

Essence, Identity, and the Concept of Woman¹

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Anti-essentialism is a prevailing assumption in contemporary feminism, to the extent that the term 'essentialist' has become a term of abuse² in feminist writing as well as in university classes in feminist theory. In a recently published collection of essays whose aim is to critique the prevailing anti-essentialism, Naomi Schor characterizes essentialism as "a prime idiom of intellectual terrorism and the privileged instrument of political orthodoxy. . . . [t]he word essentialism has been endowed within the context of feminism with the power to reduce to silence, to excommunicate, to consign to oblivion."³ And Diana Fuss makes a similar observation at the beginning of her book *Essentially Speaking*:

The sheer rhetorical power of essentialism as an expression of disapprobation and disparagement was recently dramatized for me in the classroom when one of my most theoretically sophisticated students, with all the weight of recent feminist theory behind her, sought to persuade me that the Marxist-feminist text I had assigned did not deserve our serious consideration. The book, my student insisted, was obviously essentialist and therefore dangerously reactionary. . . .⁴

Despite the evident depth of anti-essentialist feeling, there is very little sustained examination in the feminist literature of the precise form of essentialism that is being attacked. We can, however, identify two arguments on

the basis of which anti-essentialist conclusions are drawn. The first—which I will call “the naturalizing argument”—understands essentialism as a position attributing a “fixed and unchanging” nature to women.⁵ In the history of philosophy, the nature attributed to women has been assumed to be inferior to the nature attributed to men; women have been characterized variously as passive, irrational, emotional, by nature bearers and care-takers of children, and so on. In response to this assumption, feminists have developed the position that the attribution of inferior qualities to women is the result of misguided social and cultural conceptions of women. In broad terms, the naturalizing argument proposes a “socially constructed” account of gender, in which the qualities constituting womanness are no longer understood as *natural*, and in that sense fixed, but rather as open to social reform. As I will explain in a moment, there is an alternative way of characterizing the claim that women’s nature is fixed, namely, as a claim that individuals have their womanness *necessarily*.⁶

The second anti-essentialist argument—which I will call “the diversity argument”—rejects the implicit universalism in essentialist claims. As Elizabeth Spelman puts it, it rejects essentialism’s commitment to the existence of “common identities” among women, to “a golden nugget of womanness all women have as women.”⁷ The argument points out that there are significant differences among members of the category “woman,” differences in race, class, culture, as well as more fine-grained differences in individual experience and role. Individual women are *particular*, not the same, and according to this argument their particularity is incompatible with the universalism inherent in essentialist positions.⁸ The diversity argument is important because it raises the issue of whether women constitute a genuine class and hence whether feminism can operate as a political movement on behalf of a unified group of women. However, the characterization of essentialism in the argument, as a claim about women having “common identities,” conflates two sets of issues which ought to be kept distinct. It conflates issues concerning whether there is *something in common among members of the class* “woman” with issues concerning the *individual identity of a member of the class*.

The issue of whether there is something in common among members of the class “woman” raises two more specific questions: first, whether women constitute a genuine class and, secondly, if they do, whether there is a universal womanness that all members of the class share. Any arbitrary collection of things can constitute a class; for example, there is a class consisting of the moon, the continent of Australia, and the Great Wall of China.⁹ However, there is a distinction between *gerrymandered* classes, such as the latter, and genuine classes, such as the classes of horses, gold things, or human beings. Following D. M. Armstrong, I will call the genuine classes “types.”¹⁰

Broadly speaking, there are two possible ways of explaining how different “tokens” are members of the same type. The first is by positing a *universal* that all members of the type share. On this option, members of a type have something in common which is *strictly identical*; and if members of a type instantiate the same universal, they instantiate exactly the same thing.¹¹ The second option is to posit a kind of “nominalism” about types, in which tokens of types are unified, not through sharing the same universal, but in some other way. Armstrong outlines six different versions of nominalism;¹² here I will outline two which are relevant to the following discussion. In *predicate nominalism* tokens constitute a type because they fall under the same predicate; in *resemblance nominalism* they constitute a type through being parts of the same “resemblance structure.”¹³ In the third part of the paper, I will be arguing for resemblance nominalism with respect to the type “woman.”

The form of essentialism which focuses on the question of universals is distinct from another issue that is common in feminist discussions of essentialism—that of individual identity. There is a set of questions concerning the identity of the individual tokens of a type; for instance: What features are necessary to an individual being the object that it is? In virtue of what does an individual persist through change? One way of answering these questions is to say that individual objects have some of their properties *necessarily*. These “essential” properties are responsible for an individual object being the individual that it is and for its persistence through change. Since essential properties of individual objects are “fixed and unchanging,” the form of essentialism targeted by the naturalizing argument can be understood as the claim that individual women have their womanness necessarily.

One of the aims of the paper is to argue that the two forms of essentialism—i.e., as a claim about a universal “woman” and as a claim about the essential properties of an individual—should be kept distinct. Rejecting the “essentialist” claim of universal womanness does not imply that particular women do not have a *particular* womanness which is essential to their individual identity; and neither does rejecting the claim that individual women have essential properties, as some postmodernists do, imply that there is no universal womanness.¹⁴ Consider the class of white things, and suppose that there is no universal whiteness that they share. It is still an open question, for any particular object, whether the *particular whiteness* of the object is necessary to its existence as the object that it is or to its persistence through change. Now suppose that whiteness is an accidental property of members of the class of white things. It does not follow from this that whiteness is not a universal.

My goal in the paper will be twofold: to make precise and criticize three conceptions of the first form of essentialism, i.e., the position that there is a universal “woman,” and to develop a nominalist account of the type “woman”

which responds to the concerns of the diversity argument. The first part of the paper introduces an example of the diversity argument and explains how the two forms of essentialism I have identified are conflated in the argument. In part 2, I outline and argue against three possible conceptions of the first form of essentialism: The first is a claim about Aristotelian species-essences; the second is a claim about non-Aristotelian natural universals; and the third is a claim expressed in terms of Locke's notion of *nominal* essence. I try to point out in each case how the issue of universals is different from the issue of individual identity. In part 3, I introduce an alternative characterization of the type "woman" which allows for the differences identified in the diversity argument, yet also emphasizes the importance of treating women as a type. I suggest that the concept "woman" is a cluster concept and that the concept applies to a resemblance class. There is no single set of features an individual must have in order to be a woman; she is a member of the type just in case she participates in the relevant resemblance structure. Finally, I make some brief and speculative comments about the implications of my argument for the second form of essentialism, that is, for issues concerning the identity of individual women.

1. THE DIVERSITY ARGUMENT

A number of writers, for example, María Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman, and Angela Harris, have developed versions of the diversity argument.¹⁵ It is especially strongly and comprehensively argued in Spelman's book *Inessential Woman*. In this part of the paper, I will outline Spelman's version of the argument and will suggest that the argument conflates issues concerning the nature of the type "woman" with issues concerning the nature of the individuals who make up the type.

The argument is as follows. The conception of woman implicit in much feminist writing, and in the work of philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, presupposes that the experiences, roles, and self-conceptions of women, as well as the treatment of women by others, are *as they are* for white, middle-class women. To illustrate this point, Spelman uses an example from Betty Friedan who claims that the solution to the political issues of feminism is for women to "get out of the house."¹⁶ Friedan's suggestion presupposes that women are somehow defined by their role in their own families, which, although it may have been true of white middle-class American women in the 1950s, has never been true of poor women or women from ethnic minorities, who have always worked outside the home as well as in it. Many recent writers have made the point that the experience of black and Hispanic women in America of oppression, as well as their experience of sexual violence like rape, is different from that of white middle-class women.¹⁷

Indeed, as Spelman argues, the problem raised by women of color in relation to white middle-class feminists is exactly parallel to the problem that white feminists raised in relation to men. Treating male experiences, occupations, and so forth as the norm for valuable human behavior has implicitly developed a norm that excludes women. Similarly, white middle-class feminism has developed a norm that is inapplicable to other *women*. Implicitly conceiving of all women as white and middle class, and developing a feminist politics on this basis, has excluded and ostracized other women to the extent that many now resist identifying with the feminist movement.

