

**ARTICLE**

# The metaphysics of social kinds

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**Abstract**

It is a truism that humans are social animals. Thus, it is no surprise that we understand the world, each other, and ourselves in terms of social kinds such as *money and marriage, war and women, capitalists and cartels, races, recessions, and refugees*. Social kinds condition our expectations, inform our preferences, and guide our behavior. Despite the prevalence and importance of social kinds, philosophy has historically devoted relatively little attention to them. With few exceptions, philosophers have given pride of place to the kinds studied by the natural sciences, especially physics. However, philosophical interest in social kinds is growing in recent years. I critically examine answers to a cluster of related questions concerning the metaphysics of social kinds. Are social kinds natural kinds? Do social kinds have essences? Are social kinds mind dependent? Are social kinds real?

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

It is a truism that humans are social animals. Thus, it is no surprise that we understand the world, each other, and ourselves in terms of social kinds such as money and marriage, war and women, capitalists and cartels, races, recessions, and refugees. Social kinds condition our expectations, inform our preferences, and guide our behavior. Despite the prevalence and importance of social kinds, philosophy has historically devoted relatively little attention to them. With few exceptions, philosophers have given pride of place to the kinds studied by the natural sciences, especially physics. However, philosophical interest in social kinds is growing in recent years. In what follows, I critically examine answers to a cluster of related questions concerning the metaphysics of social kinds. Are social kinds natural kinds? Do social kinds have essences? Are social kinds mind-dependent? Are social kinds real?

Prior to addressing these questions, however, it is important to get clear on our subject matter. In what follows, my focus will be on social *kinds*. It is commonplace in the social ontology literature to focus on social facts rather than social kinds.<sup>1</sup> However, if facts are worldly rather than linguistic or conceptual—that is, if facts are composed of worldly rather than representational entities—then we can reconcile talk of social facts with my focus on social kinds by noting that many social facts have social kinds as constituents (e.g., the fact that bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing are money contains the social kind money as a constituent).<sup>2</sup>

Next, what should we make of the idea that some kinds are *social kinds*? Little attention has been explicitly paid to this question in the social ontology literature. Sally Haslanger suggests that a kind is social if the conditions for kind membership involve social properties and relations, or if social phenomena cause instances of the kind to

exist (Haslanger 1995, 97–98).<sup>3</sup> Another possibility is that a kind is social if it depends on collective intentions or other attitudes for its existence or nature. Alternatively, it might be argued that a kind is social if it is the result of cooperative or coordinated behavior among individuals, whether or not that behavior is caused by mental states that are collective in nature. Finally, it might be argued there is no metaphysical distinction between social and nonsocial kinds because social kinds can be understood entirely in individualistic terms.<sup>4</sup> In what follows, I remain neutral on what (if anything) makes a kind distinctively social.<sup>5</sup> Instead, I work from paradigm cases, such as those mentioned in the opening paragraph above.

Here is the plan for the remainder of the paper. In Section 2, I address the question of whether some social kinds are natural kinds. I argue that common ways of drawing a distinction between social kinds and natural kinds are flawed. Moreover, on some views of natural kinds, many social kinds qualify as natural in the relevant sense. In Section 3, I consider whether social kinds have essences. I argue that the thesis that social kinds have essences is no more controversial than the thesis that paradigmatically natural kinds have essences. In Section 4, I assess the thesis that social kinds are mind-dependent, and therefore unreal. I argue that social kinds do not depend on our mental states in any way that entails antirealism.<sup>6</sup>

## 2 | ARE SOCIAL KINDS NATURAL KINDS?

In the social ontology literature, social kinds like money and marriage are often contrasted with so-called natural kinds like tigers and titanium. This contrast presupposes that social kinds are not natural kinds. However, a clear distinction between social and natural kinds is difficult to draw.

It is obvious that social kinds are not found “in nature” so to speak. That is, looking out into the untouched wilderness, we find things such as water, lithium, and tigers, but not cartels, elections, or hipsters. Money, for example, is not something that we discovered. It does not—as they say—grow on trees. However, many paradigmatically natural kinds are not found “in nature” either. Consider synthetically produced chemical compounds like polyethylene and PTFE (Teflon).<sup>7</sup> These chemical kinds are not discovered in the wilderness as one might discover water on Mars; rather, they are created by human beings. Nonetheless, polyethylene and PTFE are natural kinds. Like other chemical compounds, polyethylene and PTFE are microstructurally individuated, and their microstructural properties explain and reliably predict the superficial properties and behavior of their instances.

