The Metaphysics of Gender: Reply to Critics

CHARLOTTE WITT

Philosophy Department
Hamilton Smith Hall
95 Main Street
University of New Hampshire
Durham, NH 03824
charlotte.witt@unh.edu

Introduction

I am very pleased to have an opportunity to respond to these generous and thoughtful criticisms of *The Metaphysics of Gender*. Considering that the book argues for a theory of gender essentialism and also sketches a view of the social world in which choice does not appear as a central political value for feminism, I had been worried about the book's reception especially by my colleagues in feminist philosophy. As it turns out my three critics have done a terrific job in conveying what my book is about, and as if by some pre-established harmony, have focused on different aspects. Mari

Mikkola's comments address the central and basic question of why an inquiry into gender is important for feminist theory. Ann Cudd's comments focus on my ascriptivist account of social normativity and my theory of social agency. And finally Ásta Kristjana Sveinsdóttir's comments develop several possible ontological difficulties that my metaphysics of gender might face.

Response to Mari Mikkola

In her thoughtful and insightful comments Mari Mikkola challenges the idea that "it is important to know and understand something about us as gendered beings" in order to engage in the theoretical and political projects of feminism. Indeed, Mikkola wants to question what she calls "the normative dogma" that "we need a substantive concept of *gender* in order to normatively ground an emancipatory feminist politics and ethics." So, Mikkola claims not only that feminist theory and politics can get along quite well without my theory of gender uniessentialism, but also that feminist claims can be formulated and its projects engaged without **any** conception of gender or women or how we exist as gendered beings. I find this broad claim implausible. For example, it seems to me that feminists ought to resist biological conceptions of gender, which must raise the question of how it is we are gendered. Mikkola also believes that since we feminists can proceed without reflection on our existence as gendered beings that we ought to do so because the normative dogma generates longstanding and apparently intractable semantic and ontological puzzles. Again, I disagree. First, as I just mentioned, I doubt that we can do without thinking about how we are gendered. Second, even if we can, "ought" does not follow from "can". Third, I think that gender uniessentialism takes the intractability out of one ontological puzzle, namely how it is that we are gendered. And if, per impossible, gender uniessentialism does not

succeed, there are other candidates--like Ásta Kristjana Sveinsdóttir's conferralism--that might do the trick.[1]

So let me narrow down and rephrase Mikkola's question: Why is gender uniessentialism, in particular, useful for feminist theory and politics? This is a reasonable and important question. Although I don't think it is necessary (or indeed possible) to argue that it's my way or the highway, I do think that gender uniessentialism has several features to recommend it. First, the framework of gender uniessentialism provides an account of gender, and of us as gendered beings, which is social and not biological. Second, gender uniessentialism differs from and is more illuminating than other approaches to women's social agency in ways that are important for feminist theory. Third, gender uniessentialism keeps theory responsive to the actual lived experiences of women, which is an important political and philosophical virtue.

One of the reasons that I began thinking that gender is different from social identities like race and sexual orientation is the universality of gender as a social category. Philosophers ask whether race was invented in the 17th century or whether homosexuality was invented in the 19th century, but there is no corresponding question that makes sense for gender. (Zack 1996; Halperin 1990; McWhorter 2009) For some the universality of gender categories points in a biological direction; one current manifestation is what Cordelia Fine calls "neurosexism" (Fine 2010). I think it is important for feminists to have an alternative account of how we are gendered, one that points towards social roles and the social world, but that can make sense of the important difference between gender and other social categories as well. Gender uniessentialism does this.

Gender uniessentialism also contributes to our understanding of social agency. The idea that our gender is our principle of normative unity just is the claim that one of our social roles prioritizes, unifies and organizes our other social roles into a practical normative whole. And, according to uniessentialism, that we are gendered beings is not primarily a fact about our individual psychologies or our bodies; it is primarily a fact about the way in which our social world is organized and structured. Finally, according to ascriptivism it is just by virtue of occupying the social position of being a woman or being a man that an individual is responsive to and evaluable under a set of gendered norms. I might add that this is the case whether or not that individual accepts those norms or is even attending to them. Much of our social agency is habitually and tacitly normed; only occasionally do we consciously attend to the norms that we are responsive to and evaluated under by others.