Two possible positions could be taken in response to these observations: *Either* one could treat the norms inherent in feminism as a mistake, yet nevertheless assume that all women are the same, *or* one could treat womanhood, not as difference from men, but as difference from other women and as *particular* to class, race, or culture. The two responses are analogous to those taken within feminist theory to the problem of sameness and difference from men. Equality feminists like Friedan and de Beauvoir see the problem of feminism as largely a political one of removing the barriers to equality with men. On this view, it is assumed that the human nature of men and women is the *same* and that it is sexist ideology that treats them as different. An alternative approach has focused on differences, rather than on sameness, and has attempted to characterize what it is to be a woman in terms which capture women's difference from men.¹⁸

I understand Spelman as proposing a version of the second option. Her argument is not only a political one against the white middle-class norms of contemporary feminism. She argues that feminist writing has presupposed a false metaphysics, which she describes as "tootsie-roll"(or "pop-bead") metaphysics:

It thus is evident that thinking of a person's identity as made up of neatly distinguishable "parts" may be very misleading. . . . This is a version of personal identity we might call tootsie roll metaphysics: each part of my identity is separable from every other part, and the significance of each part is unaffected by the other parts. On this view of personal identity . . . my being a woman means the same whether I am white or Black, rich or poor, French or Jamaican, Jewish or Muslim. As a woman, I'm like other women; my difference from other women is only along the other dimensions of my identity.¹⁹

Spelman is arguing against the metaphysical assumption that "woman" is a universal. Consider, for example, Angela, who is a black woman, and Elizabeth, who is a white woman. Spelman points out that it is implausible that womanhood is the same feature in Angela as it is in Elizabeth, because if we try to imagine Angela as white and Elizabeth as black, we inevitably imagine a difference in their womanhood: "[D]oes our being called 'women' mean the same thing to us and for us? Are there any situations in which my

being white and her being black does not affect what it means to us and for us to be women?"²⁰

However, Spelman goes on to say that *if* the womanness of Angela and Elizabeth were a separable, isolable part of each, it would follow that Elizabeth's womanness would have been the same had she been black and Angela's would have been the same had she been white. Here she is proposing that a certain analysis of *particulars*, namely, the position that they are constituted by separable properties, implies that the properties which constitute them are universals. This inference is invalid because the separability of properties in a particular does *not* imply that these properties are universals. A standard view in metaphysics claims that particulars are comprised of *particular* properties (called "tropes")—particular whiteness, womanness, or whatever.²¹

Perhaps, however, Spelman has another argument in mind. Consider the view in which particulars either are bundles of separable universals or instantiate separable universals.²² On this view, if there are universals, then they are separable parts of particulars. If the properties of particular women are *not* separable, then, on this view, the properties of particular women are not universals. The thought experiment about Angela and Elizabeth is supposed to show that Angela and Elizabeth do not share a universal womanness. Does it also show that their race, class, or womanness are not separable from each other? There is no motivation for saying that it does unless one presupposes that separable properties imply universals, which, because of the possibility of tropes, they do not. Assuming that the thought experiment shows that womanness is *particular*, it does not follow that it shows that particular womanness is not separable from the other properties or relations of an individual.

Spelman's position does not acknowledge these distinctions because for her essentialism is both a claim about a universal "woman" and a claim about the common *identities* of particular women. She says that "positing an essential womanness has the effect of making [particular] women inessential."²³ As Angela Harris puts a similar point: "[I]n an essentialist world, black women's experience will always be forcibly fragmented . . . as those who are 'only interested in race' and those who are 'only interested in gender' take their separate slices of our lives."²⁴ However, this characterization of essentialism leaves out a number of possibilities; in particular, it leaves out the possibility that universal womanness is a *non-necessary* feature of individual women. If it is, the fact that there is a universal "woman" has no implication for the essential nature or identity of individuals who happen to be women. Hence, while I agree with Spelman that the diversity argument challenges the idea that the type "woman" is a universal, the suggestion that positing universal womanness has implications for each individual woman's

identity needs to be considered in more detail. Indeed, as I explain in the next part of the paper, there is only one form of essentialism in which universal womanness is a claim about common identities.

2. THREE NOTIONS OF ESSENTIALISM

In this part, I will outline three ways of characterizing the form of essentialism claiming that there is a universal “woman.” These are: womanness on the model of an Aristotelian species-essence; womanness as a non-Aristotelian natural universal; and womanness as a nominal essence in Locke’s sense. I will argue against all three conceptions of essentialism. Although the type of essentialism that is regarded as problematic in feminist philosophy has recently been contrasted with Lockean essentialism, I will suggest that Lockean essentialism fails largely as a result of the diversity argument.

(I) ARISTOTELIAN SPECIES-ESSENCES

One way feminist theorists outline the notion of essentialism is to refer to the so-called “Aristotelian” notion of essence.²⁵ Of course, there is controversy among Aristotle scholars about the exact interpretation of Aristotle’s conception of essence.²⁶ In this section, I will try to characterize a notion which fits the view attacked in feminist theory and will make no attempt to provide an interpretation of Aristotle.

On the Aristotelian view, members of biological species, such as horses, squirrels, or human beings, share a common *species-essence*. A species is a special kind of universal where the individuals instantiating the universal have a common nature. On this view, the species-essence and the individual essence coincide, and hence it is appropriate to speak as feminist theorists do of “common identities” among individual members of the type. For example, suppose human beings constitute a species and that the species-essence is rationality: That is, it is a necessary and sufficient condition of being a human being that an individual has rationality. On the Aristotelian notion of species-essence, it is also necessary that an individual human being have rationality to be the individual that it is: If an individual human being were to lose rationality, it would not only cease to be a human being, it would cease to be the individual that it is and hence cease to exist. Having rationality is different, therefore, from having brown eyes. The class of brown-eyed people may constitute a biological kind, but it would not constitute a *species*, because having brown eyes is not necessary to an individual’s being the individual that it is. On the Aristotelian view, then, species are universals of a special sort: those which are instantiated in particulars as the natures or essences of those particulars.

How would the category “woman” be treated on the Aristotelian model? In the first place, if women were a species in the Aristotelian sense, the category of woman would be a genuine type, not an arbitrary collection of particulars. Secondly, since the Aristotelian notion of a species is committed to *species-essences* (or universals), there would be a universal womanness that all women share. Thirdly, womanness would be an essential part of each individual woman. Finally, since the Aristotelian model refers to *biological* kinds, the relevant essence would have to be biological, i.e., natural, not social.

There is only one plausible biological type that is a candidate for the species of woman: the type “female human being.” Although it has been suggested that certain psychological features—for example, being emotional or caring—constitute the nature of women, as far as I know these features do not support the generalizations that would make them plausible candidates for the universal “woman.” It is implausible that either the class of caring humans or the class of emotional humans constitutes a universal; and it is even more implausible that they constitute Aristotelian species. If the type “caring individual” were a species, being caring would be part of the essence of individuals who are caring. Yet being caring does not seem necessary to an individual’s identity; for example, the same individual would persist even after a loss of the capacity for caring. Hence, the only plausible candidate for the species of woman is that of female human being.

For the remainder of this section, I will consider the following argument for the claim that there is an essence of woman in the Aristotelian sense:

- (a) Female human beings constitute a species.
- (b) The members of a species share a common (real) essence.
- (c) The type “woman” is the same type as the type “female human being.”

Hence, (d) there is a species-essence (or universal), “woman.”

There are serious objections to all three premises of the argument. In this section I will consider objections to (a) and (b) only and will postpone discussion of premise (c) until the next section. For the moment, I will assume that premise (c) is true, i.e., that the type “woman” is identical with the type “female human being.”

Premise (a) claims that female humans constitute a species. If the premise were true, the species could be either an intersection of two further species, those of female sex and human being, or a subspecies of the species “human being,” or, if human beings are not a species, a species in its own right. The most plausible of these alternatives is that “female human” is a subspecies of the species of human being.²⁷ The clusters of features that are the candidates, respectively, for the essences of male and female are: an XY

chromosome, relatively small gametes, and male primary sex characteristics for males; and an XX chromosome, relatively large gametes, and female sex characteristics for females.

I will develop two objections to premise (a), one deriving from empirical evidence and a second using intuitions about logical possibility. Consider first some empirical results suggesting that there are five sexes, not two. Anne Fausto-Sterling has proposed that, in addition to males and females, there are three major groups of “intersexual” bodies: the “herms” or hermaphrodites, who possess one testis and one ovary; the “merms” or male pseudohermaphrodites, who possess testes, some aspects of female genitalia but no ovaries; and the “ferms” or female pseudohermaphrodites, who have ovaries, some aspects of male genitalia but no testes.²⁸

One way to construe this evidence is to say that there are no clear boundaries dividing male and female and hence males and females do not each constitute separate species. Indeed, it was an apparent absence of sharp boundaries in general that led Locke to reject the Aristotelian conception of real species.²⁹ If variations among the sex characteristics of human beings are continuous gradations between the endpoints “male” and “female,” it is implausible that sex characteristics of particular sorts constitute *types*, let alone species.

Alternatively, if we construe Fausto-Sterling’s results as evidence for the claim that there are literally five sexes, not two, an Aristotelian could claim that females, males, herms, merms, and ferms all constitute species. However, it would then become implausible and ad hoc to propose that *women* are all and only female human beings, as many hermaphrodites (i.e., those brought up as girls) have most of the features we associate with women. As I will argue in part 3, they *are* women. On this alternative, although Fausto-Sterling’s results would not constitute a direct objection to premise (a), they would undermine the argument as a whole by making the truth of (a) incompatible with the truth of (c).

A second objection to premise (a) derives from the relation in Aristotelian essentialism between species-essence and individual essence. For Aristotle, a change in species would constitute, not simply an alteration in accidental properties, but “substantial change” or the extinction of the individual.³⁰ Hence, we can assume that on the Aristotelian view an individual has its species-essence necessarily. As contemporary essentialists such as Kripke put it, an individual’s being of a certain species is *modally* essential to the individual being the thing it is.³¹

The problem for premise (a)—the claim that female human beings constitute a species—is that it seems to conflict with intuitions about logical possibility. If women constitute a species, it would be logically impossible for particular men to be women in the same way that it is logically impossible for particular men to be insects or eagles. Yet there is a qualitative difference

between the claim that, for example, Michelangelo could have been an insect and the claim that he could have been a woman. The standard (albeit defeasible) tests for logical possibility are the epistemological tests of conceivability and imaginability. Try to imagine a possible world exactly like ours in every respect except that an insect, or an eagle, was born to Michelangelo's parents in the Diocese of Arezzo on 6 March 1475. We cannot conceive of Michelangelo (or any other human) as an insect, or as an eagle. Yet we can imagine a world exactly like ours in every respect except that a baby girl was born to Michelangelo's parents on 6 March 1475. We can imagine the girl having the same talents and upbringing as Michelangelo himself had, although, of course, many of his attributes would have been different. As a woman he would probably not have been given the same opportunities to be a painter, and, even if given the opportunities, he would probably not have become recognized as a great painter. With enough historical information about the social status of women in Renaissance Italy, however, we would be able to imagine the ways Michelangelo's attributes would have been different. It is at least presumptively true, then, that Michelangelo could have been a woman.