Moreover, social kinds do not contrast with natural kinds in the sense that the former are supernatural. Social kinds are not like ghosts or telekinesis. They do not exist in a spooky realm located outside of the natural universe. Social kinds, like the human beings who create them, are occupants of the natural world, and are subject to the same physical laws that govern the behavior of everything from planets to protons.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, social kinds are susceptible to empirical investigation. Indeed, they form the subject matter of a wide variety of scientific disciplines including sociology, anthropology, history, economics, and psychology.

Finally, social kinds do not contrast with natural kinds in the sense that they are unnatural. A kind, *K*, is unnatural in this sense if *K* is defined by properties that are gerrymandered or stipulated in an arbitrary way.<sup>9</sup> However, it is not the case that social kinds are defined by gerrymandered properties that are stipulated arbitrarily. For example, we cannot stipulate that money is defined by the properties of being blue before time, *t*, and being two miles from Lake Michigan. To the contrary, what it is to be money is to be a commonly used medium of exchange, and a measure and store of value. These properties give the identity or nature of that kind; as such, any kind that is defined by different properties is not money.

Although we might have referred to a kind with a different nature by using the term “money,” this does not establish that the nature of the kind we actually refer to by that term is stipulated arbitrarily. By designating certain properties by a social kind term (e.g., “money”), we no more determine the nature of the corresponding social kind than we do by designating certain microstructural properties (e.g., being H<sub>2</sub>O) by a chemical kind term (e.g., “water”).<sup>10</sup> Thus,

although it is true that we determine (perhaps stipulatively) which kind is referred to by the term “money,” we do not stipulate what it is to be money. Similar considerations extend to other social kinds as well.

Moreover, it is plausible that many social kinds are natural kinds in the following sense: they license inductive inferences, give rise to reliable predictions, warrant empirical generalizations, and feature in fruitful explanations.<sup>11</sup> On this view, natural kinds are identified by certain epistemic features which are thought to be evidence of the world's causal structure. If natural kinds are those kinds which enable us to successfully predict and explain phenomena, there is reason to believe that many social kinds are natural kinds.<sup>12</sup>

For instance, the fact that some individuals live in poverty, or are women, enables us to explain various properties that they instantiate, and allows us to predict that other members of these kinds are likely to instantiate those properties as well. For example, children who live in poverty are more likely to do poorly in school than children who live above the poverty line, and women are more likely to be victims of sexual violence and domestic abuse than men. Moreover, we can make a variety of empirically grounded generalizations about members of these kinds. For example, individuals living in poverty have a lower life-expectancy than individuals who are not poor, and women earn less than men in the workforce. Finally, these categories are explanatorily fruitful. The fact that a child lives in poverty explains why her educational outcomes are stunted, and the fact that some individuals are women (in conjunction with discriminatory attitudes towards them) explains why they earn less than equally-well-qualified men.

However, it is likely that there is no uniform answer to the question of whether social kinds are natural kinds. It is likely that some social kinds are natural kinds, and others are not. But social kinds are not unique in this respect. For example, the disjunctively-defined chemical category *jade* is not a natural kind. Nor is the biological kind *aquatic animal*. Physical kinds can also fail to be natural in the relevant sense. Suppose that a blicket is the kind individuated by the property of being a quark or a lepton. Because both quarks and leptons are physical kinds, presumably blickets are as well. However, the former are natural kinds, whereas the latter is not.

Finally, it is likely that some social kinds are more natural than others, and that, in general, social kinds are less natural than many biological, chemical, and physical kinds. On an epistemic conception of natural kinds, naturalness is gradable along several dimensions. A kind is more or less natural given the strength of the inductive inferences it licenses, the reliability of the predictions to which it gives rise, the fruitfulness of the explanations in which it figures, and the extent to which the generalizations concerning kind members must be hedged by *ceteris paribus* clauses.<sup>13</sup> Thus, some social kinds are more natural than others given that they enable stronger inductive inferences, more reliable predictions, and so forth, but are less natural than those chemical and physical kinds that have greater inductive strength, predictive reliability, and so forth.<sup>14</sup>

### 3 | DO SOCIAL KINDS HAVE ESSENCES?

The doctrine of essentialism has something of a bad reputation in the recent metaphysical literature, especially with respect to social kinds like race and gender. Although it is commonly thought that social kinds lack essential properties, I will argue that this view is justified by a mistaken understanding of essentialism.