For example, let's consider our philosophical culture's gender norms concerning appropriate attire for women, which both Mikkola and Cudd comment upon. In writing my book I had actually meant this example to be humorous, but maybe it is worth discussing. According to a recent discussion on the blog *The Philosophy Smoker*, the consensus is that a woman philosopher's professional attire should include make-up, discrete jewelry, and low heels, but no "hooker" boots, tight sweaters or plunging necklines.[2] I mention the recent discussion on *The Philosophy Smoker* because it contains a fascinating compendium of almost 100 comments many of which describe in some detail how a woman ought to present herself as an aspiring philosopher. Although a few participants were clothing anarchists most understood very

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[1] See her "Social Construction of Human Kinds", forthcoming in *Hypatia*.

[2] http://philosophysmoker.blogspot.com/2011/10/request-for-advice-for-women-in.html
http://philosophysmoker.blogspot.com/2011/10/situational-influences-during-job.html

clearly that it really didn't matter what the individual woman thought about clothing or even whether she thought about clothing. In so far as she was a woman and a philosophy job candidate certain norms applied to her—as I would say—ascriptively simply by virtue of her social position occupancies. These two sets of norms lie in uneasy tension with one another. But, and this is the crucial point, the candidate's gendered norms of attire trump the different norms that attach to her social position as a philosopher. Why? Why isn't it entirely random, which set of norms she ought to follow? Why isn't it up to her to decide which norms to listen to as Mikkola suggests? Why can't she decide to attend to philosophical norms that day as Cudd suggests? My answer is that gender is the mega social role that is prior to, and prioritizes, a social individual's other social roles.

Mikkola has an alternative answer to these questions. She thinks that it is up to the woman to choose which set of norms to listen to, and she suggests that the reason she might attend to gendered clothing norms is because of a prudential calculation: "I would seriously undermine my chances of getting the job were I to bunk the norms." So, she decides to follow them. Mikkola's explanation acknowledges that there are ascriptive social norms in play, but her emphasis falls on the autonomy (or not) of the decision process. While I agree that this is a possible explanation for the sartorial decision, I think it is politically lacking in several respects. First, by couching the decision in terms of rational self-interest the explanation abstracts from the social and political context within which the decision **is** in one's self-interest. What is in the rational self-interest of the woman is determined by her need to respond in a self-interested way to the norms that govern her life as a woman. Even if she is successful in her instrumental response the fact that she needs to respond to just *those* asymmetrical norms is precisely the problem. And it is a political problem because the gendered appearance norms are in tension with the candidate's professional norms; there is no way to succeed given the current configuration of

social roles. Because while it might go better if you fulfill the dress norms (this is because gender trumps) this option transgresses the philosophical norm that appearance doesn't matter, which you are also evaluable under by virtue of being a job candidate. So, it is a normatively complicated situation with political overtones and not a simple calculation of rational self- interest. To lift the oppression one must alter the norms, either individually or the relations among them, and to alter the norms one must first understand what it is to stand under those norms and who stands under them. But if my decision to wear heels is understood to be in my rational self-interest, and arrived at without interference, then there is no need to undertake a political critique of the social context within which the decision is made. There is no need to notice the tension that arises when social roles clash, and no need to recognize that the problem has nothing to do with "the regulation of my desires, decisions, actions" by anyone in particular. Finally Mikkola's explanation does not identify the problematic aspect of the decision with the individual's gender, as a decision that she makes as a woman. That is, while Mikkola's description of the decision includes the fact that the individual is a woman, her explanation of the decision as being in the woman's rational self-interest does not make gender feature centrally in the explanation. Let me make this point a different way. Men are not in the same situation as women with regard to a tension between their gendered norms of appearance and the dress norms associated with their social positions as philosophers. This is, or should be, an interesting datum for feminist theory and for those concerned about the lack of women and the standing of women in our profession. But it is occluded in Mikkola's proposed explanation.

Gender uniessentialism directs our attention away from individual psychologies, their conscious and unconscious biases, and "deformed" processes of choice, and toward the social world, its available social roles, and the ways in which its available social roles can and cannot blend into a coherent

practical identity. In saying this I do not mean to dismiss or to criticize important feminist work on deformed preferences (Meyers 1989) or to minimize the role of gender schemas (Valarian 1999, 2005) or implicit bias (Banarji and Hardin 1996) in perpetuating discrimination against women.[3] But gender uniessentialism points in another direction, away from a focus on individual psychologies and toward the social world and its normative structure, which defines the conditions of agency for women. So to the frequently voiced question, "Isn't the point of feminism to give women choices?" my answer is "no, not really."

