**Godman, Marion. *The Epistemology and Morality of Human Kinds*, Routledge, 2021. 124pp. $64.95 (hbk), ISBN 9781138724303.**

**Word count:** 1237

Marion Godman’s *The Epistemology and Morality of Human Kinds*—the first monograph of an otherwise well-published author—is a concise but rich essay that contributes to recent work at the intersections of social ontology, social science, and the philosophy of science by developing an account of human kinds as historical kinds.

Other than brief introductory and concluding chapters, Godman’s book comes in two parts. In chapters 2–4, she argues for understanding some categories of human classification as objectively real kinds, the members of which share many features in virtue of their shared causal lineages – that is, their shared chains of (biological or cultural) reproduction. To make this argument, chapter 2 introduces the idea of “natural kinds,” which for Godman are characterized by multiple projectable properties rooted in a common cause. That is, if we ascertain that an individual belongs to some natural kind, that allows us to infer many of its properties (even if only probabilistically), and to expect the future discovery of even more shared properties. For example, by learning that an animal is a horse we may infer many of its features not included in our way of picking it out, in contrast with merely nominal labels (i.e., not natural kinds) such as “white horse.”

In the particularly dense chapter 3, Godman argues against six alternative approaches to human kinds, contending that none of them secure multiple projectable properties. Fodor argues that kinds in the special sciences are multiply realizable; Godman objects that the lack of causally unifying factors involved in multiple realizability precludes many property inferences in instances. Searle views the properties of human kinds as dependent on what people think about those kinds (“collective recognition”); Godman objects that many legitimate kind properties (e.g., the suicide rate of medical doctors) exhibit no such dependence. Guala’s game-theoretical approach analyzing human kinds in terms of stable equilibria of people’s preferences and strategies turns out to have the very same weakness. Boyd describes human kinds as property clusters sustained by homeostatic causal structures; Godman objects that some homeostatic property clusters (like “white horse”) fail to ground multiple projectable properties – something more is needed. Hacking’s treatment of the ways human attitudes and other institutional and cultural factors might shape a kind (“looping effect”) and Mallon’s “naturalist social constructivism” involving the emergence of human kinds from psychological representations and environmental factors are criticized for the same reason: they identify disparate proximate conditions influencing human kinds, but lack a unified causal explanation for their many projectable properties.

Chapter 4 develops the idea that viewing human kinds as historical kinds individuated by their causal reproductive lineages allows for common cause explanations of their many shared properties, and thereby grounds multiple projectability.

In chapters 5–7, Godman applies her historical kind account to paradigm cases of human kinds and shows how her account allows for their normative significance. She argues that genders, religions, and ethnicities should be construed as the results of historical lineages, where the reproductive links are often more cultural – i.e., social learning – than biological. An implication of this proposal is that cross-cultural kinds such as “woman” and “religion” are rejected on account of lacking a share lineage, while their culture-bound instances are seen as being rich in potential for explanation and projectable properties. Chapter 7 illustrates the emergence of group rights for historical kinds by a case study of the looping cultural effects of “scientific” eugenics on an ethnic group’s self-understanding.

There is much to commend in *The Epistemology and Morality of Human Kinds*. Its defense of the historical kind account develops several original arguments, and the chapters applying it are thought provoking and feature illuminating examples. It engages throughout with prior proposals similar to its own (Millikan, Bach). It also exemplifies fruitful interdisciplinarity, shedding light on social ontology using ideas from the philosophy of science. The author demonstrates remarkable familiarity with up-to-date literature in both fields. Though challenging for the uninitiated, the book might serve sufficiently motivated readers well as an introduction into the debates concerning human kinds.

Nevertheless, Godman’s book is not without its flaws. In the following, I briefly raise five points of criticism. First, frankly, the book should have been longer. Though the text is mostly clear, the arguments often feel condensed. In addition, some points could have been delivered more forcefully were there space for more illustrations and consideration of putative counterexamples. For example, Godman says that ethnic kinds capture geographical origins (pp. 78f), but one wonders how well this fits some historically nomadic ethnic groups such as the Roma.

Second, the latter half of the book could have been structured more clearly. These chapters address gender, culture (including religion), and the moral standing of some historical human kinds, illustrated by an ethnic group. But why these and why in that order? Godman seems to be building an argument for the applicability of her proposal for social science and politics, but the line of thought throughout these chapters is less than clear. Stylistic inconsistencies also appear: the argument for gender as historical is framed as “a plea for reclassification” (p. 58), while the nearly equally radical rejection of a cross-cultural notion of religion is barely emphasized.

Third, moving on to substantive concerns, Godman’s account of the individuation of historical kinds (pp. 51–55) leaves important questions unanswered. Historical kinds are individuated, we are told, by their causal lineages. But one can conceive of lineages with different degrees of specificity or breadth. Only siblings share the *exact* same lineage; according to current evolutionary thought, all mammals—and indeed all organisms—share *some*. The book fails to address whether shared lineages of *any* specificity are sufficient for constituting historical kinds, or whether there is a uniquely salient construal of lineage. This seems to be a serious, though not necessarily irremediable, defect.

Fourth, it is unclear whether the argument for the moral standing of historical kinds in chapter 7 is what it claims to be. After showing in great detail how past harms inflicted on a group of people may be sustained for generations by cultural processes, Godman claims to “make… arguments to the conclusion that membership in a historical kind… does grant a special moral standing for individuals of the group” (p. 90). What she does instead is claim that once one grants with many political philosophers that oppressed and marginalized groups have special rights, construing those groups as historical kinds helps in developing membership criteria for them: “membership in a historical kind provides a natural way to substantiate the necessary historical relation that underpins the rights of a group” (p. 92). The point is plausible, but the chapter contains little properly normative argumentation.

Fifth and finally, Godman’s sustained argument for the historical kind account calls for a complementary cost–benefit analysis. She rejects any cross-cultural identification of gender and religion kinds (pp. 63–68, 73), because these (ostensibly) lack common causes and therefore do not allow for multiple projectability. But the author intends her analysis to serve social science, and such rejection would seem to undermine a significant portion of it given that psychologists, sociologists, and archeologists (to name just a few disciplines) often seek to pronounce truths involving cross-cultural notions of gender and religion. What Godman nowhere addresses is why multiple projectability is more important than preserving the legitimacy of these social scientific projects.

These criticisms notwithstanding, Godman’s monograph is an insightful and novel contribution to multiple current discussions that repays careful study.