First, the claim that social kinds like race and gender have essential properties should not be confused with the claim that those kinds have biological essences (Witt 1995). The thesis that a kind has essential properties is not equivalent to the thesis that a kind's essential properties are biological properties. Indeed, essentialism is separable from a variety of other more specific theses with which it has been historically associated.

Essential properties provide the criteria for classifying entities into kinds. In other words, kinds are individuated by their essential properties. The essential properties of a kind, K, specify what it is to be K. That is, the being or nature of a kind is given by its essential properties. Consider money. The essential properties of money are the properties of being a commonly used medium of exchange, and being a measure and store of value. These properties specify what it is to be money. The properties of being a commonly used medium of exchange, and being a measure and store of value are obviously not biological properties, but they are essential to money nonetheless.

Nor do the essential properties of a kind need to be intrinsic properties.<sup>15</sup> For example, the properties of being a commonly-used medium of exchange, and being a measure and store of value are not intrinsic properties. Rather, money, like many other social kinds, has a relational essence. In general, although the essential properties of some kinds are intrinsic, it is not the case that a property, *F*, is an essential property only if *F* is an intrinsic property.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, the essential properties of a kind need not be given in terms of properties that are necessary and sufficient for being the kinds in question. Rather, kinds can be individuated by clusters of properties that are contingently but reliably coinstantiated because they are held in homeostasis by one or more causal mechanisms.<sup>17</sup> On this account, an individual can be a member of a kind, *K*, without instantiating all of the properties in the cluster of properties in terms of which *K* is defined.

However, it might be argued that, with respect to gender in particular, essentialism is untenable on the grounds that there are no properties that are shared by all women as women (and all men as men). To the contrary, what it is to be a man or a woman varies over time, across cultures, and even within a single culture (Spelman 1988).<sup>18</sup> The problem is that no matter how gender categories are defined, they will always illegitimately exclude some individuals from belonging to them; there is nothing that all *prima facie* women have in common. As such, there are no properties in terms of which the category can be defined. However, this line of reasoning can be reconciled with essentialism in a variety of ways.

First, one might argue if there is nothing that it is to be a man or a woman—if there are no gender-relevant properties that purported members of those categories share—then there are no such things. In other words, if there are no properties that are common to all women *qua* women, and all men *qua* men, then those kinds do not exist, and gender terms fail to refer to anything. Second, one might argue that there are many different kinds of women and many different kinds of men (and perhaps many other gender categories as well). On this view, there is a plurality of gender categories, each defined by different properties, and gender terms are systematically ambiguous. Third, one might argue that gender categories can be defined in terms of a suitably abstract property that is compatible with the fact that kind members differ greatly with respect to their beliefs, values, social roles, bodily features, and so forth.<sup>19</sup> The first proposal is tantamount to gender eliminativism; the second and third proposals are versions of gender essentialism.<sup>20</sup>

Given these considerations, there is no obvious reason to deny that social kinds have essential properties. If a kind, *K*, exists, then there is something that it is to be *K*. Moreover, the properties that specify what it is to be *K* are the essential properties of that kind. This is so whether the kind in question is social, psychological, biological, chemical, or physical, and so forth.

#### 4 | ARE SOCIAL KINDS MIND-DEPENDENT? ARE SOCIAL KINDS REAL?

The idea that social kinds are mind-dependent is pervasive in the social ontology literature.<sup>21</sup> So too is the thesis that social kinds are not real. Indeed, it is frequently asserted that if a kind, *K*, is mind-dependent, then *K* is not real. Thus, the thesis that social kinds depend on our mental states is thought to entail anti-realism with respect to them.<sup>22</sup> The conjunction of mind-dependence and antirealism about social kinds is not surprising given that antirealism is typically defined in terms of mind-dependence.<sup>23</sup> In what follows, I argue that however the real/unreal distinction is understood, social kinds do not depend on our mental states in any way that suggests that their ontological status is compromised.<sup>24</sup>

The word “real” is used by philosophers to mark a variety of distinctions. Sometimes, it is used to distinguish between existent and non-existent entities. But those who defend the view that social kinds are not real do not argue that social entities are non-existent. To the contrary, they maintain that our discourse about them is truth apt. For instance, it is literally true that some things are money (e.g., bills issued by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing) and some things are not (e.g., soggy leaves). Rather, proponents of the thesis that social kinds are not real argue that those kinds exist, but that their ontological status is somehow diminished.<sup>25</sup>

