTHIANS 11:13–15: A TESTICLE INSTEAD OF A HEAD COVERING

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Paul's notorious argument in 1 Cor 11:2–16 for the veiling of women in public worship is frequently criticized for being logically convoluted and confused.¹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza expresses the scholarly assessment of Paul's argument:

We are no longer able to decide with certainty which behavior Paul criticizes and which custom he means to introduce in 1 Cor 11:2–16. Traditionally, exegetes have conjectured that Paul was insisting that the pneumatic women leaders wear the veil according to Jewish custom. Yet, v. 15 maintains that women have their hair instead of a *head-covering* (περιβολαίου), and thus militates against such an interpretation. In a very convoluted argument, which can no longer be unraveled completely, Paul adduces several points for “this custom” or hair fashion.²

¹ This article interprets Paul's argument from nature in 1 Cor 11:13–15 against the background of ancient physiology. The Greek and Roman medical texts provide useful information for interpreting not only Paul's letters but also other NT texts. For other studies that utilize these sources for NT exegesis, see my article “Whose Flesh? What Temptation? (Gal 4.13–14),” *JSNT* 74 (1999): 65–91, and my forthcoming article “Paul's Pneumatological Statements and Ancient Medical Texts.” See also Annette Weissenrieder, “The Plague of Uncleaness? The Ancient Illness Construct ‘Issue of Blood’ in Luke 8:43–48,” in *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. Wolfgang Stegemann, Bruce J. Malina, and Gerd Theissen; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 207–22, and her 2001 Heidelberg dissertation, “Krank in Gesellschaft: Krankheitskonstrukte im Lukas-Evangelium auf dem Hintergrund antiker medizinischer Texte,” which is forthcoming in English from Mohr-Siebeck. Dr. Weissenrieder and I are currently working on a multivolume work entitled *Ancient Medical Texts and the New Testament*, the purpose of which is to make these texts and their exegetical significance more widely known in the field of NT studies.

² Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 227–28.

Similarly, Victor Paul Furnish comments:

There is no doubt that Paul also means to provide a theological basis for his instructions about the hairstyle of women who pray or prophesy, but in this case his argument is obscure, at least to modern interpreters, and it may well have seemed unsatisfactory even to the apostle himself. At any rate, in the end he abandons argument altogether by suggesting that if his directives are not followed the Corinthians will be departing from the convention that obtains in other congregations (v. 16).³

Describing Paul's argument as "bewilderingly difficult," Marion L. Soards states, "One hopes that the Corinthians had an easier time following Paul's logic than do modern readers."⁴ One may hope, but the scholarly assessment is that neither the Corinthians nor possibly even Paul himself completely comprehended this argument for the veiling of women.

While many features of this argument in 1 Cor 11:2–16 require explanation, the argument from nature in vv. 13–15 is particularly problematic.⁵ The rationale for the natural shame of a man with long hair is obscure (vv. 14–15a). Especially problematic is the statement that a woman's long hair is given to her instead of a covering (ἀντὶ περιβολαίου) in v. 15b. As traditionally understood, this statement nullifies the previous argument that a woman should wear a covering since her long hair apparently serves that purpose. A satisfactory explanation of this argument from nature should resolve the apparent contradiction and enable this argument to support Paul's contention that women should wear the veil in public worship.

The term περιβόλαιον in v. 15b provides the key for explaining this argument from nature. This portion of the verse is usually translated, "For her hair is given to her instead of a covering (περιβολαίου)." In an influential article, Othoniel Motta argues that περιβόλαιον here means some type of head covering. Paul Ellingworth and Howard Hatton explain, "The word translated *covering* is a general word for a garment, possibly one used as an outer covering. Although it does not specify any particular piece of clothing, there seems to be an obvious relation between this verse and the discussion in verses 4 and 5 about a covering for the head."⁶ Even though these scholars have identified the

³ Victor Paul Furnish, *The Theology of the First Letter to the Corinthians* (New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 77.

⁴ Marion L. Soards, *1 Corinthians* (NIBCNT; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 221, 224.

