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GENDER AS NAME

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In 2018 Theresa May, then prime minister of the United Kingdom, launched a consultation on reforming the Gender Recognition Act and moving to a process of self-identification. Instead of the lengthy and medicalized two-year process we have now, people would be able to legally change their gender by an act of mere declaration. This is already the case in other countries, such as Ireland, Portugal, and Belgium. The subsequent UK prime minister, Boris Johnson, canceled the proposed change despite a clear majority of respondents to the consultation expressing support for it, with only 36 percent in favor of requiring a diagnosis of gender dysphoria and less than 20 percent in favor of requiring a medical report.[1] Champions of the proposal focus on the practical benefits of moving to self-identification, but some believe it would also reflect the metaphysical truth that people genuinely *are* the gender they identify as. In the course of this paper, we will see that most gender theories straightforwardly rule this out. My goal is to find a theory of gender that supports it.

In section 1, I will consider what kind of project I am engaged in, suggesting that it is probably best seen as an ameliorative one, and I will clarify its aim. I will then examine Talia Bettcher's position that we should understand "First-Person Authority" (FPA) as *ethical* rather than epistemic or metaphysical in section 2, and I will argue that anything less than metaphysical FPA would leave too much room for dissent.[2] In section 3, I will show why existing gender theories, including Bettcher's and Katharine Jenkins's theories, do not adequately secure FPA.[3] I will present my own theory in section 4. I propose to understand gender in a similar manner to names. Genders, like names, have no common meanings, but they do have significance. Most importantly, our genders, like our names,

1 Jamie Wareham, "Boris Johnson 'Scraps Plans' to Make Changing Gender Easier in Blow for Trans Rights," *Forbes*, June 14, 2020, https://www.forbes.com/sites/jamiewareham/2020/06/14/boris-johnson-to-make-changing-gender-harder-in-blow-for-trans-rights/; King, Paechter, and Ridgway, *Gender Recognition Act*, 41, 47.

2 Bettcher, "Trans Identities and First-Person Authority."

3 Bettcher, "Trans Women and the Meaning of 'Woman'"; Jenkins, "Amelioration and Inclusion."

are up to us. This raises several issues that I will address in section 5, such as the worry that my theory cheapens gender, the concern that it does not support transition-related healthcare, and the interesting choice point of what to say about authority over one's *past* gender. I will conclude in section 6.

1. THE PROJECT

Suppose that Sam has the biological sex characteristics of a typical cis woman, such as ovaries, XX chromosomes, and relatively high estrogen. Sam has none of the biological sex characteristics of a typical cis man, such as testes, XY chromosomes, and relatively high testosterone. When it comes to other characteristics, all of the stereotypes Sam fits into belong to the category of men: Sam has short head hair and long leg hair; wears trousers; is attracted to women; is socially dominant, ambitious, egotistical, and highly sexed (Sam is a white middle-class Brit); and loves fire, science, prog rock, philosophy, and violence. Sam wonders, *What gender am I?* One of Sam's friends tells Sam, "Biology be damned. Your traits are evidence you are a man." "Pish! Archaic stereotypes be damned," a second friend replies. "You're an atypical woman." "Damn biology *and* stereotyping," says a third friend, "and damn anyone telling you what your gender is. You are whatever *you* identify as."

I am interested in the third friend's response. Underlying their position is an endorsement of the idea that there is no "golden nugget of womanness"—no shared intrinsic qualities that all and only women (or other genders) have.[4] Beyond that, there is the idea that individuals have a kind of *authority* over their own gender, and this can seem rather mysterious. Other properties, even very personal ones like sexuality, are not like this. It is not the case that I am ginger if and only if I identify as ginger. I could be homosexual without identifying as such. What could gender be for it to yield to our own authority in this way? As I will explain in section 4, I believe that we should treat genders in the same way as names. There is not much of a mystery why, when Sam says (with sincerity) "My name is 'Sam,'" we grant full authority to the individual while being under no impression that Sam must share an intrinsic quality unique to all Sams.