Another possible interpretation of philosophers' use of the word "real" corresponds to the idea of fundamentality: Entities are real only if they are metaphysically fundamental (Fine 2001). However, like all social kinds, the vast majority of biological, chemical, and physical kinds are not metaphysically fundamental either.<sup>26</sup> And yet, those who defend antirealism about social kinds do not argue that such things as gold and electrons are not real. Rather, they maintain that physical, chemical, and biological kinds are real, but deny that social kinds enjoy the same ontological status.

Other times, the word "real" is used to distinguish between mind-independent and mind-dependent entities: On this interpretation, what it is to be a real kind is to be a mind-independent kind, and what it is to be an unreal kind is to be a mind-dependent kind. But this flies in the face of the antirealist's contention that social kinds are not real in virtue of being mind-dependent. Dependence claims of this sort are typically understood to be asymmetrical (Audi 2012). If the fact that A obtains in virtue of the fact that B, it is not the case that the fact that B obtains in virtue of the fact that A. However, if what it is to be unreal is to be mind-dependent, the relation that obtains between the fact that K is mind-dependent and the fact that K is unreal is symmetrical—they are the same facts, differently described. Moreover, defining antirealism in terms of mind-dependence potentially renders mental states unreal. However, it should be possible to affirm antirealism with respect to some domain of entities without thereby committing oneself to antirealism about the mind (indeed, Searle holds such view).

Finally, one might take the term "real" to mean "natural" and argue that social kinds are not real in the sense that they are not natural kinds. However, as I argued in Section 2, it is not obvious that social kinds fail to be natural in the relevant sense. Although social kinds are not found "in nature," neither are many chemical and biological kinds (e.g., polyethylene and labradoodles). Moreover, social kinds are neither supernatural nor unnatural. Finally, many social kinds have the epistemic features characteristic of natural kinds: They have predictive and explanatory value (examples of such kinds include money, poverty, and women).

It is often taken to be obvious that social kinds are mind-dependent because it is a truism that social kinds would not exist in mindless world. In other words, social kinds exist only if some mental states exist. But it does not follow from the fact that a kind, K, exists only if some mental states exist that K is mind-dependent. To see this, suppose that there is a thinking being that exists necessarily. Further, suppose that this being is utterly powerless. The being did not create the universe or any parts of it; rather, it simply exists in addition to everything else, and exists necessarily.<sup>27</sup> Now, consider a physical kind such as protons. The existence of protons does not depend on any mental states; protons are a paradigmatically mind-independent kind. However, because the thinking being exists in every possible world in which protons exist, protons exist only if some mental states exist. Thus, it follows that protons are mind-dependent. But protons are not mind-dependent. So, the fact that some kind, K, exists only if some mental states exist does not establish that K is mind-dependent.<sup>28</sup>

However, it might be argued that social kinds are such that their existence is not merely modally correlated with the existence of mental states; rather, social kinds are such that their nature requires the existence of some mental states. On this proposal, social kinds are mind-dependent in the following sense: the essential properties of social kinds are such that they are instantiated only if some mental states exist.

This way of characterizing mind-dependence is stronger than mere modal correlation. Moreover, it is plausible that social kinds depend on our mental states in this sense. Again, consider money. The essential properties of money are such that they are instantiated only if some mental states exist. In other words, the properties of being a commonly used medium of exchange and being a measure and store of value are instantiated only if some mental states exist. Similar considerations apply to a wide variety of other social kinds.

But the fact that it is essential to a kind, K, that K exists only if some mental states exist does not imply that K is not real. Notice that psychological kinds are mind-dependent in this sense, but it does not follow that psychological kinds are unreal. For instance, pain is such that it is essential to pain that pain exists only if some mental states exist. Similarly, Alzheimer's disease and schizophrenia are such that it is essential to them that they exist only if some mental states exist, but it is not the case that pain, Alzheimer's disease, and schizophrenia are unreal. Thus, the fact that social kinds are mind-dependent in this sense not establish that they are unreal either.