⁵ For an analysis of the entire argument, see Troy W. Martin, "Veiled Exhortations Regarding the Veil: Ethos as the Controlling Factor in Moral Persuasion (1 Cor 11:2-16)," forthcoming in the collection of papers from the 2002 Heidelberg Rhetoric Conference.

⁶ Othoniel Motta, "The Question of the Unveiled Woman (1 Co. 11.2:16)," *ExpTim* 44 (1933): 139–41; Paul Ellingworth and Howard Hatton, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians* (Helps for Translators; London: United Bible Societies, 1985), 221.

dominant semantic domain of this word, the term περιβόλαιον has a much broader semantic range.

Since περιβόλαιον is contrasted with hair, which is part of the body, the physiological semantic domain of περιβόλαιον in 1 Cor 11:15b becomes particularly relevant. Euripides (*Herc fur* 1269) uses περιβόλαιον in reference to a body part. He casts Hercules as complaining, “After I received [my] bags of flesh, which are the outward signs of puberty, [I received] labors about which I [shall] undertake to say what is necessary” (ἐπεὶ δὲ σαρκὸς περιβόλαι’ ἐκτησάμην ἠβώντα, μόχθους οὖς ἔτην τί δεῖ λέγειν). A dynamic translation of the first clause would be: “After I received my testicles (περιβόλαια), which are the outward signs of puberty.” In this text from Euripides, the term περιβόλαιον refers to a testicle.⁷

Achilles Tatius (*Leuc. Clit* 1.15.2) plays on this meaning of περιβόλαιον in his erotic description of a garden in which Clitophon seeks an amorous encounter with Leucippe. Achilles Tatius describes the entwining of the flowers, embracings of the leaves, and intercourses of the fruits (αἱ τῶν πετάλων περιπλοκαί, τῶν φύλλων περιβολαί, τῶν καρπῶν συμπλοκαί). He portrays this erotic garden by allusions to male and female sexual organs. The term περιπλοκαί alludes to the female hair, the term περιβολαί to the testicles in males, and the term συμπλοκαί to the mixing of male and female reproductive fluid in the female. Achilles Tatius’s description of this garden associates female hair and the testicle in males.⁸

Ancient medical conceptions confirm this association. Hippocratic authors hold that hair is hollow and grows primarily from either male or female reproductive fluid or semen flowing into it and congealing (Hippocrates, *Nat puer* 20).⁹ Since hollow body parts create a vacuum and attract fluid, hair attracts semen. Appropriately, the term κόμη refers not only to hair but also to the arms or suckers of the cuttlefish (see Maximus of Tyre, *Phil* 4.5). Hair grows most prolifically from the head because the brain is the place where the semen is

⁷ Words in the semantic domain of clothing also occur in the semantic domain of body parts. For example, the Hippocratic author of *Fleashes* (Hippocrates, *Carn* 3) likens membranes to tunics (χιτώνας). Some may interpret Euripides’ statement as referring to the scrotum, but the plural περιβόλαια more likely refers to the testicles rather than the scrotum (οσχρη), which is singular. Furthermore, the scrotum is visible from birth, whereas the testicles enlarge and become pronounced at puberty.

⁸ For other texts that describe erotic gardens, see *Erotica Antiqua Acta of the International Conference on the Ancient Novel* (ed B P Reardon, Bangor ICAN, 1977), 34–35.

⁹ Émile Littré, *Oeuvres complètes d’Hippocrate* (10 vols., Paris J B Baillière, 1839–61, repr., Amsterdam, 1961–62), 7 506 23–7 510 17. For a summary of the Hippocratic and Aristotelian conceptions of hair, see Lesley Dean-Jones, *Women’s Bodies in Classical Greek Science* (Oxford Clarendon, 1994), 83–85.

produced or at least stored (Hippocrates, *Genit.* 1).¹⁰ Hair grows only on the head of prepubescent humans because semen is stored in the brain and the channels of the body have not yet become large enough for reproductive fluid to travel throughout the body (Hippocrates, *Nat. puer.* 20; *Genit.* 2).¹¹ At puberty, secondary hair growth in the pubic area marks the movement of reproductive fluid from the brain to the rest of the body (Hippocrates, *Nat. puer.* 20; *Genit.* 1).¹² Women have less body hair not only because they have less semen but also because their colder bodies do not froth the semen throughout their bodies but reduce semen evaporation at the ends of their hair (Hippocrates, *Nat. puer.* 20).¹³