The third reason that I think gender uniessentialism is important is that it connects with the experiences of women. I consider the relationship between theory and women's experiences to be a theoretical and political issue in feminism. I began my book by reporting some widely shared common sense views on gender identity that I encountered while thinking about gender uniessentialism and writing my book. Most people think that they would not be the same individual if they were a different gender. Most people think the question is simple and the answer is obvious. While it is important to note that this widespread belief is not a premise of my argument for gender uniessentialism, it *is* a common opinion in search of an explanation. Gender uniessentialism provides an explanation because the idea that gender is our principle of normative unity is just the claim that one of our social roles is prior to, prioritizes and unifies our other social

roles into a practical normative whole. So, on the assumption that a theory about women ought to engage the views of women, gender uniessentialism matters because it engages those views rather than dismissing or minimizing them.

Finally, let me clarify my views on persons and selves, and the relationship between the two. My characterization of persons, as having a first person perspective, is taken from the Kantian and liberal tradition, and I wanted to talk about persons in this sense to make a point about gender essentialism, namely that you cannot express the claim of gender essentialism coherently about persons understood in this way. And I made this point as part of my explanation of why feminist theory needs the idea of a social individual. But, as Mikkola points out, feminists have criticized the Kantian and liberal view of persons by developing relational accounts of autonomy, and it might be the case that a revised, feminist notion of persons would obviate the need for social individuals. In my response to Ann Cudd (below) I explain why I think that the most plausible relational accounts of autonomy, and of persons, are not relational in the full sense required by feminist theory. So, even if we accept a relational account of persons and of autonomy, we would still need the category of social individuals. For more on this topic see my response to Ann Cudd.

Mikkola is unsure about how I view persons and selves. She wonders whether they the same or different. In chapter 5 of *The Metaphysics of Gender* I develop a view of the self in relation to the constitution ontology of human organisms, social individuals and persons laid out in an earlier chapter.[4] A self is a certain kind of person, namely a person who is constituted by a human organism that also constitutes a social

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[3] This research is of clear importance in helping to document the complex and persistent nature of discrimination against women. Certainly, situational interventions like friendly intergroup interactions and procedural remedies—like anonymous review of applications, journal submissions, and the like—are useful tools for combating implicit bias in some contexts. It is important to note, however, that these approaches focus on individual psychologies and "the moment-by-moment decisions that disadvantage women" (Valarian, 2005, p. 198).

[4] Imagine Michelangelo's Pietà: a piece of marble constitutes both a statue (a work of art) and an object of religious veneration. Similarly, on my view, a human organism constitutes both a person and social individual.

individual. So, to be a person and to be a self are different; persons and selves are not interchangeable on my theory. In developing my view I wanted both to acknowledge that selves are capable of self-reflection, and to characterize them as beings that are inevitably (but not essentially) social position occupiers. We reflect about our practical identities. My view connects to, and extends, feminist accounts of relational selves by situating the self in relation to "the social environment of the agent." (123) But notice that my view accomplishes this by making reference to social individuals, who are essentially social position occupiers.

Earlier feminist work on relational selves emphasizes a relation among and between selves rather than between the self and its social context. In this connection, Sara Ruddick's project of maternal ethics uses the maternal relationship as a model for imagining ethical relationships in general, and in that way it presupposes a relational view of the self. However, Ruddick also thinks that maternal ethics requires that an individual choose to engage in maternal practice and that the normative requirements follow upon and are conditioned by that choice. So, for Ruddick, it is not by virtue of a woman being socially recognized to be a mother that she is evaluable under maternal norms, but it is a consequence of that woman's (or that man's) choice to undertake maternal practices and duties. This is a Kantian view of the basis of normative obligation, which I call "voluntarism" in my book. But, it seems to me that one of the salient features of the relationship between mother and child (or between a caregiver and a dependent more generally) is that the obligation is rooted in the relationship, which is not (always) undertaken voluntarily. Moreover, it seems to me that a mother is evaluable under maternal norms whether or not she chooses to accept that obligation. So, I find a tension in Ruddick's view between her relational ontology of the self, and her voluntarist account of maternal obligation. My relational theory of the self (as inevitably engaged in the social world) is compatible with, and extends, one aspect of

Ruddick's view (the relational self) but I do not accept another aspect of her view, namely the voluntarist account of maternal obligation.