Next, it has been argued that social kinds are mind-dependent in the even stronger sense that we determine which properties are essential to them. For instance, Amie Thomasson (2003a) argues that some social kinds exist only if we collectively accept that some conditions,  $c_1 \dots c_n$ , suffice for being the kinds in question. Moreover, she argues that by accepting that some conditions,  $c_1 \dots c_n$ , suffice for being a social kind,  $K$ , we thereby determine the nature of  $K$ . In particular, she claims that conditions we accept “play a stipulative role in constituting the nature of the kind” (Thomasson 2003a, 590).

But it is not the case that we determine the essential properties of social kinds. Recall that the essential properties of a kind,  $K$ , specify what it is to be  $K$ . In other words, kinds are individuated by their essential properties. If the property of being  $F$  is essential to a kind,  $K_1$ , and if that property is not essential to a kind,  $K_2$ , then  $K_1 \neq K_2$ . This is because  $K_1$  has an essential property that  $K_2$  does not. Any kind that does not have the property of being  $F$  as one of its essential properties is not  $K_1$ . Thus, being  $F$  is necessarily essential to  $K_1$ . Indeed, for any kind,  $K$ , the essential properties of  $K$  are necessarily essential to  $K$ . Moreover, if the essential properties of  $K$  are necessarily essential to  $K$ , it follows that we do not determine  $K$ 's essential properties.

For example, what it is to be money is to be a commonly used medium of exchange, and a measure and store of value. That is, the essence of money is given by the properties of being a commonly used medium of exchange and being a measure and store of value. According to the present proposal, money is mind-dependent in the sense that we determine which properties are essential to that kind. In that case, it is possible that the properties of being a commonly used medium of exchange, and being a measure and store of value are not essential properties of money. Rather, we may decide that, say, the properties of being blue before time,  $t$ , and being two miles from Lake Michigan are essential properties of that kind.

But it is not possible that the properties of being a commonly used medium of exchange, and being a measure and store of value are not essential properties of money. Again, if the property of being  $F$  is essential to a kind,  $K$ , then being  $F$  is necessarily essential to  $K$ . In this case, if the properties of being a commonly used medium of exchange and being a measure and store of value are essential to money, then they are necessarily essential to money. Any kind that is such that these properties do not belong to its essence is not money.

In other words, if the properties of being a commonly used medium of exchange, and being a measure and store of value are essential to a kind,  $K_1$  (i.e., money), and these properties are not essential to a kind,  $K_2$ , then  $K_1 \neq K_2$ . It follows that we cannot decide that money has any essential properties other than those properties which are actually essential to it. The essential properties of money are necessarily essential to money. Thus, these properties are not at our discretion. If it is not the case that we determine which properties are essential to social kinds like money, then it is not the case that social kinds like money are not real because we determine which properties are essential to them.

There are a variety of other ways in which social kinds might depend on our mental states.<sup>29</sup> For instance, it is plausible that many social kinds are causally mind-dependent; that is, we cause these kinds to exist by intentionally creating them. But causal mind-dependence does not entail antirealism either. For instance, some chemical and biological kinds (e.g., polyethylene and labradoodles) are mind-dependent in this sense, but it does not follow that they are not real (Haslanger 1995).<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, some social kinds are mind-dependent in the sense of being conferred property kinds. A kind is a conferred property kind if some of its essential properties are conferred properties. A conferred property is one that is instantiated in virtue of subjects' attitudes towards the entities that instantiate them (Sveinsdóttir 2008, 2013). For example, my apple instantiates the property of being the apple I intend to eat just by my forming the intention to eat it.<sup>31</sup>

Astá Sveinsdóttir defends the thesis that gender categories are conferred property kinds (Sveinsdóttir 2013). On her view, an individual,  $S$ , is a woman in a context,  $C$ , because we judge her to be a woman in that context. Our judgment confers the property of being a woman on  $S$ . Charles Mills defends a similar view with respect to race. According to him, individuals acquire the property of being black or being white in virtue of the fact that we judge them to be black or white (Mills 1998).

However, the fact that a kind, *K*, is a conferred property kind does not entail that *K* is not real. It is not the case that we merely imagine or pretend that individuals instantiate the conferred properties in terms of which conferred property kinds are defined; their instantiation is not fictional or illusory. For example, if Sveinsdóttir's theory of gender is correct, we are not merely imagining or pretending that some individuals have the property of being a woman, and others do not. If we judge that some individual, *S*, is a woman, she actually comes to instantiate the property of being a woman—it is literally true that *S* is a woman.