Am I doing metaphysics? I initially thought so. I would have described my project as a proposal for what it is to *be* a particular gender. However, recent papers by Robin Dembroff and Elizabeth Barnes have called this into question, distinguishing metaphysical theories of gender and theories that give the extensions of gender terms. Dembroff argues against "the idea that gender classifications should track the gender kind membership facts," and Barnes

4 Spelman, *Inessential Woman*, 159.

argues that "giving a metaphysics of gender should be understood as the project of theorizing what it is—if anything—about the social world that ultimately explains gender. But that project might come apart from the project of defining or giving application conditions for our natural language gender terms like 'woman.'"[5] I am not sure whether the two can come apart in the required way, but if they can, this paper is on the semantic side. Here, I am interested in what might determine the correct extension of gender terms rather than explaining why gender exists at all. Consequently, many readers may view this paper as compatible with several metaphysical theories of gender.[6] For example, Ásta's theory that genders are socially conferred upon us from context to context, imposing "constraints and enablements" on us, might correctly theorize what it is about the social world that explains gender, while my theory explains in parallel how we can correctly continue to call a trans man a "man" despite being in a context that constrains him from, say, entering the men's bathroom.[7] It would be a happy result if what I say in this paper is consistent with the excellent work being done on the social realities of gender.

My project, then, is to find a theory of gender *terms* that vindicates Sam's third friend as speaking truthfully. I think it is clear that in doing so I am not describing what most people have in mind when they use gender terms. Does this mean I am not trying to figure out the public meaning of words like "woman"? Well, it could be the case that most people are completely wrong about the meaning of the words they use, but it would take some impressive metasemantic gymnastics to arrive at the conclusion that meanings are so detached from people's conceptions and patterns of usage. Given the diversity of usage of gender terms among different communities—say, among very socially conservative groups as compared to among trans rights activists—some philosophers have taken gender terms like "woman" to be context dependent or to have multiple meanings.[8] The pertinent question is which meaning(s) we *should* adopt at any given time. However, I will not restrict myself by only looking for *existing* meanings of gender terms.

One possible project I might be engaged in is that of describing whatever properties gender terms track. "Water" does not mean H_2O, but our word "water" tracks what we now know is a liquid with that atomic composition. Maybe what I am doing, then, is articulating the kind of thing that people track

5 Dembroff, "Beyond Binary," 22; Barnes, "Gender and Gender Terms," 704.

6 Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

7 Ásta, *Categories We Live By*, 74–75.

8 Saul, "Politically Significant Terms and Philosophy of Language"; Bettcher, "Trans Women and the Meaning of 'Woman'"; Laskowski, "Moral Constraints on Gender Concepts."

with gender terms in communities subscribing to self-identification. While I am open to this idea, I think that where I end up in this paper is more akin to prescribing a meaning. Like Sally Haslanger and Jenkins, I feel I am best understood as engaging in an *ameliorative* project.[9] We might describe the project as one of conceptual engineering rather than standard analysis: "Those pursuing an ameliorative approach might reasonably represent themselves as providing an account of our concept—or perhaps the concept we are reaching for—by enhancing our conceptual resources to serve our (critically examined) purposes."[10] The gist is that our concepts are malleable and we should shape them to work for us. What, then, are my purposes?

My primary purpose is to forge gender concepts that guarantee FPA. Some may and do argue that this is the wrong goal. I will not address their arguments in this paper, save one: while opponents of self-identification worry about the supposed harms of people being able to determine their own gender, some also think that the very idea of "identifying into" a given gender makes no sense. In Bettcher's words, it is "just not obvious how trans people are going to understand the term 'woman' when they self-identify (or do not self-identify) with that term."[11] I will be arguing that my theory of gender as name *does* make sense of self-identification. Otherwise, I will be assuming that the benefits of FPA to the wellbeing of trans people and society as a whole outweigh any potential harms.[12]

It is possible that different situations call for different goals and different operative concepts. For instance, you might agree that FPA is the right goal to have in interpersonal contexts but think we should use Haslanger's account of gender as class when analyzing discrimination against women in the workplace; after all, if your boss classes you as a woman, they are likely to treat you in a certain way regardless of your hidden biology or gender identity. This paper can therefore be read as an answer to the following question: If we accept that it is at least *sometimes* correct or desirable to recognize FPA, how ought we to conceive of gender in those situations?