Response to Ann Cudd

Ann Cudd agrees with me that we need a principle of normative unity, and that a principle of normative unity is a condition for the possibility of conflicting norms. However, she strongly disagrees that the principle is itself a social role (gender) and she thinks further that normative conflicts like that between gendered dress norms and professional norms of attire supports her view and not mine. When Cudd is entering a professional situation she puts her gendered dress/appearance norms "on hold" and attends to her professorial norms, which are not inflected by gender or by any other social role like race or ability/disability unless she chooses to attend to one of them as well. This happens all the time, in fact, and so gender could not be the mega social role as I claim it is. For Cudd the principle of normative unity is the person, and the person decides which social norms to attend to and which to ignore. I will have more to say about persons in a moment, but for now let's stick with the two accounts of social normativity.

As Cudd sees it we have lots of sets of social norms that we alternately activate and deactivate to govern our behavior. In particular, with regard to the issue of appropriate dress in the context of philosophy, Cudd puts her gendered norms of appropriate attire on hold and activates her philosophical norms to ask "what the (hell) am I going to say?" Cudd adds: "Now one might respond that what social norms apply is not up to the individual – I could simply be obtuse in thinking that others are not evaluating me under gendered norms. But surely many of us put aside the gender norm of appearance in the way I suggest at least some of the time." I certainly would not use the word "obtuse" in Cudd's vicinity. And I have no doubt that some of us, some of the time, ignore

gender role expectations, which is, after all, just one way of being responsive to them. The picture Cudd sketches of us picking and choosing when we want to fulfill our gendered social norms or other social roles is very attractive. But if Cudd were right then it would just be a mystery why aspiring women philosophers even have to worry about what to wear for an APA interview besides the basics (wear clothing, no holes). If Cudd were right we should just advise women to put their gendered norms of appropriate attire "on hold" and to concentrate on what to say. The latter, by the way, I would argue also has gendered norms—that govern how to engage in philosophical conversation, whether or not to attend the smoker, whether or not to discuss personal matters like children, how to sit and so on. So, Cudd is right that, given her view of social roles, as a buffet of distinct and unrelated options from which we pick and choose, it would make no sense to claim that one social role is prior to and prioritizes our other social roles. But, if I am right, and whether and which social role applies to one is not up to us but is a matter of social position occupancy and social recognition, then one of our social roles could be our principle of normative unity. If I am right then social roles are less like discrete items on a buffet table and more like a soup or stew with intermingled and mutually inflecting ingredients. And we are not the cooks. Finally, I think there is an internal tension between the "buffet" view of social roles that Cudd endorses here, and her theory of oppression, which includes (as I think it should) an ascriptivist element in the norms associated with social groups. If there is an ascriptivist element then the consequences of group membership and the appropriate instrumental response to group membership are such that one often cannot place that group membership or the associated norm on hold.

Cudd thinks that persons unify their practical agency and she is not happy with my conception of a person, or my conception of autonomy. Let me begin with two points of clarification. I don't describe persons primarily in terms of

autonomy; rather I describe persons as necessarily having a first person perspective or being capable of self-reflection. And I don't hold that persons cannot occupy social positions; they can and they do. But persons are not essentially social position occupiers.

Cudd argues that my notion of social individual is redundant because persons are essentially social. Self-reflection requires the ability to reflect and reflection is inherently social: "Reflection, though, is a normative practice that is enabled by language and other social norms such as epistemic and practical reasoning norms." We need to be clear about what it means to say that persons are essentially social. Cudd thinks that persons are essentially social in the sense that language and practical reasoning are not private or individual enterprises; they require other persons. I don't think it follows from this that persons are essentially social in the sense that is important to me (and, I would argue, to feminism) namely that persons are essentially social position occupiers. If Cudd had an argument to the effect that to be self-reflective it is necessary that one be social in the full sense of being a social position occupier, then I might be willing to blend the categories of person and social individual but only because persons turn out to be essentially social individuals. But in the absence of such an argument the distinction between social individuals and persons is important because what is significant for feminism is that we are social individuals, that is, social role occupiers, and not that we are persons, that is not that we are self-reflective.