According to these medical authors, men have more hair because they have more semen and their hotter bodies froth this semen more readily throughout their whole bodies (Hippocrates, *Nat. puer.* 20). The nature (φύσις) of men is to release or eject the semen.¹⁴ During intercourse, semen has to fill all the hollow hairs on its way from the male brain to the genital area (Aristotle, *Probl.* 893b.10–17). Thus, men have hair growth on their face, chest, and stomach. A man with hair on his back reverses the usual position of intercourse. A man with long hair retains much or all of his semen, and his long hollow hair draws the semen toward his head area but away from his genital area, where it should be ejected. Therefore, 1 Cor 11:14 correctly states that it is a shame for a man to have long hair since the male nature (φύσις) is to eject rather than retain semen.

In contrast, the nature (φύσις) of women is to draw up the semen and con-

¹⁰ Hippocrates himself may have held a different view, for Galen (*Definitiones medicae* 439) states, “The seed is secreted, as Plato and Diocles say, from the brain and the spinal marrow, but Praxagoras, Democritus, and Hippocrates too, [say that it is secreted] from the whole of the body” (translated by Philip J. van der Eijk, *Diocles of Carystus: A Collection of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary*, vol. 1, *Text and Translation* [Ancient Studies in Medicine 22; Leiden: Brill, 2000], 85). Aristotle (*Gen. an.* 783b.38–784a.4) affirms the brain as the origin of the reproductive fluid.

¹¹ The author of *Airs, Waters, Places* (Hippocrates, *Aer.* 22) states that cutting the vein behind each ear renders a man impotent. This statement assumes that this cutting severs the connection between the brain and the genitals. See also Hippocrates, *Genit.* 2 and *Loc. hom.* 3.

¹² J. Chadwick and W. N. Mann translate the latter, “This [reproductive] fluid is diffused from the brain into the loins and the whole body, but in particular into the spinal marrow: for passages extend into this from the whole body, which enable the fluid to pass to and from the spinal marrow. Once the sperm has entered the spinal marrow it passes in its course through the veins along the kidneys. . . . From the kidneys it passes via the testicles into the penis” (*Hippocratic Writings* [New York: Penguin Books, 1978], 317–18). See also Aristotle, *Gen. an.* 728b.27–29.

¹³ For texts illustrating the ancient debate of whether women’s bodies were colder or hotter than men’s, see Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 230–31.

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Gen. an.* 730a.33–730b.2; 739a.37–739b.3; 765b.7–15; Soranus, *Gyn.* 1.8 (33).

geal it into a fetus (Hippocrates, *Genit.* 5; *Nat. puer.* 12).¹⁵ A woman's body is simply one huge gland, and the function of glands is to absorb (Hippocrates, *Gland.* 3).¹⁶ The author of *Glands* writes:

In women the substance of the glands is very rarefied [ἀραιή-loose textured], just like the rest of their bodies. . . . The male is close-pressed like a thick carpet both in appearance and to the touch. The female, on the other hand, is rarefied [ἀραιόν-loose textured] and porous [χαῦνον] like a flock of wool in appearance and to the touch: it follows that this rarefied and soft tissue does not reject moisture. (Hippocrates, *Gland.* 16)¹⁷

Earlier, this author describes glands with these same descriptive adjectives and likens the glands to wool (*Gland.* 1). Just as loose-textured, porous glands absorb, so also the loose-textured, porous body of a woman absorbs.