The point can be brought home using counterfactuals. The counterfactual "If Michelangelo had been an insect, he would not have painted the Sistine Chapel" has an impossible antecedent. Similarly, if female human beings constitute a species, the counterfactual "If Michelangelo had been a woman, he would not have painted the Sistine Chapel" would also have an impossible antecedent. Since counterfactuals with impossible antecedents are trivially true, the counterfactual would be trivially true. But the counterfactual seems true *substantively*, not trivially: We *assess* it as true on the basis of historical evidence about the social status of women painters in Renaissance Italy. Moreover, there are parallel counterfactuals which seem obviously false: For instance, it is false that if Michelangelo had been a woman, he would not have been a Catholic. The proposal that female humans constitute a species leads to an unacceptable conclusion, namely, that counterfactuals which seem obviously false are trivially true. It follows that even if there are genuine Aristotelian species, we should hesitate to adopt premise (a) and to claim that female human beings themselves constitute a species.

I will now turn to a consideration of premise (b). The premise claims that the members of a species share a common "real" essence. It articulates the two main elements of the Aristotelian position: first, that the members of a species have real essences, construed as internal structures (or Aristotelian forms)³² of the individual members; and secondly, that the essences of the members of a species are numerically identical; that is, they are particular instantiations of a single universal. The objective discontinuities—or precise boundaries—delimited by species are due to their members having essences which are both real and numerically identical.

The primary problem for Aristotelian accounts of species is to reconcile the commitment to universals construed as real internal structures of individuals with the considerable variations among members of a species. I will outline two manifestations of the problem: first, to explain the distinction between essential and accidental features of members of a species; and secondly, to explain how individuals can be unified into a species when some members of the species have a significantly different internal structure.

One way of accounting for variations among members of a species is to distinguish between essential and accidental properties of the individuals in the species. Variations are explained away as variations among accidental properties only. John Dupré, for example, discusses a “natural law” analysis of the distinction between essential and accidental properties.³³ Suppose that squirrels have a certain genetic structure and as a matter of law the genetic structure causes squirrels to have tails. The essential features of a squirrel are the genetic structure and those properties, such as having a tail, which as a matter of law are determined by the genetic structure. Properties such as being gray or black, or being of a particular size, are accidental because they are not determined as a matter of law by the genetic structure. It is a fact, however, that a certain small percentage of squirrels will develop without tails or other features typical of normal squirrels. Dupré suggests a modified essentialist position in which the relevant laws are probabilistic: Since it is highly probable that squirrels have tails, having a tail is plausibly determined by the genetic structure in normal squirrels and is thus an essential feature of a squirrel.³⁴ However, as Dupré goes on to point out, a probabilistic criterion seems arbitrary, for suppose that the frequency of gray squirrels were the same as the frequency of squirrels with tails. If it is the same, how do we distinguish color as an accidental feature of squirrels and having a tail as an essential feature?

The second manifestation of the variation problem for premise (b) centrally concerns abnormal members of species. Consider the claim that species constitute natural divisions in nature on the basis of the essence, i.e., the internal structure, of the members of species. As Locke pointed out, “there are Naturals amongst us, that have perfectly our shape, but want Reason.” The internal constitution of a “Changeling” may be as different from the normal human as the latter is from a monkey or “Drill.”³⁵ Indeed, the genetic structure of a chimpanzee may be *more* similar to a normal human’s than to a genetically abnormal human’s.³⁶ On the basis of internal structure, how do we keep genetically abnormal humans in the species while at the same time keeping chimpanzees out? Problems such as these have led philosophers to abandon the internal-structure account of species-essence and move to an “evolutionary” model of species, in which membership in a species is delimited through the capacity of members for interbreeding as well as the origin of members in a common gene pool.³⁷ But this version of essentialism about

species is a rejection of the Aristotelian commitment to common internal structures and hence a rejection of premise (b). It is also incompatible with treating female humans as a species, i.e., with the truth of premise (a).

For all these reasons, the prospects for an Aristotelian account of the essence of women look bleak. Even if we assume for the sake of argument that “woman” refers to all and only female humans, we still cannot establish that there is a species-essence of woman. The notion that female humans comprise an Aristotelian species is problematic both empirically and for reasons issuing from modal intuitions. Moreover, essentialism about species will be difficult to sustain in an Aristotelian form, i.e., as a claim about the sameness of internal structure of members of species. Thus, the Aristotelian essentialist position that all women have the same essential womanness—a position which has been the target of so much feminist criticism—will fail for reasons which are quite independent of the feminist arguments outlined in the introduction to the paper.

(II) ESSENCES AS NON-ARISTOTELIAN NATURAL UNIVERSALS

The criticisms developed in the last section were specific to the Aristotelian proposal in which universal womanness, if there is such, is instantiated as the essence of each individual woman. The Aristotelian proposal characterizes “fixed and unchanging” womanness, the notion which is rejected by the naturalizing argument, as the property all women have necessarily. However, as I argued in part 1, we cannot assume that a commitment to universals implies a commitment to properties that individuals have necessarily. Even if, for example, whiteness is a universal, it does not follow that whiteness is an essential property of individual white things. Thus, an alternative conception of the first form of essentialism—i.e., essentialism understood as a claim about universals—is a conception in which the universal is instantiated as a non-necessary or accidental property of the individual. In this section, I will consider the position that womanness is such a universal. In particular, womanness will be characterized as an intrinsic, natural, yet accidental property of individual women.³⁸ Since the property is intrinsic and natural, it is a “fixed and unchanging” property in the sense of being unable to be revised through social reform.

On this approach, having the property of womanness is not necessary in any sense to the identity of the individual. Being a woman is analogous to having a certain facial structure or skin color. Individuals having the same facial structure or skin color have an intrinsic, natural feature in common which can be characterized as a universal without implying that facial structure or skin color is an essential feature of the individuals instantiating the universal. Notice however that while on this alternative womanness, skin color, or facial structure is not necessary to individual identity, there is no assumption that they are *irrelevant* to individual identity. Consider the

example of race. Some views of race suppose that race is simply a matter of having a certain bodily or facial structure or a certain skin color. They further suppose that these features of a person are irrelevant to the identity of the individual having the features. (This is illustrated by the remark that “a black man is a white man underneath.”)³⁹ However, the color of one’s skin is clearly not irrelevant to personal identity on certain understandings of personal identity: For example, the color of one’s skin is clearly not irrelevant to one’s *sense* of self. Although the issues of universals and individual identity are logically distinct, this does not imply that they are entirely unrelated.

In order to consider whether there is a natural and intrinsic property constituting universal womanness, I will consider premise (c) of the argument presented in the previous section. Premise (c) claims that the type “woman” is the same type as the type “female human being.” The type “female human being,” i.e., the class of individuals having an XX chromosome and female sex characteristics, is the only genuine candidate for a natural universal of womanness. (There is no evidence that other putative candidates, such as the class of “caring individuals,” constitute types which could correspond to universal womanness.) If the type “female human being” is a universal, and the type “woman” is identical with the type “female human being,” then there is a natural universal of “woman.” My strategy in this section will be to argue that the concept of woman does not apply to all and only female humans. I will elaborate the concept by looking at a range of cases which illustrate what we mean in our applications of the term ‘woman’. I will argue that the term is used in a variety of ways which outrun the category of female human and hence that there is no natural category which overlaps exactly the extension of the concept “woman.” If the concept “woman” does not apply to all and only female human beings, it follows that the type “woman” is not the same as the type “female human being.” Hence, even if “female human being” is a universal, it is not the same universal as the universal “woman,” and there is no natural universal of womanness.

Consider, first, cases of sexually indeterminate people, such as those described by Anne Fausto-Sterling, who can count as either men or women, or neither. I will assume for the moment that their existence does not undermine the existence of the universals “male” and “female.” Their existence however does undermine the claim that “woman” refers to all and only female human beings (and correspondingly that “man” refers to all and only male human beings). The film *Paris Is Burning* provides a striking example of cases of people of indeterminate biological sex to whom the common-sense concept of woman clearly applies due to their behaviors, clothes, makeup, sexuality, hair, body shape, etc. (Such examples have led Judith Butler to claim that gender is constituted through performance and parody.)⁴⁰ Transvestites, like the character Dil from the film *The Crying Game*, as well as transsexuals, provide a related set of examples. Male transvestites have

many of the features which make the concept of woman applicable, yet have an XY chromosome and male sex characteristics. Transsexuals keep the same chromosomes, yet *change* genders. These examples show at least that there is more to the concept “woman” than having an XX chromosome and related sex characteristics. At most, they show that female sex is not necessary for being a woman and hence cannot be a candidate for the universal “woman.”

The diversity argument provides more evidence that the concept of woman applies to features other than female sex. An important version of the argument can be found in anthropological discussions of the variations in and cultural specificity of gender roles.⁴¹ If the type “woman” is identical with the type “female human,” such variations are, like the color of a squirrel, features which are not essential to membership in the type. All the features of an individual woman other than her female sex—her oppression on the basis of sex, her reproductive role, her role as nurturer and carer, the kinds of labor she performs—are *accidental* to her membership in the type. Yet, as I go on to argue in part 3, the type “woman” is a type precisely because of the clustering of a range of features, including both female sex *and* the typical roles females play, such as reproductive role, or the kinds of work female humans typically perform, and so forth.

