

Reflecting upon gender. Neurotypes.

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Gender, traditionally understood through the lens of binary biological distinctions, has undergone a profound re-evaluation in contemporary philosophical theory, and politics. This essay is a philosophical exploration of gender, challenging the conventional paradigms and proposing a redefinition that will attempt to cover the complexities of identity, biology, and social constructs. While many have looked at gender as hard categories, this investigation reveals it as a fluid and multifaceted phenomenon, influenced by a myriad of factors beyond mere anatomy.

The prevailing notion of gender has long been critiqued by scholars and activists alike for its failure to encapsulate the diverse experiences of individuals across the spectrum of society. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity disrupts the idea of gender as a fixed attribute, suggesting instead that it is an ongoing act of performance influenced by societal norms and expectations. Sally Haslanger questions the concept by examining the socio-political forces that shape our understanding of gender categories, advocating for a critical approach that recognizes gender as a component of broader power dynamics.

However, as we delve deeper into the philosophical propositions of gender, it becomes apparent that the traditional labels of 'male' and 'female' are not only insufficient but are also restrictive. This essay argues for a paradigm shift towards viewing gender through the framework of biological diversity, personal identity, and social roles, proposing a model that aims to be both inclusive and reflective of individual experiences.

As we proceed, this paper will explore the contributions of various philosophers and theorists who have already improved our under-

standing of gender, drawing from the works of Katharine Jenkins, Mary Harrington, and Martha Nussbaum, among others. Each offers a unique but evolving perspective on the intersections of gender with culture, biology, and politics, providing a rich soup of ideas from which to construct a more nuanced understanding.

By giving a new definition of gender, we not only challenge the existing narratives that have long dominated the discourse, but also (attempt to) open up a space for more inclusive, direct and empathetic understandings. I believe, it is through this philosophical inquiry that we can begin to dismantle the rigid structures that constrain our understanding of identity, and embrace a more dynamic view of what it means to exist with a gender in the modern world.

Historical research

In attempting to understand what it means to be a gendered person, it is useful to understand the ground work laid out by different authors over time. Historically, the concept of gender has been tightly interwoven with social roles and biological characteristics, forming a basis for differentiation that often prescribes rather than describes human experience.

Gender as power dynamics, Sally Haslanger

Sally Haslanger argues that gender and race are not just biologically determined but profoundly shaped by social mechanisms and power relations. Her work provides a robust framework for examining gender and race as socially constructed concepts that are intricately linked to power dynamics. She argues that these categories are not naturally occurring but are imposed by societal structures that define and sustain power disparities (*Haslanger, 2000*).

Gender is a category that society uses to organize itself; it is imbued with social significance that dictates the distribution of rights, roles, and resources. This framework compels us to question not just the validity of traditional gender roles but also their origins and utility. She urges for a redefinition of gender that does not merely adjust to existing norms but challenges the very frameworks that maintain inequality and oppression.

Haslanger's critical approach emphasizes the role of societal structures in perpetuating gender categories that reinforce inequalities.

She calls for a redefinition of these categories to expose and dismantle the underlying mechanisms of oppression.

However, one might argue that Haslanger's framework, while revolutionary and important at a political level, sometimes overlooks the individual identity and the internal sense of gender that can diverge significantly from societal categorizations. Her focus on broad social structures, necessary for her analysis, might not fully capture the personal and often complex experience of gender as lived by individuals.

Addressing individuality, Katharine Jenkins

Responding to Haslanger, Katharine Jenkins proposes an ameliorative (i.e. attempt to improve) approach that seeks to redefine gender categories to better serve the individuals they describe (*Jenkins*, 2016). Jenkins argues that definitions of gender should not only be inclusive but also sensitive to how individuals understand and express their own identities. Her framework emphasizes the importance of self-identification, advocating for a conceptualization of gender that accommodates personal experiences and challenges exclusionary practices.