This author also writes that glands and hair fulfill similar bodily functions. Just as glands absorb the excess bodily fluid that flows to them, so also hair collects the excess, frothed fluid that rises to the surface (Hippocrates, *Gland.* 4). What glands do within the body, hair does on the surface of the body. As one large gland designed to absorb male reproductive fluid, a woman's body is assisted by long hollow hair that increases the suction power of her hollow uterus (Aristotle, *Gen. an.* 739a.37–739b.20). Consequently, another author, Pseudo-Phocylides, appropriately states, “Long hair is not fit for males, but for voluptuous women” (ἄρσεσιν οὐκ ἐπέοικε κομᾶν, χλιδαναῖς δὲ γυναιξίν) (212).¹⁸

This conception of hair as part of the female genitalia explains the favorite Hippocratic test for sterility in women.¹⁹ A doctor places a scented suppository in a woman's uterus and examines her mouth the next day to see if he can smell

¹⁵ See also Aristotle, *Gen. an.* 739b.1–20; 765b.15–16; and Soranus, *Gyn.* 1.8 (33); 1.14 (46); 1.10 (36); 1.12 (43); and 3.13 (47).

¹⁶ See also Dean-Jones, *Women's Bodies*, 56. Soranus (*Gyn.* 1.9 [34–35]) states that a woman's uterus is similar to her whole body. In selecting a female capable of conception, he recommends looking “for a woman whose whole body as well as her uterus is in a normal state. For just as no poor land brings seeds and plants to perfection, but through its own badness even destroys the virtues of the plants and seeds, so the female bodies which are in an abnormal state do not lay hold of the seed ejected into them, but by their own badness compel the latter also to sicken or even to perish” (trans. Owsei Temkin, *Soranus' Gynecology* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956], 34).

¹⁷ Paul Potter, *Hippocrates Volume VIII* (LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 124–25.

¹⁸ P. W. van der Horst, “Pseudo-Phocylides: A New Translation and Introduction,” in *OTP* 2:581.

¹⁹ See Hippocrates, *Aph.* 5.59; Aristotle, *Gen. an.* 747a. Soranus (*Gyn.* 1.9 [35]) rejects the validity of this test not because he rejects the theory on which it is based but because he conceives of “certain invisible ducts” that can conduct the scent upward without being able to conduct the reproductive fluid, which has a greater viscosity.

the scent of the suppository. If he smells the scent, he diagnoses her as fertile. If he does not smell the scent, he concludes she is sterile because the channels connecting her uterus to her head are blocked. The suction power of her hair cannot draw up the semen through the appropriate channels in her body. The male seed is therefore discharged rather than retained, and the woman cannot conceive.

Aristophanes (*Eccl.* 523–24) plays on this Hippocratic test in the scene where Blepyrus accuses his wife Praxagora of sexual unfaithfulness during her clandestine early-morning excursion. She denies the accusation and invites Blepyrus to test her fidelity by smelling her head to see if she smells of the sweet odor of semen from her head (εἰ τῆ κεφαλῇ ὄζω μύρου).²⁰ Blepyrus doubts the veracity of the test by inferring that a woman can engage in intercourse without scent. Praxagora's response admits that some women can have intercourse without the scent of semen from the head but she cannot. Of course, an infertile woman could because the scent of semen would not be drawn to her head but a fertile woman could not. Fertile women who engage in illicit intercourse eat garlic to mask the scent (Aristophanes, *Thesm.* 492–94). Praxagora affirms both her fertility and her fidelity by inviting Blepyrus to smell her head.²¹

This conception of hair as part of the female genitalia also explains one of Soranus's signs of conception. He uses the adjective φρικώδης to describe the

²⁰ Stephen Halliwell translates Praxagora's test as "Why, smell my hair for trace of scent," and Blepyrus's response as "What? Can't a woman be fucked without some scent?" (Aristophanes: *Birds, Lysistrata, Assembly-Women, Wealth: A New Verse Translation with Introductions and Notes* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1997], 173). Aristophanes (*Lys.* 937–47) plays on the double meaning of μύρον as the scent of perfume and of semen in the exchange between Myrrhine and Kinesias, who is pressuring her to satisfy his erection. She stalls by claiming that they need perfume (μύρον) and asks, "Do you wish that I should perfume (μυρίσω) you?" He protests with an oath since he should perfume her in the act of intercourse rather than the other way around. He then interjects, "O that the perfume (μύρον), Master Zeus, might stream out!" Of course, Kinesias refers to his desired ejaculation. Finally, he curses the man who first refined (ἐψήσας) perfume (μύρον). The verb ἔψω means to boil and refers to the bodily function of frothing bodily fluids. Hence, it often means to nurse, for milk is frothed blood. Semen is also frothed blood, and this verb refers both to the refining of perfume with fire and to the frothing of semen in the male body. Throughout the exchange, therefore, Aristophanes plays on the double meaning of μύρον as both perfume and semen. See also Plato (*Resp.* 398a), who stipulates that an effeminate bard (*Resp.* 395d) be sent away from the ideal city after having myrrh poured down his head and after being crowned with fillets of wool. Both of these actions symbolize the effeminateness of the bard.