Cudd also argues that persons are necessarily social beings because of what autonomy really is. Autonomy requires a social world and social interactions to develop—a causal point—but it is also constitutively relational. Let me respond with three points. First, of course as an empirical or causal matter, autonomy requires other persons and a social world to develop. Second, as Cudd notes, what is at issue is **not** this empirical or causal claim about the conditions under which

autonomy arises, it is a question about what autonomy is. Third, it is not clear to me that the purely formal dialogic capacity or disposition described by Andrea Westlund as partially constitutive of autonomy (and cited by Cudd) is sufficient to make persons essentially social beings since it is devoid of any particular content.[5]   In other words the formal dialogic capacity does not make any essential reference to a social role or identity although it does make reference to a rational capacity to engage with others. So I don't think that Cudd's view of autonomy gives us any additional reason to think that persons are essentially social in the sense of essentially social role occupiers.

Cudd shelves her skepticism about whether or not a mega social role unifies our social agency in order to focus in on my argument that gender, rather than say disability or race, does the job. She comments: "After all, many women do not bear or raise children, and many men do not beget children. Therefore, these connections cannot be necessary and sufficient ones for norms based on them to be universal or prior."   And further, in Cudd's case, the norms associated with engendering were not of interest to her at all during much of her life making gender a very poor candidate for being the mega social role.

 It is simply not part of my view that women are always obsessing about children. Rather, the engendering function an individual is recognized to have establishes his or her gender, but the social roles of women and men contain many norms that are only tangentially related to the engendering function. For example, there are norms of dress and expression, of posture and behavior, of profession and vocation, of sexuality

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[5] "In my view, autonomy relies (in part) on the disposition to hold oneself answerable to external critical perspectives on one's action-guiding commitments. Autonomy thus requires an irreducibly dialogical form of reflectiveness. But this type of relationality is formal, not substantive, in nature and carries with it no specific value commitments." (Westlund, 2009, 27)

and interpersonal relations. And the fact that many women do not bear and raise children and many men do not beget is compatible with the functional specification of gender, which like all functional definitions is normative and not simply descriptive. The Republican war on women targets our reproductive rights and in doing so it attacks all women; those who have children and those who don't; those who can have children and those who can't; those who want children and those who do not.

However, Cudd is right that gender is not the only candidate for the mega social role. Plausible candidates for being the mega social role are those that inflect most or all of an individual's other social roles synchronically and diachronically. If we simply consider this criterion, as I note in my book, there are other candidates for being the mega social role, like race or sexual orientation. So, although I do argue that there is just one mega social role I think that the general account of social normativity—ascriptivism, and the inflection of one set of social norms by another apply more generally. In addition to this general account of social roles, however, the mega social role has certain distinctive features, namely it is prior to, and prioritizes an individual's other social roles.   Let me make an analogy with Aristotle's notion of virtue and the role it plays in a flourishing human life. In some instances virtue will simply trump or be prior to other goods like wealth or honor; in other instances virtue will provide a way of prioritizing other goods and other pursuits. Pleasures are part of a virtuous life if they are moderate; money making must be compatible with generosity. So in the example discussed earlier of a job interview, in which professional philosophical norms are called for, we find that gender norms of attire trump or are prior to professional philosophical disdain for appearances.

In what follows I focus on disability as a candidate for the mega social role, noting that disability is a complex phenomenon and I am sure I can't do it justice here. In my

theory the mega social role is prior to, and prioritizes an individual's other social roles. Given this description of the mega social role, let me raise a few questions about disability in relation to the prioritizing function. First, disability (like race) is a "gappy" social category; some claim that disability as a social category has only existed since the 19th century, and it is unclear how pervasive it is in cultures. Second, even in our culture today, the category refers to multiple conditions of very different types and of very different durations. Some disabilities might inflect an individual's other social roles only modestly, and some might be of relatively brief temporal duration. Other disabilities might be lifelong and minor or severe and temporary. For these reasons it is difficult to see how there could be a social role of disability with a set of norms that could perform the prioritizing function of the mega social role. It seems to make more sense to think that disability refers to many different social roles with many different norms. So, it seems to me that in a society like ours social roles like race or disability obviously do inflect an individual's other social roles—they matter socially—without being the mega social role.