9 Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*; Jenkins, "Amelioration and Inclusion."

10 Haslanger, *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique*, 386.

11 Bettcher, "Trans Women and the Meaning of 'Woman,'" 246.

12 Valentine and Shipherd examine twenty years of research about what significantly impacts the mental health of transgender and gender nonconforming people, among whom depressive symptoms and suicidality are elevated. Alleviating factors shown to be highly beneficial include access to medical intervention, employment protection, and "the central importance of a social and community support network (information and formal) that affirms one's gender identity" ("A Systematic Review of Social Stress and Mental Health among Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming People in the United States," 26).

2. FIRST-PERSON AUTHORITY

It is sometimes thought that we are in a privileged position of authority when it comes to our own mental states. The idea that we should think similarly about gender comes from Bettcher: "Claims about self-identity in (some) trans subcultures have the form of first-person, present-tense avowals of mental attitudes (e.g. 'I am angry at you')."[13] Yet there are different ways to understand FPA. In the case of mental attitudes, the *metaphysical* (or *ontological* or *constitutive*) thesis that identification *determines* one's attitude is highly implausible.[14] Individuals cannot simply identify themselves into a particular mental state such as anger. We might prefer instead to consider an *epistemic* FPA according to which individuals are *best placed* to know their own minds. Bettcher, correctly in my view, argues that this will not do since we are often *not* best placed to know our own minds, owing to phenomena like self-deception. Instead, Bettcher opts for an *ethical* FPA according to which we *morally ought* to treat first-person avowals as decisive. One of her examples is someone proclaiming that they want to go home.[15] To fail to take this avowal as decisive would undermine their autonomy and erode their self-confidence. According to Bettcher, we have this ethical FPA over our own genders.

I worry that this is too weak. As Bettcher acknowledges, we are not always in the best epistemic position to know our own minds. Consider a case in which our friend, visibly fuming, avows that they are not angry with us. We do not believe them. Already we are in a place many trans rights activists do not want to be when it comes to gender; ideally, we would take a friend at their word when they avow that they are genderqueer. Returning to our angry comrade, we can dispute ethical FPA. It may well be morally permissible to say to them, "I don't believe you. I can tell you're angry with me, and you're right to be after what I did to your rabbit." Of course, sometimes it will be inappropriate to deny someone's sincere avowal too. So, if gender really is analogous to mental states, ethical FPA only holds on a case-by-case basis.

13 Bettcher, "Trans Women and the Meaning of 'Woman,'" 246–47.

14 The term "metaphysical" here looks to be in tension with how it was used in the discussion of Dembroff and Barnes in the previous section. To square things up, we should take the "metaphysical" in this instance to pertain to the extensions of terms, or whatever it is that makes sentences containing the relevant terms true or false, which is still importantly different from the "epistemic" and "ethical" to be discussed in a moment. Metaphysical FPA for gender, then, need not be a matter of theorizing what it is about the social world that ultimately explains gender; it is theorizing what it is that determines the correct application of gender terms.

15 Bettcher, "Trans Identities and First-Person Authority," 99.

Furthermore, without metaphysical FPA, ethical FPA is simply not going to be convincing to anyone who gives speaking the truth greater moral weight than harmful consequences. Even if a social conservative admits that depression and suicide may follow from describing someone as a gender that person disavows, the social conservative may insist that these bad consequences do not trump the truth. Indeed, I have spoken to anti-trans activists who say that pushing this line of argument is itself immoral because it is an attempt to guilt-trip people into saying untruthful things. While it may be *polite* to treat people's first-person avowals as decisive, perhaps we are under no obligation to do so when they are false.

In light of this, I am skeptical that Bettcher has "shown that the basis for such [first-person] authority resides in the ultimate priority of ethical considerations over metaphysical and epistemological ones."[16] I think defenders of FPA over gender need to tackle the issue head-on and endorse it as a metaphysical thesis: sincere avowals of one's own gender *guarantee their own truth*. This undercuts the social conservative's position I outlined and yields an iron footing for epistemic and ethical FPA too. However, metaphysical FPA is *prima facie* mysterious.[17] How can we have such authority? Where does this power come from? Do any existing theories of gender guarantee that self-identifications are always true?