²¹ R. G. Ussher explains this test from the common practice of a woman's perfuming before intercourse (Aristophanes *Ecclesiazusae: Edited with Introduction and Commentary* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973], 148). Perfuming, however, explains neither Praxagora's confidence in the test nor her invitation to smell her head rather than other parts of her body that would have been perfumed. In contrast, the Hippocratic test explains both of these features of the scene.

sensation a woman feels when she conceives after coitus (*Gyn.* 1.12).²² Owsei Temkin translates that she is conscious of “a shivering sensation,” while James Ricci explains that she “feels erection of the hair on the skin.”²³ Soranus's connection of conception with the physiological experience of a chill often accompanied by erection of hair on the skin relates the hair to a woman's reproductive processes, and one Hippocratic author recommends that a woman neither bathe nor get her hair wet after coitus if she wants to retain the semen (Hippocrates, *Mul.* 1.11).²⁴

This conception of hair probably explains the frequent depilation of women's pubic hair.²⁵ Although sometimes inflicted on male adulterers, depilation of the pubes is common among Greco-Roman women and enhances their attractiveness to males.²⁶ Plucking, singeing, and applying caustic resins are the means of removing the hair, but singeing is the most effective in enhancing fertility.²⁷ In Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* (13), Praxagora praises the lamp for singeing the flowering hair. Vase paintings depict women engaged in singeing the pubes, and to infiltrate secretly the Thesmophoria and appear as a woman, Mnesilochus submits to the depilation of his pubes by singeing.²⁸ Bettina Eva Stumpp surmises that the practice originally served a hygienic and then an aesthetic purpose before becoming the dominant fashion.²⁹ Depilation serves a

²² See also Hippocrates, *Carn.* 19.

²³ Temkin, *Soranus' Gynecology*, 43; James V. Ricci, *The Genealogy of Gynaecology: History of the Development of Gynaecology throughout the Ages 2000 B.C.–1800 A.D.* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Blakiston Company, 1950), 118. The role of the woman is to cool the hot male semen and congeal it into a fetus. The sensation of a chill, therefore, indicates that conception has occurred. Since erection of body hair is a physiological response to a chill, Ricci appropriately identifies this response as one of Soranus's signs of conception and appropriately indicates that hair plays an important role in the female reproductive system.

²⁴ See Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 237–38.

²⁵ See W. A. Krenkel, “Me tua forma capit,” *WZ Rostock* 33, no. 9 (1984): 72–75; K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality: Updated and with a New Postscript* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 105–6, 117; Ussher, *Aristophanes*, 73; Bettina Eva Stumpp, *Prostitution in der römischen Antike* (Antike in der Moderne; 2nd ed.; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998), 106–7; and Gerd Hagenow, “Kosmetische Extravaganzen (Martial Epigramm III. 74),” *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* n.F. 115 (1972): 48–59.

²⁶ For depilation as the punishment for adulterous males, see Aristophanes, *Nub.* 1083. N. M. Kay comments, “Depilation of the pubic area of males is not commonly attested” (*Ausonius: Epigrams: Text with Introduction and Commentary* [London: Duckworth, 2001], 261). He notes, however, that Ausonius “deals with the subject of male depilation being an indication of passive homosexuality” (p. 260). For male attraction to a depilated feminine pudendum, see Halliwell, who explains, “The practice was meant to please male preferences for visible, youthful pudenda” (*Aristophanes*, 268). See also Stumpp, *Prostitution*, 107.

²⁷ Krenkel, “Me tua forma capit,” 74–75.

²⁸ J. D. Beazley, *Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1942), 218; Aristophanes, *Thes.* 216, 236–48.