Jenkins critiques Haslanger's model for its potential to enforce rigid categorizations that fail to acknowledge the fluidity and self-determined aspects of gender. She suggests that an effective analysis of gender must consider both the social implications of categorization and the personal dimensions of gender identity. By doing so, Jenkins' approach provides a complementary perspective to Haslanger's, focusing more on the micro-level experiences that can sometimes be overshadowed by macro-level analyses.

Together, they provide a comprehensive view of gender as both a social construct influenced by power structures, and a personal identity shaped by individual experiences. This dual perspective helps create a richer, more nuanced understanding of gender that can inform more effective and empathetic approaches to issues of equality and identity politics.

That said, while these frameworks are great at describing the current existence of the conventional genders, and are able to separate the individual context from the political one; they are not really radical. By that, I'm attempting to say that they do not really attempt to explain why these genders come into existence, and what leads a

person to exist on either of these planes, nor do they directly offer any solutions: just critiques.

Performative gender, Judith Butler

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity provides a critical response to the existing frameworks of the time. Butler argues that gender is not a stable identity rooted in nature or a mere social construct, but instead an ongoing performance that emerges through repetitive actions within specific regulatory frames. Their theory rejects the notion of gender as an innate quality or a fixed social role, presenting it instead as fluid and continuously constructed through discourse and practice.

With this, they suggest that gender is performed through a series of acts and desires that are governed by social norms and expectations (*Butler, 2006*). It is important to note that this performance is not a voluntary action but a subconscious reiteration of norms which pre-exist the individual. By understanding gender as performative, Butler challenges the binary and essentialist view of gender, suggesting that the rigid categories of 'male' and 'female' are effects of a cultural discourse which seeks to maintain heteronormative power.

Following, they suggest that the binary model of gender limits individuals within preconceived social scripts, which can lead to the exclusion and marginalization of those who do not conform to these norms. By reconceptualizing gender as an open-ended performance, we can instead have a framework that accommodates a wider diversity of identities and experiences.

Butler's theory doesn't only critique the societal structures which enforce rigid gender norms, but also empowers individuals to challenge these norms through performative acts that disrupt traditional gender expectations. Their approach encourages a critical examination of how gender is materially and discursively constructed, offering potential pathways for resistance and social transformation. As we will get back to later, awareness of one's condition is useful in order to break its mold.

Against progress, Mary Harrington

While previous discussions on Butler and Jenkins propose an expanded and fluid understanding of gender, through several interview discussions, Harrington offers a contrasting perspective that

critiques these modern feminist ideologies for potentially undermining social cohesion and the biological realities of human existence. Harrington argues that the detachment of gender identity from biological sex can lead to a disconnection from embodied experience, which is fundamental to human existence. She is concerned that the emphasis on gender fluidity and rejection of binary categories might compromise societal structures that have historically supported individual and communal well-being.

Harrington's viewpoint argues against the idea of gender fluidity, suggesting that such perspectives might neglect the importance of biological and psychological consistencies that underpin humans and humanity. However, this view oversimplifies the complex nature of identity, which, as argued by Jenkins, is not merely a social or biological construct but a multifaceted phenomenon deeply intertwined with personal perception and societal influence.

To integrate Harrington's criticisms into a broader philosophical debate on gender, it is essential to question the underlying assumptions of her argument. Does her critique hold if we consider gender not just as a social or biological construct but as a neurotype, as proposed in this essay? A large part of her argument depends on the person's bodily conditions, in which case it seems reasonable to include all the given constraints, not only the ones which suits her argument.

Moreover, Harrington's conservative and regressive perspective claims that the modern woke culture is disrupting her own necessities, desires and expectations. However, by framing gender fluidity through the lens of neurodiversity, we can address her concerns about social cohesion by advocating for policies and societal adjustments that recognize and accommodate the diversity of everyone, without undermining the social fabric of any one demand.

Thus, while Harrington's critique of contemporary gender theory raises concerns about the disconnect between biological realities and identity gender, her arguments do prompt a deeper examination on how we can integrate an acknowledgment of the bodily and mindful conditions we are born with into our understanding of gender.

