

Genders as Historical Explanatory Kinds

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What is it to be a man? A woman? A member of some 'third gender'? Though ultimately embracing a pluralist approach to human gender, in this talk I explore the virtues of a deeply historical account of gender categories and kinds. (This account is analogous to a historical account of the animal sexes that I recently defended.) On this view, gender is understood in terms of the origins of gendered groupings, origins delineated without appeal to gender-typical characteristics. I will suggest that, so understood, gender can be explanatory of the weak patterns in gender difference we see in human societies today, while still embracing the radical differences in gender traits found both within and across cultures. The latter openness to diversity is possible in light of the fact that gender, as I will describe it (and in contrast to other going accounts), is neither tied to 1) particular properties of men, women, etc. (whether intrinsic or relational), nor to 2) features of gender systems which were selected for in the past (either via cultural or biological selection).