The concept of woman is a rich and complicated one which includes many more elements than the identification of the type “woman” with the type “female human” suggests. Although a person’s sex may be a paradigmatic element in the correct application of the concept, sex is not the only element, and in cases where a person’s sex is indeterminate, it is not an element at all. Since the type “female human” is the only plausible candidate for womanness construed as a natural universal, and since the examples suggest that being a female human is not necessary to being a woman, I would conclude that there is no natural universal of womanness.

The conclusion is relevant to an important debate in the feminist literature on the relation between sex and gender. Although I have not been presupposing that sex is different from gender, it is standard to distinguish them in the following way: “Sex” (a person’s *maleness* or *femaleness*) refers to anatomical sex, while “gender” is analyzed as a social category which is in principle independent of sex. This sharp distinction between sex and gender has been problematized by certain feminist philosophers who have proposed that the focus of theoretical investigation ought to shift from “gender” construed as a purely social category to “body” or “sexed subject.” For example, Moira Gatens has argued persuasively that female sex is not a tabula rasa on which gender is inscribed. Rather, there is a significant and nonarbitrary connection between one’s bodily attributes and behaviors and one’s gender.⁴² On the view that the concept of woman is a cluster concept, which I propose in part 3, female sex turns out to be a necessary component of the *concept* of woman, although as I have suggested it is not essential to the attribution of

womanness to an individual. Hence the view I will adopt can be understood as a contribution to the position that sex and gender are, not only nonarbitrarily, but *necessarily* linked.⁴³

The arguments of the last two sections can be summarized as follows. The claim that there is an essence of woman (understood as a universal) can be construed in two different ways: either as an Aristotelian species-essence or as a non-Aristotelian universal in which womanness is instantiated in individual women as a natural intrinsic property of them. The only plausible candidate for both a species-essence of woman and a universal “woman” is the female human. However, female humans do not constitute an Aristotelian species and hence “woman” is not an Aristotelian species. Neither is “woman” a non-Aristotelian universal, because, even if “female human being” is a universal, the concept of woman does not apply to all and only female human beings. If “woman” is not a universal in either of these two senses, the possibilities left open are these: (i) “Woman” is a social or conventional universal; (ii) “woman” is not a universal at all, i.e., women either are not a type or are unified into a type through some other means. The next section takes up option (i), and part 3 of the paper develops my version of option (ii).

(III) NOMINAL ESSENCES

In response to the conclusion of the last section, one possible approach would be to develop an “error theory” of the concept of woman; that is, to argue that insofar as our ascriptions of the term ‘woman’ purport to attribute universal natural properties, they fail to refer and hence fail to be true of the world. This option would argue that since there is no natural universal named by the general term ‘woman’, there are simply *no women*.⁴⁴ An alternative approach is to develop the position that womanness is a social or conventional universal. This view has been outlined by feminists using Locke’s notion of nominal essence. In this section, I will briefly outline Locke’s concept of nominal essence, then argue that since a nominal-essence analysis in effect supposes that there is a single property or set of properties constituting womanness, this analysis cannot cope with the diversity argument.

Locke rejected the Aristotelian claim that species (such as “horse”) and chemical kinds (such as “gold”) are natural universals. Instead he suggested that we sort things into classes on the basis of their overt features; in the case of gold, on the basis of features such as its yellowness, shining color, weight, fusibility, malleability, etc. The nominal essence of both a species and the individual members of a species is the set of characteristics that we associate with individual members of the species, not their internal constitution or real essence. For example, the nominal essence of gold is yellowness, shining color, malleability, etc.; as Ayers puts it, the nominal essence is an *epistemological* essence.⁴⁵

Locke had several arguments against Aristotelian species.⁴⁶ For instance, he claimed that since real essences are unknown to us, we cannot classify things into species on the basis of real essences, and that since species contain deformed or “monstrous” individuals, we should not claim that there are precise boundaries in nature between species. However, despite the conclusion that the natural world does not contain precise boundaries, for Locke *our classifications* have precise boundaries: “The measure and boundary of each Sort, or *Species* . . . is what we call its *Essence*, which is nothing but that *abstract Idea to which the name is annexed*: So that everything contained in that *Idea* is essential to that Sort.”⁴⁷ Following Mackie, we can interpret Locke as claiming that there is a set of necessary and sufficient criteria which an individual must satisfy in order to fall under a general idea such as “gold” or “horse.”⁴⁸ Articulating a nominal essence is thus providing a definition of a term.

Both the naturalizing and the diversity arguments provide rationales for a shift from real essence to nominal essence. The naturalizing argument understands essentialism as primarily a position which attributes a fixed, unchanging (and inferior) nature or biology to individual women. The doctrine of nominal essences offers an opportunity to reject essentialism construed in this way, as it replaces real essences (or individual natures) with nominal essences or ways of classifying the natural world in order to achieve certain purposes: As Locke claims, classifying things into species enables us to “consider Things, and discourse on them, as it were in bundles, for easier and readier improvement, and communication of their Knowledge. . . .”⁴⁹ Moreover, Locke’s nominalism provides a promising response to the diversity argument since nominalism rejects the position that there is a single common (natural) property had by all members of a type. If one is a nominalist, members of a type are at most a group of similar particulars. For example, “woman” could be the name of a class of similar particulars without implying that womanness constitutes a natural universal.

Feminist writers have invoked nominal essence in order to elaborate a “socially constructed” conception of woman. For example, both Teresa de Lauretis and Diana Fuss contrast nominal essence with the Aristotelian essentialist appeal to common natures. De Lauretis says:

If most feminists . . . agree that women are made, not born, that gender is not an innate feature but a sociocultural construction, . . . that patriarchy is historical, . . . then the ‘essence’ of woman that is described in many of the writings of so-called essentialists is not the *real essence*, in Locke’s terms, but more likely a *nominal* one. It is a totality of qualities, properties and attributes that such feminists define, envisage, or enact for themselves. . . . This is more a project, then, than a description of existent reality; it is an admittedly feminist project of “re-vision.”. . .⁵⁰

And Diana Fuss suggests that

when feminists today argue for maintaining a *class* of women, usually for political purposes, they do so . . . on the basis of Locke's nominal essence. It is Locke's distinction between nominal and real essence which allows us to work with the category of "women" as a *linguistic* rather than a natural kind, [and] nominal essence is especially useful for anti-essentialist feminists who want to hold onto the notion of women as a group without submitting to the idea that it is "nature" which characterizes them as such.⁵¹

Fuss and de Lauretis propose different ways in which nominal essence might be helpful in characterizing the notion of woman. In the first quote, de Lauretis claims that nominal essences could provide the opportunity for "revisionary" accounts of the notion of woman. In the second, Fuss argues that nominal essence provides the tools for treating women as a (linguistically constructed) type without appealing to Aristotelian natures. These different interpretations indicate (as Haslanger has pointed out)⁵² that the notion "socially constructed" is multiply ambiguous. For example, de Lauretis intimates that the category of woman might be socially constructed in the sense that it might be posited—perhaps tacitly—in order to achieve certain revisionary political goals.⁵³ This approach focuses on the *pragmatics* of attributions of gender. Alternatively, the category of woman might be socially constructed in the sense that it is constituted by social relations and practices. If so, ascriptions of the term 'woman' would be *descriptive*, rather than pragmatic—they would describe the relevant relations and social practices. Consider a parallel distinction between "socially constructed" accounts of morality: Moral rules might be socially constructed in the sense of being instituted to achieve certain goals. Alternatively, morality might be analyzed as constituted by a tacit agreement among citizens in a society and hence "socially constructed" in another sense. On the latter sense, moral terms would be *descriptive* of features of the tacit agreement.

The distinction between the two notions of "socially constructed" reflects a distinction in Locke between types of nominal essence. For Locke, the paradigm case of a nominal essence is the nominal essence of *substances* such as biological species and chemical stuffs. For substances, the nominal essence can be understood as a pragmatic device introduced by us to classify a vague natural world. The nominal essence is used to group together individuals with unknowable real essences on the basis of similarities in their overt features. However, not everything falls into the category of substance. In particular, there are also what Locke terms *mixed modes*, which include geometrical figures as well as social concepts like adultery or suicide, and for which real and nominal essences *coincide*: "[A] Figure including a Space between three Lines is the real as well as the nominal *Essence* of a Triangle;

it being not only the abstract *Idea* to which the general Name is annexed, but the very *Essentia*, or Being, of the thing it self.”⁵⁴ Like the term ‘triangle’, the terms ‘suicide’ and ‘adultery’ are descriptive of a real essence, in their case, of a certain range of behaviors defined as constituting suicide or adultery. Hence, the distinction between types of nominal essence reflects a distinction between types of term. If one thinks of the term ‘woman’ as a substance term, like ‘gold’ or ‘horse’, then the nominal essence can be understood as a definition introduced by us for certain purposes. It is distinct from the real essence of the individuals to whom the term refers. However, if ‘woman’ is a social term like ‘adultery’ or ‘suicide’, it does not make sense to draw a sharp distinction between real and nominal essence. For social concepts, the real essence is constituted by the social features of the world given in the definition of the term. If ‘woman’ is defined by a certain social relation, e.g., being subordinated on the basis of having a female sex, then, on Locke’s view, the real essence of womanness is precisely the relation of being sexually subordinated. In order for an individual to be a woman, it is necessary and sufficient for that individual to be in a relation of sexual subordination. Notice, however, that there may be an epistemological distinction between real and nominal essence, even for social concepts. As Mackie points out, our possible knowledge of suicide is not exhausted by the features we associate with the term ‘suicide’, because it is also a “concrete performance, a kind of behaviour, a socio-psychological phenomenon which may well have much more to it than is known automatically to everyone who uses the word correctly.”⁵⁵ Similarly, there may be more to the actual “psycho-social phenomenon” of being subordinated on the basis of female sex than is known by those who understand the definition of the term ‘woman’.