Response to Ásta Kristjana Sveinsdóttir

Ásta Kristjana Sveinsdóttir thinks that the way I distinguish human organisms, social individuals and persons licenses an open-ended process of ontological multiplication. It might be hard to fit the trinity of human organism, social individual and person into an armchair, but what if we add the student, the blogger, the fashionista? As Sveinsdóttir notes, things are getting crowded. And, she wonders, aren't human organisms, social individuals and persons all agents? This seems redundant. But is it really? I think we need a category of social individuals to ground the normativity of our social agency, which is ascriptive and requires social recognition. Now my argument might not persuade Sveinsdóttir, who thinks that human organisms are agents of the right kind, or

Cudd, who thinks that persons are agents of the right kind, but a central argument for the existence of social individuals is that social agency and its normative structure is importantly different from both natural normativity (if there is such a thing) and ethical normativity, which pre-supposes a voluntarist account of obligation. This point is relevant to Sveinsdóttir's overpopulation worry that every time an individual occupies a social position, a new thing pops into existence. When a social individual occupies the social role of being a student or being a fashionista, she becomes responsive to and evaluable under new sets of norms, but they are social norms and not norms of an essentially different kind. So the argument that I make to differentiate human organisms, social individuals and persons is not applicable to these examples, and my trinitarian ontology does not license open-ended ontological multiplication of the kind Sveinsdóttir envisions.

Sveinsdóttir also wonders about the aptness of the Aristotelian model I use to introduce the notion of uniessentialism—the idea that a functional essence organizes and arranges a heap of material parts into an individual, like an artifact or an organism. For example, the sheltering function organizes bricks and boards into a shelter, a house. Similarly I argue that a functional essence, the socially recognized engendering function (or the gender) unifies a heap of social role occupancies into an individual, a social individual. There are important differences of course; for example, the kind of unity in one case is physical and spatial, and in the other case it is normative and temporal. But Sveinsdóttir points out an additional difference, namely that the sheltering function defines what a house is but the engendering function does not define what a social individual is. This observation is partly right and partly wrong. It is partly right because on my view a social individual is an agent. An agent is capable of intentional behavior, capable of entertaining goals (singly and in groups) and figuring out how to achieve them, and capable of acting from a standpoint

or perspective. So there is more to what a social individual is than the engendering function. However, relative to the organization of actual societies, social individuals are essentially gendered. So, relative to the way societies are actually organized, the engendering function is part of the definition of a social individual. It might be worth noting that there is an ambiguity in the phrase 'defines what an x is'. It could refer to x's ontological type (x is an artifact; x is a social individual) or it could refer to x's specific kind (x is a house; x is a woman). So, here is the full analogy. Just as the house function is uniessential to the house, which is an artifact, so her engendering function is uniessential to the woman, who is a social individual.

Finally, like Cudd, Sveinsdóttir thinks that I make too much of the engendering function. First, Sveinsdóttir is concerned about all the people who are not "breeders"? Aren't they social individuals? Yes, they are and here is how. Functional definitions are normative and not descriptive so all the folks who are not breeders (who don't breed, or who can't breed) still count as social individuals.   A celibate priest, for example, has a socially recognized engendering function even though he might never perform that function.   Second, Sveinsdóttir asks: don't we use other markers for gender all the time--like dress or presence of body parts or perceived sexual orientation? I completely agree with Sveinsdóttir that when (or if) we are "tracking" someone's gender we might use "presence of body parts, presumed sexual orientation, self-presentation or the like" as signs or clues. But I don't see that as incompatible with the role I assign the socially recognized engendering function as establishing an individual's gender. It is important to distinguish the wide array of culturally variable markers for gender and what it is that makes an individual a man or a woman, namely that individual's socially recognized engendering function. As Kripke pointed out there is a difference in principle between the contingent features that we use to pick out an individual and what is essential to that individual. (e.g. the meter bar in Paris and the length of a meter)

Conclusion

I want to end my response by picking up on a question that Ann Cudd broached about the possibility for social change if the picture that I sketch of our gendered existence is right. She asks whether oppression is intrinsic to gender as I understand it, and how (or whether) I think it is possible to extricate ourselves from oppressive norms. Especially since, as Cudd puts it: "Social individuals are always norm takers, it seems to me, never norm makers." Well, I am optimistic and I think there is room in my theory for optimism. First, I don't think that engendering and the relations that flow from it are necessarily asymmetrical although I do think that they have been historically, and are currently, oppressive to women. Right now they are getting worse in the United States. But they need not deteriorate and could improve depending upon how we meet the current political challenge.

Second, progressive change is possible even though social individuals are not gender norm makers (though they can be and are norm resisters and critics).   Change in social roles, and change in the possible configurations of social roles, in my view, is primarily material and institutional and only secondarily a change in individual psychologies. To end with a positive example, I think the political fight for gay marriage is changing the institution of marriage and the nature of family in ways that will have a positive ripple effect on the possible social roles and possible constellations of social roles that will be available to us in the future.

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