3. OTHER THEORIES

Most theories of gender straightforwardly contravene FPA. I will briefly consider four of these before discussing two other theories in more detail. According to purely biological sex-as-gender views, women are adult human females (where "female" is a biological sex term).[18] Someone born male cannot be a woman in virtue of a mere act of self-identification. Sam, whom we met in section 1, would be classed as a woman, and Sam's second friend would be vindicated. This biologically reductive view rules out FPA and intentionally so.

What about other, more trans-friendly theories? Consider Haslanger's view:

> *S is a woman* iff$_{df}$ *S* is systematically subordinated along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.), and *S* is "marked" as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction.

16 Bettcher, "Trans Identities and First-Person Authority," 115.

17 Henceforth, an unqualified "FPA" is to be understood metaphysically.

18 Byrne, "Are Women Adult Human Females?"; Bogardus, "Evaluating Arguments for the Sex/Gender Distinction."

> *S is a man* iff$_{df}$ *S* is systematically privileged along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.), and *S* is "marked" as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of a male's biological role in reproduction.[19]

This view makes room for the existence of trans people if they "pass" as a target for privilege or subordination based on a mistake in perception. A looming worry about this way of thinking about gender is how it may play into the trope, which fuels so much violence against trans folk, that they are "deceivers" about their true biological role in reproduction.[20] In any case, it is clear that Haslanger's theory does not secure FPA.[21] Self-identity simply does not come into the picture and nor do nonbinary genders. If someone identifies as genderqueer but is systematically subordinated in virtue of being perceived as having biologically female features, they will be classed as a woman.

Family resemblance views do a little better.[22] There are no necessary and sufficient intrinsic features that guarantee membership of a gender category; there is no golden nugget of womanness. Instead, we could take exemplars of paradigmatic women, men, or any other genders, and then see which of them we sufficiently resemble. Resemblance is vague and there will be borderline cases, and that is a feature rather than a bug: gender is messy. Does Sam share any features with paradigmatic women such as Beyoncé and Queen Elizabeth II? Yes, biological features, but that is all. There is unlikely to be sufficient resemblance to categorize Sam as a woman, given everything else. Sam's first friend would probably be vindicated. Does self-identification come into it? Perhaps! It could be the case that paradigms of genders tend to self-identify as those genders, and so self-identification is one possible shared feature.[23] However, it is certainly insufficient by itself. In short, while family resemblance theories may *give weight* to self-identification, they will not yield FPA: people may identify as genders they do not sufficiently resemble.

Theories that view gender as a performance are very trans friendly. Judith Butler tells us it is an illusion that we have a core, inner gender that we manifest

19 Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, 230.

20 Bettcher, "Evil Deceivers and Make-Believers."

21 Jenkins, "Amelioration and Inclusion," 398–402.

22 Fileva, "The Gender Puzzles"; Heyes, *Line Drawings*; Munro, "Resemblances of Identity"; Stoljar, "Essence, Identity, and the Concept of Woman."

23 Fileva has a two-tiered account. The first tier is procedural and is a kind of idealized self-identification view: "Under suitably idealized conditions, the person who has that gender will identify with said gender" ("The Gender Puzzles," 189–90). (It is the second, substantive tier that invokes family resemblance.) Yet we are looking for FPA here and now, under nonidealized conditions.