In the rest of this section, I will use Catharine MacKinnon’s analysis of gender as an example of an analysis appealing to nominal essence. I will argue that although MacKinnon’s analysis of woman can deal with the issues raised by the naturalizing argument, it cannot give a convincing account of the differences among women outlined by the diversity argument. There are numerous possible interpretations of MacKinnon, of which here I will briefly outline two.⁵⁶ First, MacKinnon can be understood as claiming that women are defined by being in a certain kind of social relation: a relation of eroticized subordination to men. On this understanding, MacKinnon is suggesting a parallel between a Marxist conception of class and a conception of gender. As class is defined in Marxism as work-related subordination, so gender is defined in feminism as sexualized subordination. A second way of understanding MacKinnon is to say that her social theory of gender relies on a tacit claim about women’s experience. The social theory that women are defined by their sexual subordination often seems to be justified in MacKinnon’s writing by a further assumption that all women’s experience

is as of being sexually subordinated. In either case, 'woman' is defined using social relations: Being a woman is either *being* in a relation of sexual subordination or *experiencing* sexual subordination as a result of the social structure of the culture in which we live.

Accounts such as MacKinnon's in terms of social relations can provide a promising response to the issues raised by the naturalizing argument because, even if they are committed to a real essence of woman, the real essence is not "fixed and unchanging." Recall that we can distinguish two senses of the notion "fixed and unchanging": An individual's womanness could be fixed and unchanging either in the sense that it is a natural property of the individual or in the sense that it is a necessary property of the individual. On MacKinnon's analysis, womanness is not fixed and unchanging in the first sense, since womanness is a social relation. Neither is it thought to be fixed and unchanging in the second sense. If the social conditions of society were revolutionized, and the social relation of sexualized subordination was thereby destroyed, women would cease to exist. However, arguably the individuals who had been women would persist. Thus, an analysis of "woman" in terms of social relations suggests that womanness is not a necessary property of individuals who are currently women. (Note that an analysis of womanness in terms of social relations does not *entail* that womanness is not a necessary component of individual identity. I discuss this issue further in part 4 of the paper.)

On the other hand, MacKinnon's analysis does not adequately address the diversity argument. Although it rejects the position that there is a natural universal "woman," it introduces a *social universal*. MacKinnon's position is an example of an appeal to nominal essence precisely because it provides a definition of womanness: On her view, it is both necessary and sufficient in order to be a woman that an individual either be in a relation of sexual subordination or experience sexual subordination because of cultural conceptions of sex. Thus, womanness is literally the same relation or experience in all individuals who are women—that is, it is a universal.

I will suggest three reasons for rejecting MacKinnon's analysis. First, its commitment to a social universal cannot be reconciled with the differences outlined by the diversity argument. Secondly, the definition of womanness offered by MacKinnon is too restrictive to do justice to the richness of the concept of woman. Thirdly, the diversity argument is typically accompanied by a positive project of developing and revaluing new and different conceptions of womanness. MacKinnon's analysis is incompatible with this project.

In order to elaborate the first reason, let me introduce a parallel from moral philosophy. Moral absolutists claim that there is a single true morality, a single moral code or set of moral rules applicable to all. Moral relativists

claim that there is no single true morality, but rather a number of different moral codes which are relative to different concerns, outlooks, or cultures. MacKinnon holds a position on gender like the absolutist view on morality. Although her position can be understood in either a strong or a weak sense (Elizabeth Rapaport points out that the social relations MacKinnon invokes can be understood either as historically and culturally invariant or as operative in modern European industrial culture),⁵⁷ she nevertheless defines women within modern European culture using a single relation; there is a unitary role or social experience which is necessary and sufficient for being a woman.

In contrast, Spelman's position can be characterized as adopting an extreme relativistic account of gender. She argues that there is no single gender that members of the type "woman" share; rather, there are many: that of Afro-American women, that of white women, that of Hispanic-American women, that of poor women, etc. For Spelman, the *definition* of gender is relative to a racial or cultural context or, as Mackie puts it when discussing morality, a "way of life."

The question here, as in the case of morality, is which account provides a better explanation of the facts of diversity? Prima facie, the relativistic position is a compelling explanation of diversity. On the other hand, MacKinnon's view could be reconciled with the evident diversity of roles and experiences within even western industrialized culture by claiming that difference is a *difference in manifestation* of the same relation or experience of sexual subordination. For example, subordination on the basis of cultural conceptions of sex could be manifested differently among Hispanic women than among black women, etc., while still remaining, at a general level of description, subordination on the basis of cultural conceptions of sex.

The suggestion that differences are different manifestations, in different racial or cultural contexts, of a single relation or experience is unconvincing. The greater the difference in manifestation, the less plausible will be the claim that those manifestations are of a *single* role or experience. For example, both Iceland and Ireland are western industrialized countries, yet the roles and experiences of women in each country appear to be vastly different. In the former, for example, women have their own avenue of political representation through the Women's Party, while in the latter, basic services such as contraception are not readily accessible. MacKinnon's absolutism is hostage to the empirical evidence: If the evidence shows an enormous range of experiences and roles of women, it will be ad hoc to label them manifestations of the same thing. The second reason for rejecting MacKinnon's analysis is that the definition of "woman" outlined by MacKinnon seems incompatible with the concept of woman outlined in the last section. Even if there were a society (perhaps, e.g., Iceland) in which there was no obvious sexual subordination of a class of members, it would

be implausible to suggest, given the many aspects of our common-sense concept, that womanness does not exist in that society. Individuals will continue to call themselves “women,” engage in political action on behalf of others whose experiences are similar, and value aspects of themselves which are particularly associated with being women. Thirdly, MacKinnon’s approach ignores the theme of *revaluing* that is apparent in contemporary attempts to recharacterize and rework the notion of woman. De Lauretis adopts nominal essence because the notion is compatible with what she calls the “feminist project of ‘re-vision.’” As we have seen, de Lauretis can be understood as promoting nominal essence in the sense of promoting the idea that conceptions of womanness should be developed to achieve certain pragmatic goals. However, MacKinnon’s use of a definition of womanness (a nominal essence) is part of a descriptive rather than a pragmatic project. She theorizes that womanness is constituted by certain existing social features of the world. Since those features are inevitably oppressive, the only desirable course of political reform is to extinguish gender altogether.

I have suggested that MacKinnon’s account of the social concept “woman” can be understood as an application of Locke’s notion of nominal essence. She provides a definition of “woman” in social terms, and in her theory the term ‘woman’ refers to preexisting social relations and structures. Because her analysis of “woman” is literally a definition, she is committed to a social universal “woman” which is incompatible with the differences among women emphasized by the diversity argument. Moreover, her definition fails to capture the diversity of features in the concept of woman and fails to allow for the positive project of developing new and different conceptions of womanness.

3. “WOMAN” AS A CLUSTER CONCEPT

MacKinnon’s definition of gender does not adequately address the diversity argument, because of its appeal to a unitary notion of woman. Spelman, on the other hand, copes with the diversity argument by suggesting that there are many definitions of “woman.” For Spelman, a particular definition of “woman” is relative to a context or way of life which includes other significant features such as race and class. She claims that

If we can say with de Beauvoir that societies create women out of females (making gender out of sex) and that different societies do this differently, indeed in part define their differences by how they do this, we can say in an important sense that there is a variety of genders . . . gender is constructed and defined in conjunction with elements of identity such as race, class, ethnicity and nationality rather than separable from them. . . .⁵⁸

If Spelman is right, the term 'woman' refers to a range of different properties: For middle-class Asian-American women, it refers to womanness*; for poor Euro-American women, it attributes womanness**; for middle-class Afro-American women, it attributes womanness***, etc. The question arises of whether and how the many individuals satisfying the different definitions of "woman" can be unified into a type. Although Spelman does not deny that there are similarities among women*, women** and women***, etc., she does not indicate whether on her view they constitute a type. What little she says suggests that she would endorse, at most, predicate nominalism. For instance, she writes, "To know what 'woman' means is to know that it applies to me and to Angela Davis, and doesn't apply to my brother Jon or to James Baldwin."⁵⁹

Although I find Spelman's view congenial because of the plausibility of a "ways-of-life" analysis of gender, her view is unsatisfactory for two reasons. First, according to predicate nominalism, the type "woman" is no more than an ad hoc collection of women in different racial and cultural contexts that is a collection simply in virtue of the arbitrary designation of the word 'woman'.⁶⁰ Predicate nominalism provides no principled reasons for collecting women into a type, and hence cannot provide a justification for feminist action on behalf of women, nor an explanation of the similarities among individual members of the type. But individuals calling themselves "women" identify with each other on the basis of shared experiences, political goals, and similar behaviors and bodily features. Just as it fails to be explanatory to ignore *differences* among individual women, it also fails to be explanatory to ignore *similarities*. Secondly, Spelman's view leaves us with a problem I alluded to when discussing the sex-gender distinction. Her position is a strong version of the view that gender is a social category: Different genders are constituted by different social contexts. On this view, although women are typically associated with having a female sex, there is no necessary relation between sex and gender. Yet being a female human (or having a female body) is perhaps the most important cross-cultural feature making the concept "woman" applicable and distinguishing it from the concept "man." For this reason, I would argue that there *is* a necessary relation between the concept of woman and female sex. As I explain in a moment, if we treat "woman" as a cluster concept, then even if having a female sex is an essential component of the *concept*, it does not follow that having a female sex is essential to being an individual woman.