Transhumanism

The author also talks about transhumanism, a movement she perceives as supporting the separation of the modern gender from their biological realities. Transhumanism parallels the efforts to redefine gender beyond biological constraints, she says.

Harrington argues that the transhumanist agenda aligns disturbingly well with certain feminist theories that promote a disconnection from our biological nature. This conspiracy promotes a view of the body as merely a vessel that can be altered at will, mirroring the fluidity otherwise cheered upon by performative gender ideologies. She believes that such perspectives are likely to contribute to a societal drift towards seeing human bodies and identities as customizable properties, detached from the inherent biological or psychological truths which she defends.

According to her, this detachment risks leading to a society where traditional human values and relationships are increasingly disregarded in favor of a more mechanistic and isolated existence. Following her argument, the push towards viewing the body as a malleable object is likely to also lead to broader social and ethical consequences, both in terms of issues of class differences, but also perjoratively defying the very essence of what it means to be human.

Harrington also reflects on the psychological toll that these ideologies may have on individuals. The pressure to conform to an ideal of fluid identity, as promoted by both transhumanism and certain feminist ideologies, will contribute to existential unease and discontent. This, she argues, is because these ideals can conflict with the ingrained human need for stable and coherent identities, leading individuals to feel disconnected from their own bodies and societal roles.

Exploring transhumanism, Abigail Thorn

In contrast to Mary Harrington's conservative and backwards-moving views on the implications of modern feminist ideologies and transhumanism, Abigail Thorn offers a forward-thinking perspective in her video essay on transhumanism (Thorn, 2022). Thorn discusses the philosophical and ethical implications of using technology to transcend human limitations, advocating that human beings can and should use technology to overcome our biological and genetic boundaries to enhance our capabilities and fundamentally alter our nature.

Thorn characterizes transhumanism as a natural extension of human evolution, an idea that supports a profound shift in understanding human identity and capabilities. She opposes the idea that transhumanism is a radical departure from humanism; instead, she presents it as an evolution of human ideals which we've been en-

gaging in since the dawn of time: the strive for improvement, the overcoming of disease, the pursuit for making our lives easier. She acknowledges the modern ethical dilemmas, such as equity and access to enhancements, but also highlights the potential benefits, including extended health spans and enhanced mental capacities.

She argues that embracing transhumanist technologies can lead to new forms of expression and ways of being, allowing us to rethink the constraints imposed by nature and society. This aligns with the framework of gender we have in mind, where we break down the individual's desires and natural conditions, which may be in conflict. This view leads to a more inclusive, diverse, and adaptable human experience. Agreeing with Thorn, we can conclude that technology should enhance, not detract from, our humanity.

In summary, Thorn advocates for a balanced approach to transhumanism, urging thoughtful consideration of both its benefits and challenges. This balanced perspective encourages the use of technological advances paired with ethical considerations to ensure that enhancements are used responsibly and to the benefit of all, not just a privileged few.

Moving on from the past

As it appears to me, Harrington's views seem to reflect a nostalgia for what she perceives as a more stable past where traditional gender roles were more clearly defined and seemingly unchallenged. This perspective assumes that such roles inherently provided balance and stability within society, and were a natural part of the human body—and, given her response to transhumanism, how it's intended to be—.

As explained by Thorn, exploring ethical enhancements of the self can often make people happier, closer to the exclusive desires of the self, and eventually make society more diverse. Allowing people to live their lives without pain and submission, as we'll see through Nussbaum, is a priority.

This approach allows for a critique of Harrington's idealization of the past, which overlooks the substantial inequities and hardships faced by those who did (and do) not fit neatly into the prescribed roles. Transhumanism, as discussed by Thorn, offers a future where technology can be leveraged to address these inequities, providing individuals with the tools to define their identities and capabilities in ways that align with their true selves, rather than being confined by the rigid expectations of traditional societal structures.