²⁹ Stumpp, *Prostitution*, 106.

hygienic purpose by removing the pubic hair and destroying its power to draw reproductive fluid to the genital area. In contrast to plucking the hair, singeing seals the opening in the hair and more effectively removes the suction power of the pubes. Thus, depilation of the pubes and especially depilation by singeing enhances female fertility by removing the pubic counterforce to the upward draw of the hair on the head, and postmenopausal women cease or should cease depilating the pubes (Martial, *Epigram* 10.90).

Finally, this conception of hair explains why prepubescent girls were not required to wear the veil whereas adult women were. Before puberty, a girl's hair is not a functioning genital and does not differ from a boy's hair. After puberty, however, this situation changes. Tertullian draws an analogy between prepubescent children and Adam and Eve, who were naked before they became aware of genital differentiation. Afterwards though, Tertullian notes, "They each marked the intelligence of their own sex by a covering" (*Virg.* 11 [ANF 4:34]). Noting the growth of the pubes to cover the female pudendum, Tertullian exhorts, "Let her whose lower parts are not bare have her upper likewise covered" (*Virg.* 12 [ANF 4:35]). Tertullian's analogy and exhortation presume that hair becomes a functioning part of a young woman's genitalia at puberty similar to the way testicles begin functioning at puberty as part of the male genitalia in facilitating the dissemination of semen.³⁰ Prepubescent girls, therefore, need not cover their hair, but pubescent young women should, and Tertullian recommends that the extent of the veil be "co-extensive with the space covered by the hair when unbound" (*Virg.* 17 [ANF 4:37]).

The masculine functional counterpart to long feminine hair, then, is the testicle.³¹ Aristotle calls the male testicles weights that keep the seminal chan-

³⁰ In contrast to pubescent girls, who began to cover their hair, pubescent boys cut their hair as a rite of passage. In his life of Theseus, Plutarch describes a custom at Delphi of youths' sacrificing their hair when they reach puberty (*Theos.* 5.1; Bernadotte Perrin, *Plutarch's Lives with an English Translation by Bernadotte Perrin* [LCL; 11 vols.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967], 1.11). He writes, "Since it was still a custom at that time for youth who were coming of age to go to Delphi and sacrifice some of their hair to the god, Theseus went to Delphi for this purpose." The custom evidently involved the shaving of the head, because Theseus only shaved the front part of his head, and his action was considered so unusual that this hairstyle or tonsure became known as *Theseis*. The physiological reason Theseus shaved only the front part of his head is that the brain, which produces and stores the semen, is located there. See Aristotle, *Gen. an.* 783b.38–784a.4). This rite probably had several meanings. From a physiological perspective, however, the hair that had attracted the reproductive fluid upward before puberty is shaved as the testicles develop and begin to attract this fluid downward in pubescent boys.

³¹ The Greek term ὄρχις refers both to male testicles and female ovaries. However, ancient medical science did not ascribe a corresponding reproductive function to testicles and ovaries. The testicles served as receptacles for reproductive fluid and performed the final frothing to transmit the heat that carried the form of the individual. The Hippocratics, however, do not ascribe such a function to ovaries. Their flat shape was not conducive to attracting reproductive fluid. Dean-Jones

nels taut (*Gen. an.* 717a.30–717b.5). Their function is to facilitate the drawing of semen downward so it can be ejected. Without them, the seminal channels draw up inside the body, and the male becomes unable to dispense semen into the female. The female is not given such weights but instead develops a hollow uterus and appropriate vessels to draw the semen upward (*Gen. an.* 739a.37–739b.20).³² Thus, testicles do not develop at puberty for females as they do for males. Long feminine hair assists the uterus in drawing semen upward and inward; masculine testicles, which are connected to the brain by two channels, facilitate the drawing of semen downward and outward (Hippocrates, *Loc. hom.* 3). Long hair is a glory for the female φύσις but a shame for the male φύσις as Paul correctly states in 1 Cor 11:14–15a.