In this part, I will sketch an account of "woman" which has two elements. First, the concept of woman is a "cluster concept"; i.e., there is a cluster of different features in our concept of woman and in order for an individual to satisfy the concept, it is sufficient to satisfy *enough* of, rather than all and only, the features in the cluster.⁶¹ Secondly, the type "woman" is a type in virtue of

the resemblance structure which obtains among individual members of the type. Women constitute a type on the basis of the real (natural and social) similarities among the members of the type, and hence sentences ascribing womanness to the world are true. Resemblance nominalism also allows for difference because the similarities are not identities; as Armstrong puts it, the similarities are at most “partial identities.”⁶² Positing that “woman” is a cluster concept which picks out a resemblance class avoids either the appeal to nominal essence, which requires that we delimit a set of necessary and sufficient features which members of the type must have, or the difference approach, which fails to build in important similarities among members of the type. Thus, the position I will outline is a stronger tool for feminists than either the appeal to nominal essence or the difference view espoused by Spelman.

The notion of a cluster concept derives from Wittgenstein’s idea in the *Philosophical Investigations* that some features of the world bear *family resemblances* to each other.⁶³ For example, our concept of game includes “board-games, ball-games, card-games, Olympic games and so on.” However, there is no single thing that is the same across them all: “[W]e see a complicated network of similarities, overlapping and crisscrossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.”⁶⁴ Wittgenstein observes that different games have different features: In chess, much depends on skill; in cards, there are elements of skill and luck; in children’s games, there are elements of luck and amusement, but perhaps not of skill, and so forth. We call all these practices “games” because of the similarities among them.⁶⁵

The concept “woman” is like the concept “game.” There are a number of different features in our idea of womanness. As with the concept “game,” it is sufficient that an individual woman have a proportion of these features in order to satisfy the concept “woman.” The elements of concepts cluster together: Our idea of a game includes the elements of play, amusement, fun, luck, etc., which are typically associated with each other in the practices to which the word ‘game’ applies. Similarly, a class of objects is a type because of a characteristic clustering of features: ‘Gold’ refers to a type because of a clustering of the features of yellowness, shining color, malleability, fusibility, etc., in samples of gold. In order to outline the elements of the concept “woman” and to argue that the concept applies to a type not a gerrymandered class, I will look for a clustering of features which is both associated with the concept “woman” and manifests itself in actual individual women.

I want to suggest that there are four general elements in the concept “woman.” First, womanness is attributed on the basis of female sex. Female sex includes having the characteristics of a human female (XX chromosome, sex characteristics, and general morphology) and having other bodily characteristics such as gait or voice quality. Secondly, a range of phenomenological features, or aspects of what it *feels* like to be a woman, are typically

associated with women: for example, physical feelings, like having menstrual cramps and female sexual experience, and the “lived experience” of child-birth, breast-feeding, or at least the potential to have such lived experience.⁶⁶ The phenomenology also includes feelings which are the product of social factors, like fear of walking on the streets at night or fear of rape. Thirdly, there are roles such as wearing typical female dress, or being oppressed on the basis of one’s sex, or typically undertaking “private” responsibilities like child-rearing rather than “public” responsibilities in the wider community. Finally, there are self-attributions and the attributions of others which occur as a result of the physical and other features that I have identified: calling oneself a woman and being called a woman. An important explanation of why these particular features cluster together in individual women is that, for many individuals, having a female sex *causes* the phenomenology, role, and attributions of womanness. Lived experience often occurs as a result of bodily features as well as cultural and social conceptions of femaleness; roles like child-rearing are typically the products of having a female sex, and attributions of womanness tend to be made on the basis of female sex.

The elements of the concept “woman” will help us to pick out paradigms of women which are required to construct a resemblance class. In his account of resemblance nominalism, H. H. Price provides a method for constructing a resemblance class: “[A] class has, as it were, a nucleus, an inner ring of key members, consisting of a small group of standard objects or exemplars.”⁶⁷ Let a group of particulars which satisfy the concept of woman, i.e., satisfy *enough* of the elements in the cluster, be the exemplars of the type “woman.” What counts as enough will be controversial, but for the moment I will suggest that an exemplar must satisfy at least three of the dimensions in the concept of woman in order to count as a woman. For example, the following group could constitute the exemplars of the type: (i) an Afro-American who has an XX chromosome and female sex characteristics, a characteristic female gait, attributes womanness to herself, and is oppressed on the basis of sex; (ii) an Asian-American transsexual who attributes womanness to herself and dresses as a female, has female secondary sex characteristics, and has many of the elements of female phenomenology though she lacks an XX chromosome; (iii) a white European hermaphrodite who has been brought up “as a girl” and as a result satisfies typical female roles, has many of the aspects of female phenomenology, and dresses and lives as a female though she lacks female sex characteristics; (iv) a Papua New Guinean with an XX chromosome and female sex characteristics who calls herself a woman and is called a woman, and has responsibility for child-rearing and other family oriented tasks.

Any individual resembling any of the paradigms sufficiently closely (on Price’s account, as closely as they resemble each other)⁶⁸ will be a member of the resemblance class “woman.” For example, consider a white American from a poor background with an XX chromosome and female sex charac-

teristics who has been oppressed on the basis of sex. The nature of her oppression will differ from that of exemplar (i) since, for Afro-American women, the experience of oppression is intimately bound up with the history of slavery and racial oppression in America. Nevertheless, she will count as a woman because her oppression will resemble the oppression experienced by exemplar (i) sufficiently closely. Her oppression is as similar to the oppression of exemplar (i) as the latter is to the oppression of the white hermaphrodite of exemplar (iii).

There are a number of advantages and consequences of the model I am developing. First, it makes sense of some of the hard cases raised earlier in the paper. Having an XX chromosome and female sex characteristics is not necessary for being an individual woman, though female sex is a necessary component in the *concept* of woman. Treating the concept as a cluster concept explains both why female sex is centrally important to the notion of woman and how individuals can be women without being of the female sex. For instance, individuals of indeterminate sex who have female lived experiences, social roles, and self-attributions of womanness will count as women. Moreover, we understand why examples like the character of Dil in *The Crying Game* are hard cases. Dil is a transvestite who dresses as a woman, has the gait and bearing of a woman and hence has womanness attributed to her by others, and also has many aspects of female phenomenology. However, Dil also satisfies many of the features of the concept "man" and in principle could be a member of the type "man." Treating the types "woman" and "man" as resemblance classes explains this possibility. Resemblance classes do not have precise boundaries, and cases like Dil suggest that the boundaries of the types "man" and "woman" overlap.

Secondly, there is room to argue on this model that gender is a matter of degree. Whether it is a matter of degree depends on how we understand the notions of a cluster concept and of sufficient resemblance to the exemplars of the resemblance class. On one common understanding of a cluster concept, once an individual satisfies enough of the features in the concept, it is fully fledged; there is no room for satisfying the concept to a greater degree.⁶⁹ On an alternative understanding, having enough of the elements in the cluster is a threshold over which an individual must pass in order to satisfy the concept. However, once past the threshold, an individual can be a woman to a greater or lesser degree, depending on how closely she resembles the exemplars of the class. Degrees of gender might be useful in explaining cases like Dil. Even if Dil makes it over the threshold of womanness, she may not be a woman to the greatest possible degree, as she may not resemble the exemplars as closely as other members of the type.

Thirdly, the model has an advantage over analyses of gender which characterize gender wholly in terms of social relations. It provides an account in which natural features such as sex, as well as features caused by them, like

sexual experiences, are necessary components of the concept of gender (though not necessary to an individual being a woman).

Fourthly, the notion of woman as a resemblance class is an empirically powerful one in that it explains actual “felt similarities” among women. Judith Mary Green and Blanche Radford Curry use a Wittgensteinian analysis to explain what they term the “real recognition experiences, in history, in literature, and in our own lives” among women of different races.⁷⁰ Just as differences cannot be denied, the similarities among women along the four dimensions mentioned earlier must be recognized in any account of what it is to be a woman.

Finally, the model is compatible with the projects of revision and reevaluation of what it is to be a woman outlined by de Lauretis. Although there are real similarities among members of a resemblance class, the class is *constructed* in the sense that there is a choice as to the exemplars of the class. Moreover, the elements of the cluster concept that I have identified include both social roles and conceptions, and natural features of individuals. To the extent that any of these are revisable, the concept itself is also revisable.

4. IDENTITIES

In the introduction I identified two forms of essentialism: a form which understands the essence of woman as a universal, and a form in which the essence of woman is the essence or identity of individual women. I have argued that there is no essence of woman in the first sense, though women constitute a type which is bound together by a resemblance structure. Feminists claim, however, that people have a gender “identity” and often seem to imply by this that gender is constitutive, or at least partially constitutive, of the individual. Since I gave a negative answer to the question of whether there is a universal “woman,” the possibility of an affirmative answer to the question of whether gender is essential to individual identity again shows that the two forms of essentialism are distinct.