Capabilities Approach, Martha Nussbaum

Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach demands that a just and fair society should enable all its members to cultivate their inherent potential through the access to essential opportunities such as education, health care, and political participation (Nussbaum, 2011). This ethical framework can be applied to transhumanism, which advocates for using technology to break the physical and cognitive limitations imposed by nature.

By definition, if a human could desirably enhance their own abilities through the means of technology, given the right set of social circumstances, this is necessarily part of their potential. By aligning transhumanist goals with Nussbaum's principles, we can advocate for the ethical use of technology to extend human capabilities in a way that promotes social justice and equality.

Capitalism, as critiqued from a capabilities perspective, entirely fails to distribute resources in a manner that allows for the universal maximization of human capabilities. Inherent to the system, the profits of capitalism will be wielded by the few elite, which is by definition not fair. In the chance that this system generates more profit overall, improving the well-being of the median person—which I tend to disagree with—we still have the issue of agency and freedom.

Under capitalist constraints, individuals often adjust their desires and goals to what is realistically achievable within their socioeconomic context—a phenomenon Nussbaum identifies as “adaptive preferences”. This adaptation tends to obfuscate deeper injustices and lead individuals to accept less fulfilling lives than they might aspire to under fairer conditions. This notion is one that many liberals (and most libertarians, if not all) overlook when talking about freedom of choice. In the context of transhumanism, this is likely to mean offering up the sanity of your own body (and mind) for the sake of your own survival. Traditionally we would exemplify this problem through participation in undesired (and often abusive) sex work, exploitative (a modern-society capitalistic euphemism for accepted slavery) work conditions, or the submission of the self towards your expected social role in marriage. In terms of transhumanism, we must consider and predict the forecoming issues, even if we can lamentably already observe the phenomenon in terms of reproductive labour and experimental drug testing.

To counteract the limitations imposed by capitalism, Nussbaum advocates for reforms which would ensure equitable access to capability-

enhancing technologies. This involves restructuring societal priorities to focus on human development and well-being rather than mere economic growth. Policies must be enacted that guarantee all citizens—not just the wealthy—can benefit from advancements in medical, educational, and technological fields. Such reforms would challenge the status quo by addressing the root causes of inequality and enabling a more dynamic conception of human capabilities.

For reference, the framework proposed by Nussbaum identifies a list of ten capabilities which are essential for a person to live a life of dignity and freedom: ▶ life, ▶ bodily health, ▶ bodily integrity, ▶ sense, imagination and thought, ▶ emotions, ▶ practical reason, ▶ affiliation, ▶ other species, and ▶ control over one's material and political environment.

Tying it together

By interpreting the ideas laid above, we can highlight that understanding oneself and one's social context is not just beneficial, but also essential for exercising true agency. For instance, Nussbaum's emphasis on practical reason and affiliation remarks the importance of being able to form a conception of what is good (for oneself) and engage in critical reflection about one's own life planning.

The capacity to decide about one's life is deeply connected to the ability to understand and articulate one's identity, as previously argued by Katharine Jenkins and Judith Butler. Jenkins, with her ameliorative inquiry into the category of individually perceived gender, makes it a point that giving a static definition of gender should serve the practical purpose of enhancing the lives of those it describes. This requires not only recognizing one's identity within the prevailing social norms but also understanding the implications of these norms for personal autonomy and social inclusion.

Judith Butler's notion of performativity further expands on this idea by suggesting that gender is not an innate attribute, but an ongoing performance shaped by social norms and individual actions. According to Butler, the performance itself benefits from recognizing and understanding the norms we navigate. That is, without this awareness, individuals may find themselves unawaresly playing their roles without the ability to question, and much less change them, thereby limiting their agency. Failing to understand how one's identity appears to be, how their actions often are self-constraining, and how they're blind to hidden options all lead to the same path of circular

viciousness.

Therefore, it is critical to foster capabilities which allow individuals not only to access information and education but also to critically analyze and understand their identities within their specific cultural and historical contexts. This is where Nussbaum's framework intersects effectively with Butler's and Jenkins' thoughts. Nussbaum argues for a society that enables individuals to critically examine their own desires and aspirations against the pressures of their societal conditioning, which she describes as essential for leading a life one has reason to value.