(or hide) through our gender expression; there is only the expression.[24] We are not bound by biology or an innately gendered mind. *Anyone* can perform, for example, womanhood, and anyone can (and should) subvert gender norms. According to Butler, gender is not really something you *are*, but something you *do*. While this does allow for great scope in the genders people can correctly identify as, it does not quite give us FPA. What do we say of someone who is pressured to perform womanhood but identifies as genderqueer "underneath"? Presumably the answer is that there *is* no underneath. Defenders of these theories of gender might say that it is very sad that this person is pressured into performing a gender they do not wish to perform, but to think that gender is anything more substantial than this performance is a mistake. Dembroff, who proposes a theory of genderqueerness as necessarily involving active resistance to the dominance of the binary gender system, echoes this sentiment: "I diverge from standard interpretations of this situation, which say that this person is 'truly' genderqueer, and unjustly prevented from self-expression. In contrast, I read the situation as one in which someone is unjustly prevented from being genderqueer."[25] Pressure and injustice need not even be part of the story. Many people who identify as (say) women *choose* to appear and behave in ways coded as other genders. Thus, self-identification is once again insufficient.

The final two theories I will contemplate here are ones that take subjective identity very seriously and consider it integral to gender categorization, which means they cannot be ruled out as straightforwardly as the previous four. First up is Jenkins's norm-relevancy theory.[26] Jenkins argues for a twin concept where we begin with the concept of gender as class—Haslanger's theory—and use it to come to the concept of gender as identity. There are two steps to the process, one objective and one subjective. The first involves identifying the social norms for people classed as men and women (which will vary depending on culture). This is the objective part since it must be based on social realities; we may believe there is a norm that women ought to regularly remove their leg hair, but we cannot pretend there is a norm that women ought to hop to work. The second step is to identify which norms you feel apply to you. These norms form an internal "map" with which to navigate the world. Importantly, you do not need to *follow* the norms you feel are applicable. People who identify as women

24 Butler, *Gender Trouble*; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*; Butler *Undoing Gender*.

25 Dembroff, "Beyond Binary," 25. Ásta writes something similar about situations where an individual's resistance to the gender that has been conferred upon them fails to secure the appropriate social recognition, leaving them stuck with an unwanted set of constraints and enablements. She compares it to the phenomenon of being silenced—an attempt to be a particular gender may "receive no uptake and remain futile" (*Categories We Live By*, 76).

26 Jenkins, "Amelioration and Inclusion"; "Toward an Account of Gender Identity."

might violate these norms, and indeed may be fully motivated to do so. For a woman, growing out her leg hair can be an intentional act of resistance, "but her experience of having hairy legs is not the same as it would be if she identified as a man: if she identified as a man she would not be conscious of violating a norm of feminine appearance, since she would not see those norms as applying to her."[27]

This view gets us much closer to FPA than before. On Jenkins's account, someone born with a typically male biology who strongly resembles paradigmatic men and who routinely performs masculinity may have a female gender identity. What of nonbinary genders? There are no nonbinary classes in Haslanger's theory, so step 1 leaves us at a loss when it comes to identifying nonbinary gender norms. Jenkins believes that people identifying outside the man/woman binary can still be explained by reference to just the two sets of norms. Here are two of her illustrative examples:

> *S* has a **genderfluid** gender identity iff *S*'s internal "map" is at times formed so as to guide someone classed as a woman through the social or material realities that are, in that context, characteristic of women as a class, and at other times formed to guide someone classed as a man through the social or material realities that are, in that context, characteristic of men as a class.
>
> *S* has an **agender** gender identity [or: *S* lacks a gender identity] iff *S* does not have an internal "map" that functions to guide them through the social or material realities that are, in that context, characteristic of any gender class.[28]

It is worth mentioning that many nonbinary people do not wish to have their genders defined only in relation to norms associated with men and women. They may take umbrage with the idea that "there are just two channels: the 'woman' channel, and the 'man' channel" on their gender "radio" from which they can choose to compose themselves.[29] From conversations with nonbinary people, I know that some are passionate about rejecting the idea that their gender exists on any kind of spectrum between, or is any function of, man and woman. Regardless, let us run with the assumption that nonbinary folks are not forging their internal maps from scratch but rejecting or riffing off what is already out there, that they are not creating new norms but mixing and matching existing ones.