The plausibility of the claim that gender is essential to personal identity itself depends on how one unpacks the notions of “essential” and “identity” used in the attribution of a gender identity. I will briefly consider three possibilities here. These are that gender is essential to one’s “sense of self”; that gender is essential in that the individual cannot survive changes in gender; and that gender is essential in that one’s actual gender is logically necessary to being the individual that one is.

I have already suggested that the last alternative is implausible. The counterfactual “If I were a man, I would not have written this paper” seems

true, but not simply trivially true. It seems true for substantive reasons such as that men are far less likely to be interested in feminist philosophy. Yet, if gender were a condition of modal identity, the conditional would have an impossible antecedent and hence be trivially true. Similarly, the counterfactual “If I were a man, I would have learnt to drive earlier than at the age of seventeen” seems false. (My parents did not treat my brothers differently in this respect.) However, the counterfactual could not be false if gender were modally essential to identity, as, if it were, the counterfactual would be trivially true. It follows that if the claim that gender is essential to self means “modally essential,” it is unlikely to be true.

Perhaps, however, having the gender that I have, *once I have it*, is essential to me.⁷¹ On this view, if I change genders, I become a different person. Despite hard cases (e.g., transsexuals who perhaps do not seem to become different persons as a result of a change of gender), this line of argument may be promising, though I cannot pursue it here.

Finally, the claim that gender is an essential part of one’s *sense* of self seems almost uncontroversial.⁷² The claim may not be true if one had an ambiguous gender to start with. However, once one has a gender, it seems plausible that the features of gender are deeply connected to one’s sense of who one is. This is exemplified by the fact that people identify with a certain gender and make attributions of gender to themselves.

If gender *is* essential to individual identity in any of these senses, an interesting consequence follows. I have argued that gender is a cluster concept, which means that a particular individual has a gender just in case she has a certain number of the properties in the cluster. On my account, the properties in the cluster comprise relations as well as intrinsic properties. Thus, having a gender may in part be a matter of being in certain relations. If gender is essential to individual identity or to one’s sense of self, and if gender is, in part, having certain relations, it follows that the self or at least one’s sense of self is, in part, constituted by being in certain relations. A conclusion that the self is relational, if established, could illuminate in interesting ways several independent accounts of the nature of the self in which it is argued that the self is relational. For example, some communitarians claim that individuals are constituted by historical and community relations; and some feminists propose that bodily relations and properties are components of the self.⁷³

5. CONCLUSION

I have suggested that two forms of essentialism in feminist philosophy should be separated. An analysis and critique of the first form reveals that there is

no universal “woman.” Instead, the concept “woman” is a cluster concept applying to a resemblance class. People are women when they have *enough* of the properties relevant in the application of the concept.

An answer to the question of whether there is a universal “woman” does not answer the further question of whether womanness is essential to individual identity. This question’s answer depends on how we unpack “essential” in the context of individual identity. However, *if* gender is essential to individual identity, there is an interesting consequence for the nature of the self.

NOTES

1. I am especially grateful to Sally Haslanger for her extensive comments on an earlier draft. I am also indebted to Cynthia Freeland, Ian Gold, Fran Gray, Alan Musgrave, and Paul Thom for many helpful discussions and comments, as well as to audiences in the Philosophy Program in the Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, May 1995, and the Women in Philosophy Conference, University of New England, Armidale, July 1995.
2. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, with Ellen Rooney, “In a Word. *Interview*,” in *The Essential Difference*, ed. Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 159–60.
3. Naomi Schor, “This Essentialism Which Is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray,” in *The Essential Difference*, 42. See also Schor’s introduction to the same volume.
4. Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989), xi.
5. Elizabeth Grosz describes essentialism in these terms. She usefully distinguishes between two forms of essentialism: biologism and naturalism. The former analyzes woman’s essence in terms of biological characteristics (reproductive ability, brain features, etc.); while the latter analyzes woman’s essence in terms of “natural” characteristics which may be biological but need not be—characteristics such as being emotional, irrational, passive, etc. While both types of essentialism imply “universalism,” i.e., that *all* women have *the same* set of features in virtue of which they are women, universalism does not necessarily imply essentialism of either kind. See Elizabeth Grosz, “Sexual Difference and the Problem of Essentialism,” in *The Essential Difference*, 83–6.
6. Note that not all natural properties are had by individuals necessarily and not all natural properties are intrinsic. For example, having brown eyes is natural and non-necessary and being a biological daughter is natural and relational.
7. Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 159.
8. In postmodernist critiques of essentialism, the two arguments against essentialism that I have identified seem to coincide. The postmodernist position against fixed or unified subjects, namely, that they are unstable, multiple, or fragmented, is understood as ipso facto opening up the possibility of differences among subjects and hence as incompatible with universalism. See, for example, Linda J. Nicholson, introduction to *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990); Judith Butler, “Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse,” in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, 327; and Iris Marion Young, “The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference,” in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, 303–5.
9. See D. M. Armstrong, *Universals: An Opinionated Introduction* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1989), 12–13.

10. *Ibid.*, 1–13.
11. *Ibid.*, 5.
12. D. M. Armstrong, *Nominalism and Realism*, vol. 1 of *A Theory of Universals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978) and Armstrong, *Universals*, 14–18. The six versions of nominalism are: predicate nominalism, concept nominalism, classes as primitives, resemblance nominalism, natural classes of tropes, and resemblance classes of tropes. A trope is a property or relation which is itself a particular.
13. Armstrong, *Universals*, 5, 15, 39–58. Armstrong argues that, of all the nominalisms, only resemblance nominalism gives an analysis of why the members of a type are unified into a type, and hence only resemblance nominalism provides a genuine alternative to a doctrine of universals.
14. I am grateful to Philip Gerrans for pointing out that the postmodernist position that subjects are multiple or fragmented can be characterized as the claim that individuals have no essential natures, which does *not* imply the rejection of universals. See also note 8 above.
15. See María C. Lugones and Elizabeth V. Spelman, “Have We Got a Theory for You! Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism, and the Demand for ‘The Woman’s Voice,’” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 6 (1983): 573–81; Angela P. Harris, “Race and Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory,” in *Feminist Legal Theory*, ed. Katharine T. Bartlett and Rosanne Kennedy (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991), 235–262.
16. Spelman, *op. cit.*, 8.
17. Harris, *op. cit.*; bell hooks, *Ain’t I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981); *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (Watertown, Mass.: Persephone Press, 1981).
18. The French feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray is an example of a “difference feminist.” For an English collection of her work, see *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).
19. Spelman, *op. cit.*, 136.
20. *Ibid.*, 33ff.
21. See, e.g., Keith Campbell, “The Metaphysics of Abstract Particulars,” in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy VI: The Foundations of Analytic Philosophy*, ed. P. A. French, T. A. Uehling, and H. K. Wettstein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 477–88, and *Abstract Particulars* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).
22. See Armstrong, *Universals*, chs. 4 and 5.
23. Spelman, *op. cit.*, 158.
24. Harris, *op. cit.*, 240.
25. See, for example, Fuss, *op. cit.*, 2ff. For Aristotle’s own discussion of essence, see in particular *Metaphysics VII*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). Note that Aristotle himself does not think that there is an essence of *woman*. On his view, women are members of the species of human beings (see, e.g., *Metaphysics* 1058a29–34).
26. See, for example, Charlotte Witt, *Substance and Essence in Aristotle* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989). Witt describes the standard interpretation of Aristotelian essence as “a universal essence shared by all members of the same species— . . . the *species-essence*” (2–3). Witt’s notion of Aristotelian essence differs from the species-essence interpretation on a number of crucial points (summarized on 3). For a standard interpretation of Aristotle, see, e.g., W. D. Ross, introduction to *Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924). For further discussions, see David H. DeGroot, *Philosophies of Essence: An Examination of the Categories of Essence* (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1976) and Irving M. Copi, “Essence and Accident,” in *Naming, Necessity, and Natural Kinds*, ed. Stephen P. Schwartz (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), 176–191.

27. John Dupré provides a convincing argument that “female sex” is not a kind. If “female sex” is not a kind, then “female human being” cannot be the intersection of two kinds, “female sex” and “human being.” See John Dupré, “Sex, Gender, and Essence,” in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy XI: Studies in Essentialism*, ed. P. A. French, T. E. Uehling, and H. K. Wettstein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 446–47.
28. Anne Fausto-Sterling, “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough,” *The Sciences* 33 (1993): 20–24.
29. See, e.g., John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), bk. 3, ch. 4, par. 22. See also Michael Ayers, *Locke Volume II: Ontology* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 68–9.
30. See Copi, *op. cit.*, 177–8.
31. If being of a species is “modally essential” to an individual, the individual is of that species in every possible world in which the individual exists. In Kripke’s account, there are three necessary conditions of transworld identity: (i) being from the same sperm and egg; (ii) being the same sort of thing; and (iii) being made of the same kind of matter. See Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 106ff. It might be thought that Kripke’s condition (i)—coming from the same sperm and egg—is inconsistent with the possibility of a female being male or vice versa. If it is, on Kripke’s analysis, being female would be essential to individual identity. (Note that the claim that being a female is essential to individual identity does not imply that being a woman is essential to individual identity, unless the type “female” is identical with the type “woman.”) However, although the sperm and egg determine the chromosomal features of an individual, the other features in the essence of “male” and “female” (the sex characteristics, etc.) are the product of chromosomal features plus development. For example, it is not biologically necessary that a fetus with an XY chromosome will develop with male sex characteristics. Hence, Kripke’s condition (i) does not imply that being a female or a male is essential to individual identity.