This ancient physiological conception of hair indicates that Paul's argument from nature in 1 Cor 11:13–15 contrasts long hair in women with testicles in men. Paul states that appropriate to her nature, a woman is not given an external testicle (περιβόλαιον, 1 Cor 11:15b) but rather hair instead. Paul states that long hollow hair on a woman's head is her glory (δόξα, 1 Cor 11:15) because it enhances her female φύσις, which is to draw in and retain semen. Since female hair is part of the female genitalia, Paul asks the Corinthians to judge for themselves whether it is proper for a woman to display her genitalia when praying to God (1 Cor 11:13).

Informed by the Jewish tradition, which strictly forbids display of genitalia when engaged in God's service, Paul's argument from nature cogently supports a woman's covering her head when praying or prophesying. In Isa 6:2, the seraphim who participate in the divine liturgy have six wings. Two are for flying, two cover the face for reverence, and two cover the feet for modesty. The term feet euphemistically refers to the genitals of the seraphim.³³ The priests in Yahweh's service receive special instructions for approaching the altar so that their nakedness is not exposed (Exod 20:26). As a further precaution when entering

comments, "Nor did they [the Hippocratics] feel it necessary to discover a female analogy to the testicles. In both sexes, they believed that the seed was drawn either from all over the body at the time of conception or from a reservoir in the head. Although both sexes supplied seed it was accepted without question that they differed in reproductive anatomy. Moreover, the Hippocratics were not compiling an anatomy for its own sake and their models of disease and procreation in women worked well for them without having to invoke two small organs which had only been seen in quadrupeds and whose function was not immediately apparent" (*Women's Bodies*, 68).

³² The Hippocratic author of *Ancient Medicine* (Hippocrates, *Vet. med.* 22) describes the shape of the uterus as designed for the attraction of fluids. See Dean-Jones, *Women's Bodies*, 65–67. Soranus lists one of the initial signs of conception as the lack of moisture in the vagina because "the whole of the moisture [reproductive fluid] <or> its greater part having been directed upward" (see Temkin, *Soranus' Gynecology*, 43–44).

³³ Marvin H. Pope, "Bible, Euphemism and Dysphemism in the," *ABD* 1:721. See Ronald A. Veenker, "Forbidden Fruit: Ancient Near Eastern Sexual Metaphors," *HUCA* 70–71 (1999–2000): 57–73.

the tent of meeting or approaching the altar, these priests wear “linen breeches from the loins to the thighs to cover their naked flesh” (Exod 28:42–43 RSV). Again, “flesh,” a euphemism, refers to the genitals (Lev 15:2, 19; Ezek 16:26; 23:20). These breeches are for the glory and beauty of the priest (Exod 28:40), while exposure of the genitals subjects the priest to guilt and death (Exod 28:43).

Informed by this tradition, Paul appropriately instructs women in the service of God to cover their hair since it is part of the female genitalia. According to Paul’s argument, women may pray or prophesy in public worship along with men but only when both are *decently* attired.³⁴ Even though no contemporary person would agree with the physiological conceptions informing Paul’s argument from nature for the veiling of women, everyone would agree with his conclusion prohibiting the display of genitalia in public worship. Since the physiological conceptions of the body have changed, however, no physiological reason remains for continuing the practice of covering women’s heads in public worship, and many Christian communities reasonably abandon this practice.

Confusing a testicle with a head covering will render even the deftest of arguments “convoluted” and prevent anyone from being “able to decide with certainty which behavior” the argument reproaches or recommends. The problem with Paul’s argument from nature for the veiling of women in public worship arises not from Paul’s convoluted logic or flawed argumentation but from the philological confusion of modern interpreters who fail to understand the ancient physiological conception of hair (κόμη) and confuse a testicle (περιβόλαιον) with a head covering. Ancient philology and physiology demonstrate that both Paul and the Corinthians probably comprehended quite well this cogent argument from nature for the veiling of women.

³⁴ Thus, Annie Jaubert, among others, argues that the covering signified decency and honor rather than subordination (“Le voile des femmes [I Cor. XI.2-16],” *NTS* 18 [1971–72]: 425–28), but see Troels Engberg-Pedersen, “1 Corinthians 11:16 and the Character of Pauline Exhortation,” *JBL* 110 (1991): 681–82 n. 9.



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