Jenkins faces a trilemma with how to understand the norms in play and what it means to feel they apply to oneself: Are they expectations that others

27 Jenkins, "Amelioration and Inclusion," 411–12.

28 Jenkins, "Toward an Account of Gender Identity," 735–36.

29 Jenkins, "Toward an Account of Gender Identity," 735.

will apply the norms *to* you, are they conscious endorsements of the norms, or are they subconscious acceptances? None of the options look very nice. The first horn is a nonstarter. Trans folk fully expect to be sanctioned by society for breaking the norms of the gender on their birth certificates, but Jenkins does not indicate that expectations of external pressure determine one's gender identity, nor is that idea in the spirit of her theory.

On the second horn, we have the problem that many liberally minded folks consciously reject gender norms. People who identify as women, for instance, may say that the norm that women ought to shave their legs is totally irrelevant to them and how they choose to live. It is a bad norm, and we should pay no heed to it. We could say that all people who consciously reject gender norms are agender, but this flies in the face of FPA, which I will return to in the paragraph after next. A different response to this is to insist that these gender rebels *do* think the norms they are violating are relevant in the sense that the norms apply to them, whether they like it or not.[30] The suggestion is that the second horn should be expanded to include conscious, *nonendorsed* acceptances of application. This raises the initial question again. In what sense do these women accept that the norms apply to them, despite their lack of endorsement? They know that they are likely to incur social penalties for exposing their hairy legs—from looks of disgust to verbal abuse or worse—but that is just the first horn of the trilemma. Another idea is that they believe the norms apply to them because they identify as women, but this is circular. Perhaps instead it is because they believe society has created this set of norms for women *as class* and that the norms apply to them simply because they are members of the target group. This will not be acceptable either, first because this would exclude some trans women who are not in that target group, and second because it risks bringing gender as class and gender as identity too close together. Opting for the second horn is unsatisfactory.

We are left with the third option, which is the best interpretation of the theory.[31] Jenkins undoubtedly draws our attention to an important psychological phenomenon. Typically, a woman who shaves her legs will not notice any norm breaking, whereas a man who shaves his legs will notice he is doing something that goes against the grain. It is likely to feel jarring for him. So, while he may consciously reject the norm that men should not remove their leg hair, it may be very difficult for him to exterminate the inner red light telling him to stop shaving his legs. On the third horn, these subconscious red (and green) lights are what constitute your inner map, and if they match (a sufficient subset of)

30 Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this point.

31 Jenkins, "Toward an Account of Gender Identity," 730–31.

the norms for the class of men and none of the norms for the class of women, then you have a male gender identity.

The trouble with this third horn is the extreme difficulty of resisting one's conditioning. Bettcher makes a similar point about how a recently transitioned trans woman might not "have much of a map to guide them through the social and material realities of being classed as a woman" while retaining much of their acquired male map.[32] Wearing "women's" clothes for the first time in public is likely to be experienced as a breaking of norms. I would go further than this: for some, the "wrong" internal maps will *never* go away. One possible response is that even if some of the "wrong" map is retained in this person's psychology, the majority of their map is that of a woman.[33] This is an important point to make, but two problems remain. First, such "mixed" maps—even when skewed unequally—would count as nonbinary on Jenkins's theory, so we still violate FPA. Second, we continue to face the fundamental issue that our maps are not *up to us*, and so we would be letting our gender identities be determined by something beyond our direct control.

Jenkins herself responds to Bettcher's worry by admitting that "the norm-relevancy account does *not* entail that everyone is always right about their own gender identity" and reiterating that she only wishes to secure *ethical* FPA.[34] But does she manage to do this? Perhaps it would be wrong to tell someone their self-identification is incorrect because that would, in effect, be telling them they do not know their own mind and what their own internal map looks like. However, the workings of the person's mind may be common ground. Somebody who identifies as a man may openly admit that much of his internal map is that of a typical woman, and he may be skeptical that he will ever be able to undo his social conditioning: the norms of femininity he now consciously rejects were drilled too deeply into him throughout his childhood. If the only reason it would be unethical to tell him that *this means he is not really a man* is that it would be rude or lead to harmful consequences, we are left with the worries I raised in section 2. At bottom, the problem with the third horn is the same as the first: it leaves the facts of the matter largely imposed on us from outside instead of determined by ourselves. Agency about our genders is undermined. If we are interested in vindicating FPA, we should look elsewhere.