Looking back at Nussbaum's activism, it's important to remember that it's not sufficient to make the life-improving platforms and ideas available, but also accessible. Awareness of what choices one has available is as important as having them merely exist.

In this light, the next section of the essay will explore how moving beyond traditional gender labels, and considering alternative frameworks like neurotypes, can provide a more nuanced and effective way of understanding identity and fostering agency. This approach not only challenges restrictive societal norms but also highlights the diverse ways in which individuals experience and express their identities. By broadening our perspective on what constitutes gender and how it is experienced, while simultaneously shifting the focus from the victims towards the aggressors, and specifically seeking out the source of harassment, oppression and conditioning, I believe we will eventually see a common light.

Gender as a neurotype

The conventional ways of defining gender—whether through strict biological determinism or as mutable social roles—restrict our understanding and fail to accommodate the varied realities of individual lives. By embracing a framework that views gender as a multifaceted and ever-evolving aspect of identity, we open the door to greater freedom and validation for all individuals. This perspective acknowledges that gender is not merely an attribute one is born with, but is something one actively defines, reflects upon, and continually refines throughout life. This approach allows individuals to adapt and evolve their understanding of gender based on their experiences and perceptions.

Katharine Jenkins introduces a nuanced approach to gender by dis-

tinguishing between political and individual gender. She argues that understanding these distinctions is crucial for discourse and for addressing the specific needs and rights of individuals. Her political gender addresses the structural and systemic power dynamics that categorize genders into oppressors and the oppressed at the political level, often dictating access to resources and opportunities; but fails to mention how gender roles, which are practically inevitable, lay the grounds for adaptive preferences where the oppressed may knowingly or carelessly move against against their own benefit.

In contrast, individual gender is a deeply personal experience and perception of one's own identity, which may or may not align with societal expectations or biological attributes. While Jenkins touches upon individual gender, further exploration is needed to understand its complexity fully. As the suggestion of this framework, individual gender can be conceptualized as a neurotype—a unique wiring of the brain that affects how one identifies and expresses gender—. This idea suggests that, much like personality traits and cognitive styles, gender expression is diverse and intrinsically linked to neurological patterns. Recognizing gender as a neurotype allows for a more personalized understanding of identity, highlighting the diversity within gender experiences without forcing individuals into predefined, few and limiting categories.

Recognizing gender as a neurotype also has useful and important implications for social inclusion and policy-making. It urges a shift from classic one-size-fits-all approaches in legal, medical, and social services to more personalized approaches which respect and respond to the unique aspects of each individual's requirements. Furthermore, it hints at the idea that generalizations are often wrong, and that people have different strengths and weaknesses. Policies would need to be flexible enough to accommodate a spectrum of gender identities, providing the necessary support and resources that allow all individuals to thrive without discrimination or prejudice.

Treating gender as a static and prescriptive term seems to only inhibit freedom, benefitting only the few which are close enough to the platonic mold of the gender. Attempting to find a generalized descriptive definition which is meant to unionize all people of the gender group seems to always leave someone outside. Instead, it is probably more useful to look at specific attributes of the person, understand how those attributes affect their lives, and treat the harassment and oppression which people are affected by—which I argue has nothing to do with gender, directly, but rather about

privilege and power—, in a direct manner.

This expanded view of gender, incorporating both Jenkins's distinctions and the concept of neurotypes, enriches our understanding of identity and agency. It challenges us to consider not only the social and biological conditionings of gender but also its personal and neurological dimensions. By broadening and splitting our perspective on what constitutes gender and how it is experienced, we hopefully move toward a more inclusive and empathetic understanding that respects the unique experiences of all individuals. This approach not only aligns with the capabilities framework advocated by Martha Nussbaum but also paves the way for policies that reflect and accommodate the diversity of human experiences.

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