Likewise, Mills stresses that, on his view, races are no less real in virtue of being mind-dependent in this way (Mills 1998, 48). Thus, although race is not a biological phenomenon, it is not merely make believe. Rather, Mills argues that our judgments actually bring races into existence. That is, we make it the case that some individuals have the property of being black, or the property of being white, and so forth, by judging that they are Black or White, and so on. Given that we judge that some individual is Black, for example, it is literally true that she is Black.

## 5 | CONCLUSION

I have focused on a cluster of related questions concerning the metaphysics of social kinds. Are social kinds natural kinds? Do social kinds have essences? Are social kinds mind-dependent? Are social kinds real? First, I argued that although social kinds are typically contrasted with natural kinds, given an epistemic conception of natural kinds, there is reason to believe that some social kinds are natural. Next, I argued that although it is commonly thought that social kinds lack essential properties, that view is justified by a mistaken understanding of essentialism. Once essentialism is properly understood, there is no reason to deny it with respect to social kinds. Finally, I argued that although the thesis that social kinds are mind-dependent is often thought to entail that social kinds are unreal, social kinds do not depend on our mental states in any way that implies antirealism.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> For example, see Searle 1995, 2010, 2014 and Tuomela 2013.
- <sup>2</sup> There are various categories of social entities other than social kinds and social facts, including social objects (e.g., the twenty-dollar bill in my wallet), social events (e.g., the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election), and social properties (e.g., the property of being the President of the United States). However, on the assumption that individuals belong to social kinds on the basis of possessing certain properties, my discussion of social kinds is germane to the metaphysics of social properties. Finally, there are also social groups (see Effingham 2010; Epstein 2009 and 2015; Gilbert 1989; Hindriks 2008; and Ritchie 2013 and 2015; Tuomela 2013) and social structures (see Haslanger 2007, 2015 and 2016).
- <sup>3</sup> Note that this proposal simply defers the question of what makes a kind social, by defining social kinds in terms of social properties, relations, or other social entities and phenomena. However, it is possible that a noncircular explanation of what makes some entity or phenomenon social cannot be given (Haslanger 2012, 197).
- <sup>4</sup> Ontological individualism is widely endorsed among philosophers of social science. See Epstein (2009) and (2015) for an illuminating critical discussion of this view.
- <sup>5</sup> I also focus exclusively on human social kinds, although it is likely that there are social kinds among nonhuman animals as well (e.g., dominant male).
- <sup>6</sup> See Mason, ms., for a more thoroughgoing defense of this line of argument.
- <sup>7</sup> Other examples include genetically engineered species of plants and animals.
- <sup>8</sup> It is a separate question whether social kinds figure in laws of nature qua social kinds, or whether all social scientific laws are reducible to physical laws.
- <sup>9</sup> The claim that a kind is defined in terms of some properties should be understood on the model of real definition, which pertains to the nature of the kind itself, rather than a linguistic definition.
- <sup>10</sup> We could have called a different set of microstructural properties (e.g., being XYZ) by the term "water," but we do not thereby determine the nature of the kind (i.e., being H<sub>2</sub>O) actually designated by that term.
- <sup>11</sup> See Bach (2012), Boyd (1999), Dupre (1993), Haslanger (2016), Griffiths (1999), Khalidi (2013), Kitcher (1984), Kornblith (1993), LaPorte (2004), and Millikan (2000).