For a discussion of the second condition, see Penelope Mackie, “Sortal Concepts and Essential Properties,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (1994): 311–33. Mackie challenges the view held by Kripke and others that being in a species (or sort) is essential to being the thing that it is. Her view turns on making an important distinction between the following claims: (i) It is necessary, once an individual is in a certain species, that it remain in the same species in order to persist as the same individual (“Once an *F*, always an *F*”); and (ii) it is necessary for an individual to be the individual that it is that it be of the species of which it is actually a member. I will ignore this subtlety here, although see part 4 for a bit more discussion.
32. See DeGrood, *op. cit.*, 20.
33. Dupré, *op. cit.*, 444–5.
34. Dupré is suggesting in effect a criterion of normalcy based on relative frequency. There may be other criteria of normalcy. In particular, Aristotle’s own criterion of normalcy is a *normative* one. He explains variations among members of a species as different degrees of failure to actualize fully their potential nature, and potential nature is spelled out using a conception of the flourishing of the members of a species. Since women fail to actualize their human nature (i.e., their rationality) fully, they are for Aristotle abnormal or “deformed” members of the human species. See, e.g., *Generation of Animals* 765b9–10. (I thank Sally Haslanger for this point.)
35. Locke, *Essay*, bk. 3, ch. 6, par. 22; Ayers, *op. cit.*, 85.
36. Ayers, *op. cit.*, 85.
37. For example, Ayers defends this account of the essence of species. See *ibid.*, 81–7.
38. Universals can also be relations (or extrinsic properties). For an examination of the position that womanness is a universal social relation, see the next section on nominal essences. There are of course other options that I will not be considering: for example, universal womanness as a natural relation (e.g., like the relation of being a biological daughter).

39. Spelman, *op. cit.*, 12–13.
40. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 140–1.
41. See, e.g., Sherry Ortner and Harriet Whitehead, *Sexual Meanings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
42. Moira Gatens, “A Critique of the Sex-Gender Distinction,” in *A Reader in Feminist Knowledge*, ed. Sneja Gunew (New York: Routledge, 1991), 140. Gatens argues that the sex-gender distinction presupposes a further incorrect distinction between the “natural” and the “social.” There is no passive or neutral anatomical body; there are only bodies which have social significations (145).
43. Definitions of “woman” wholly in terms of social relations can have nonarbitrary (though contingent) links to sex. For example, consider “x is a woman if and only if she is treated as sexually subordinate because she is believed to be female” (suggested by Sally Haslanger). Definitions of gender based on “perceived sex” do not however do justice to the centrality of sex in the concept of gender nor to the insights of Gatens and others about the apparent noncontingent role of the female body. Therefore, I have opted to treat sex as a necessary component in the concept of gender.
44. An error theory of the concept of woman would suggest that sentences describing people as women are false in the same way that sentences describing people as witches are false. J. L. Mackie has developed error theories of both the concept of color and the concept of morality. See J. L. Mackie, *Problems from Locke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), ch. 1, and *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), ch. 1. He argues, first, that the relevant concept has a range of features implicit in it and, secondly, that such features do not exist in the world. Hence, sentences which purport to attribute the features implicit in the concept to the world are false because they attribute features to the world which (literally) do not exist. In the case of morality, Mackie provides a diagnosis of why objective morality is incorrectly projected onto the world.
- There is a striking parallel between Mackie’s approach and Simone de Beauvoir’s argument in the introduction to *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989). De Beauvoir first investigates the features of the concept “woman”: For example, woman is conceived as the inferior and political unequal of man, as “weighed down by everything peculiar to [her body],” as dependent, submissive, as not autonomous, as neither decisive nor consistent, as to be ordered back into the home, as “frivolous, infantile, irresponsible.” She then points out that real women do not have the features attributed to them—“woman” conceived in the way described is a myth. Finally, she diagnoses why people (especially men) would project such features onto real women: “They cannot be blamed for not cheerfully relinquishing all the benefits they derive from the myth, for they realize what they would lose in relinquishing woman as they fancy her to be. . . . Refusal to pose oneself as the Subject, unique and absolute, requires great self-denial” (xxv–xli).
45. Ayers, *op. cit.*, 68.
46. Locke summarized these arguments in the *Essay*, bk. 3, ch. 6, pars. 14–20. Ayers emphasizes that although Locke accepts that there are natural resemblances between things, he does not believe that there are natural boundaries (*op. cit.*, 68).
47. Locke, *Essay*, bk. 3, ch. 6, par. 2.
48. Mackie, *Problems from Locke*, 85.
49. Locke, *Essay*, bk. 3, ch. 3, par. 20.
50. Teresa de Lauretis, “The Essence of the Triangle, or Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously,” in *The Essential Difference*, 3.
51. Fuss, *op. cit.*, 5.
52. Sally Haslanger, “Ontology and Social Construction,” this journal, this issue.
53. The idea that it may be useful for political purposes to posit an essence or a class of women without presupposing that “woman” refers to a single property or essence has been captured in Spivak’s idea of “strategic” essentialism. See, e.g., Gayatri Chakravorty

- Spivak, with Elizabeth Grosz, "Criticism, Feminism, and the Institution," *Thesis Eleven* 10 & 11 (1984–85): 175–88.
54. Locke, *Essay*, bk. 3, ch. 3, par. 18. De Lauretis says that the essence of woman is more like the essence of a triangle: "One may prefer one triangle, one definition of woman and/or feminism, to another and, within her particular conditions and possibilities of existence, struggle to define the triangle she wants or wants to be. . . ." (de Lauretis, op. cit., 4). This is an inappropriate metaphor for an essentialism compatible with revisionary feminism because, for Locke, a triangle is an example of a case in which nominal and real essences are *the same*. I am grateful to Fran Gray for drawing my attention to this problem in the work of de Lauretis. See Fran Gray, "De Lauretis, Fuss, and the Essence of John Locke" (manuscript).
 55. Mackie, *Problems from Locke*, 90.
 56. For example, Catharine MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence," *Signs* 8 (1983): 635–658, and *Feminism Unmodified* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987). The interpretations of MacKinnon I outline are from Sally Haslanger, "On Being Objective and Being Objectified," in *A Mind of One's Own*, ed. Louise M. Antony and Charlotte Witt (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1993), 98–101, and Harris, op. cit.
 57. Elizabeth Rapaport, "Generalizing Gender," in *A Mind of One's Own*, 135–6.
 58. Spelman, op. cit., 175.
 59. *Ibid.*, 158.
 60. De Beauvoir rejects predicate nominalism for this reason (op. cit., xxiv).
 61. The question has been raised whether the cluster-concept view can really be distinguished from a view requiring necessary and sufficient conditions, as even on the former view it is a necessary and sufficient condition for an object to satisfy the concept that it have enough of the features in the cluster. I would argue that even if there is a necessary and sufficient *condition* that must be satisfied for an object to satisfy a cluster concept, nevertheless there is no single *feature or set of features* that it is necessary and sufficient for an object to have in order to satisfy the concept. Thus the cluster-concept view is distinguished from all varieties of views committed to universals, since a universal implies that there is a single *feature or set of features* that it is necessary and sufficient for an object to have in order to satisfy the concept which applies to the universal.
 62. Armstrong, *Universals*, 15.
 63. As far as I know, there is only one published article which discusses in detail the idea of using Wittgensteinian family resemblances to resolve the problem of essentialism and difference: Judith Mary Green and Blanche Radford Curry, "Recognizing Each Other Amidst Diversity: Beyond Essentialism in Collaborative Multi-Cultural Feminist Theory," *Sage* 8 (1991): 39–49. (I am grateful to Naomi Scheman for this reference.) Some authors have mentioned in passing the possibility of using family resemblances to address the problem of essentialism and difference; e.g., Haslanger, "On Being Objective and Being Objectified," 98–9.
 64. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), sec. 66.
 65. As Armstrong notes, even if 'game' does not refer to a universal, Wittgenstein's argument does not show that there are no universals. Suppose that chess has properties FGH, bridge has properties GHI, soccer has properties HIJ, etc. There is no single property between them, yet all the properties they instantiate could themselves be universals (Armstrong, *Universals*, 86).
 66. See Green and Curry, op. cit., 42. For articles on the phenomenology of being a woman, see Iris Marion Young, "Breasted Experience" and "Pregnant Embodiment," in her *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

67. H. H. Price, *Thinking and Experience* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1969), 20–21; and see also Armstrong, *Universals*, 47–8.
68. Price, op. cit., 22.
69. I thank Alan Musgrave for this point.
70. Green and Curry, op. cit., 45.
71. Penelope Mackie distinguishes between the claim that once something is of a certain kind, it cannot change into being a member of another kind from the claim that, if something is a member of a certain kind, it *could not have existed* as a member of another kind (op. cit., 314).
72. Of course, since “sense of self” is an epistemological notion, there is room for disagreement over whether gender is part of one’s sense of self. As Sally Haslanger pointed out to me, it may be quite an individual thing how deep a connection there is between one’s gender and one’s sense of self.
73. For a communitarian example, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), ch. 15; for a feminist example, see Rosalyn Diprose, *Bodies of Women: Ethics, Embodiment, and Sexual Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1994).