The final account I will consider in this section is Bettcher's existential self-identity theory. According to Bettcher, gender is not about *what* you are but rather *who* you are: "For example, the claim 'I am a trans woman' may be an

32 Bettcher, "Through the Looking Glass," 396.

33 Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this point.

34 Jenkins, "Toward an Account of Gender Identity," 733.

avowal of a deep sense of 'who one is' (that is, of one's deepest values and commitments). And as such, this is the prerogative of the first person alone where defensible avowals of gender are presumptively taken as authoritative."[35] Such claims do not merely describe oneself but also communicate one's "reasons for acting."[36] This is meant to secure an ethical FPA because one takes up responsibility for such avowals, and it would be an affront to challenge someone's self-interpretation and to deny that they know what they "stand for."[37]

What values, commitments, and reasons for acting are communicated by saying "I am a woman"? A commitment to speaking less during meetings and an ethics of care over justice? Of course not. Bettcher is fully aware that there are no universally shared values among women. Throughout her work, she makes clear that people have very different views and it is up to the individual to decide what their gender identification means to them: "In general, one does not know in advance what a person's reasons are for self-identifying and gender presenting."[38] The worry is that this means one is no longer communicating anything at all. I can understand how a person saying "I am a socialist" communicates their values. Even if it is a little vague whether they stand for public ownership, worker ownership, or union power, the self-identified socialist clearly is not communicating that they want to squash workers' rights. Contrastingly, there are no values, commitments, or reasons for acting we can rule out when someone identifies that they are a woman. It is unclear, then, why we ought to link gender identities with these things. Indeed, it seems *prima facie* undesirable to make these associations at all.

Importantly, the theory still does not secure FPA. We can begin by noticing that someone's identification as a socialist can be false, and it can even be ethically justified to say to a self-identified socialist that they are not really a socialist, perhaps with a nod to their voting record or their endorsement of campaigns to weaken workers' rights. Returning to Bettcher's theory, we only need to add an extra step: when someone identifies as (say) a man, we ask them which values, commitments, and reasons for acting they have associated with manhood. Suppose that to this person, being a man is a matter of being committed to war and violence. Clearly, metaphysical FPA can be violated, and we may question ethical FPA too: it might not be bad to say to this person that their commitments are far less violent than they think they are. It could be said that Bettcher's theory is only intended to secure FPA for people who *sincerely and wholeheartedly* avow

35 Bettcher, "Trans Women and the Meaning of 'Woman,'" 247.

36 Bettcher, "Trans Identities and First-Person Authority," 111.

37 Bettcher, "Trans Identities and First-Person Authority," 110.

38 Bettcher, "Trans Identities and First-Person Authority," 110.

their genders, rather than for people who lie or are simply unsure.[39] However, the not-so-violent person previously mentioned could be entirely sincere and wholehearted in their belief about who they are but misguided about their own qualities. While Bettcher secures FPA for people who know their own minds, in section 2 we saw that Bettcher herself allows that we can be mistaken about ourselves. This opens up the space for rejecting sincere avowals of people's own genders. In short, even if we like the idea that genders are extremely individualistic codes for our existential self-identity, we still do not reach the desired result of having full authority over our own genders. So, let us look at my theory.

4. GENDER AS NAME

I propose that we conceive of genders as we do names. I am not calling for us to identify gender terms *with* names because, grammatically, they are different parts of speech: "Josie" is a proper noun and "woman" is a common noun.[40] The theory is only that genders are *determined in the same way* as names and they mean just as much. On this account, learning there are three women in the room gives us very little information about these individuals, just as learning there are three Michaels in the room would tell us nothing more than how to refer to them. The important feature is that the bearer has the appropriate authority. Your name is, in a very real sense, up to you. FPA should be easy. If our friend makes a sincere avowal that their name is now "Raphael," we do not merely defer in virtue of the fact that it would be ethically bad not to, and we do not simply believe them because they are better placed to know their name than we are—we defer because "Raphael" is genuinely their name. No biological or psychological inspections could reveal anything non-Raphael-ish. There is nothing further to question. Likewise, on my theory, if somebody tells us he is a man with he/his/him pronouns, we refer to him accordingly. We learn nothing for certain about his biology, character traits, or values. All we learn is how to address him. Genders and names are words we use to refer to people, and we get to choose our own.