- <sup>12</sup> See Khalidi (2013) for an in-depth defense of this view. Sally Haslanger (2016), Ron Mallon (2003 and 2016), and Michael Root (2000) also defend an epistemic conception of natural kinds. See also Theodore Bach (2012), who argues that gender is a natural kind with a historical essence.
- <sup>13</sup> Ian Hacking (1991a, 1991b, 1996, 1999, 2002, 2006) argues that social kinds are not natural kinds because they are subject to “looping effects,” and Paul Griffiths (2004) argues that some social kinds are not natural kinds because they are normative categories. Khalidi (2013) argues that both concerns are spurious. For a related critique of Hacking, see Cooper (2004) and Mallon (2003 and 2016). According to Khalidi (2013 and 2015), what prevents some social kinds from being natural kinds is that they associated with certain properties by convention rather than causation. However, Khalidi argues that even though some social kinds are conventionally associated with certain properties, they may also be associated with properties on the basis of causal processes in which they participate. If so, then even these kinds have some degree of naturalness.
- <sup>14</sup> A related worry is that many inferences concerning social kinds are racist/sexist/homophobic, and so forth. (e.g., the inference from Muslim to terrorist, or from Black to criminal); however, frequently, the badness of the inferences in question stem not from the relevant kinds and their alleged unnaturalness, but from the individuals making the relevant inferences (i.e., various forms of bad reasoning, including base rate neglect, and confirmation bias). Indeed, in many cases, such inferences are not licensed at all. Moreover, given the prevalence of various cognitive biases, reliability concerns potentially undermine inferences involving biological, chemical, and physical kinds as well. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this concern.
- <sup>15</sup> See Bach (2012), Boyd (1999), Griffiths (1999), Haslanger (2000), and Mallon (2003).
- <sup>16</sup> Indeed, this claim is refuted straightaway by origin essentialism.
- <sup>17</sup> See Boyd (1999) and Mallon (2003).
- <sup>18</sup> This is what Sally Haslanger calls the “commonality problem” (Haslanger 2000, 37) and what Katherine Jenkins calls the “inclusion problem” (Jenkins 2016, 395).
- <sup>19</sup> For example, see Haslanger (2000) and Bach (2012). Jenkins (2016) argues that Haslanger’s analysis problematically excludes trans people.
- <sup>20</sup> For an alternative approach to gender essentialism, see Witt (2011).
- <sup>21</sup> The idea that social kinds are mind-dependent is often stated contrastively: social kinds, in contrast with so-called natural kinds (e.g., physical, chemical, and biological kinds), depend on our mental states. This is what Francesco Guala calls the “difference thesis” (Guala 2014). Brain Epstein (2009, 2013, and 2015) denies that social kinds depend on our mental states, although his primary target is ontological individualism.
- <sup>22</sup> See Hacking (1991a, 1991b, 1996, 2002, 2006); Hayek (1943); Ruben (1989); Searle (1995, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2014); Thomasson (2003a and 2003b); Tuomela (2007). By contrast, several of the essays collected in Haslanger (2012), as well as Khalidi (2013 and 2015); Mallon (2003 and 2016); Root (2000); and Sveinsdóttir (2013 and 2015), defend the thesis that social kinds are mind-dependent, but not that they are therefore unreal.
- <sup>23</sup> For example, see Devitt (2005), Searle (1995) and Thomasson (2003). See Jenkins (2005) for critical discussion.
- <sup>24</sup> Gideon Rosen claims that the rogue sense of “real” and “unreal” at issue in such debates is often characterized metaphorically and is intimately tied to concerns about the ontological import of the mind (Rosen 1994). Rosen argues that little sense can be made of the metaphors—they are a “rhetorical illusion” (283). As such, he argues, we should reject the idea that among the various things that exist, some of them have the status of being real, whereas others do not. Ultimately, I am sympathetic with his line of argument. Thus, establishing that social kinds are not unreal does not thereby establish that they are real.
- <sup>25</sup> For example, see Thomasson (2003a and 2003b) and Searle (1995, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2014).
- <sup>26</sup> Indeed, if monism is true, then nothing is fundamental except the entire cosmos (Schaffer 2010).
- <sup>27</sup> I am grateful to Alex Kaiserman for suggesting this counterexample.
- <sup>28</sup> The failure of this modal-existential analysis of mind-dependence is unsurprising given that there are well-known problems with modal-existential characterizations of dependence more generally (see Fine 1995).
- <sup>29</sup> In Mason, ms., I consider each of these proposals, and several others, in greater detail.
- <sup>30</sup> I follow Haslanger in thinking that discursively constructed kinds (i.e., kinds subject to what Ian Hacking calls “looping effects”) are causally mind-dependent in this sense. See Cooper 2004, and Khalidi 2010 and 2013 for germane discussions of discursively constructed or “interactive” kinds.
- <sup>31</sup> One way of spelling out Searle’s claim that social kinds exist only if we collectively accept that they exist is by appeal to the idea that social kinds are conferred property kinds. According to Searle, the fact that X (some entity or type of entity) counts as Y (a particular social kind) in a context C obtains in virtue of the fact that we collectively accept that X counts as Y in C. On the assumption that Y is a conferred property kind, Searle’s view can be understood as follows: Y is conferred



upon X in a particular context C, by our collectively accepting that X counts as Y in that context. Although it is implausible that all social kinds are conferred property kinds, it is likely that some of them are (e.g., permanent resident).

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