I am sidestepping the debate about whether proper names are homonymous definite descriptions, meaningless referrers, or something else. This is not because doing so avoids difficult philosophy of language (although that is nice too) but because the debate is not relevant to the social conventions about names I am alluding to. While Saul Kripke and friends are trying to figure out how on earth names manage to refer to things (their work applies equally to "Sheffield" and "Socrates"), I am interested in what makes a name *mine* or *yours*.

39 Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this point.

40 Thanks to Matt Cull for this linguistic point of order.

Suppose Alice is bullied at school because she looks like Batman's butler. Her bullies call her "Alfred," and she hates it. "That's not my name," Alice protests, and she is right. The name "Alfred" can refer to her, but it does not *belong* to her. Kripke has a story about how "Alfred" refers to Alice, but he does not distinguish between names we are merely called and names that are our own. This distinction allows us to say that "Confucius" is not Confucius's real name.[41]

It is an interesting question how *our* names—names that belong to us—are determined. As far as I am aware, there is no philosophical literature about this. I have two hypotheses: the *endorsement* account and the *declaration* account.[42] The former comes from thinking that our real names are the ones we *want* to be called. Alice wants to be called "Alice" and not "Alfred." Not just any old desire will do, though. Desires are cheap. We might ponder several names and think "I'd quite like to be called *X*, *Y*, and *Z*," but never adopt them for ourselves. Indeed, many of us dislike our names while still accepting them. According to the endorsement account, it is a sort of stamp of approval we give to a selected name that makes it our own. The declaration account requires something a little more public. It is not enough to endorse a name privately; we must declare it in some way, whether by announcing it verbally or writing it—or perhaps less explicit means would work too, such as answering to it regularly. There is an analogy to be made here with the nuances of giving consent—it can be done in different ways, but it must be *communicated*.

Cases where an individual privately endorses one name yet publicly declares another might tease out which of the two hypotheses is preferable. I can imagine one such individual later in life saying "My name back then was 'Harold' even though I wanted to be called 'Humphrey,'" while another says "I never told anyone until I was an adult, but my real name has been 'Ria' ever since I was seven years old." I do not know which hypothesis is correct. My own intuitions are murky, and discussions with others have revealed mixed hunches. There may be better hypotheses I have not thought of too. Yet whatever the details turn out to be, I think it will be widely accepted that we have the power to choose for ourselves what name(s) we answer to. I am proposing that genders work in the same way: we have the authority to decide which genders and pronouns are ours.

For an ameliorative project to have a chance at being successful, the intended concept should not be too far removed from the current one(s). Any attempt to make "man" mean bicycle is unlikely to work. Fortunately, there are many similarities between names and genders already. We are assigned a

41 Thanks to Stephen Ingram for this example.

42 Thanks to friends, colleagues, and an anonymous reviewer for rightly pressing me to come up with proposals.

gender and a name at birth. It is possible to change them legally, yet it is not necessary for interpersonal purposes: we do not need to check someone's birth certificate or change-of-name deed before we call them what they wish to be called. There are no common intrinsic features that all and only Michaels have; there is no golden nugget of Michaelhood. Yet there are stereotypes. Even if you cannot learn anything for sure from a name or a gender, you can make educated guesses. Anyone called "Sixtus Dominic Boniface Christopher Rees-Mogg" probably did not grow up on a council estate. Likewise, you might guess that your genderqueer colleague does not vote Conservative and your male friend does not have ovaries, but you cannot rule it out. I do not think it is an unreasonably large jump from common practices to conceive of genders as names.

Some trans people tell us they have always felt like a different gender to the one they were assigned.[43] Many anti-trans activists reply that being a woman is not a feeling.[44] When Shania Twain sang "Man! I feel like a woman!" what did she mean?[45] Submissive? Oppressed? Sexy? Empowered? Gassy? Any substantive answer will be open to counterexample. In this regard, my theory seems to side with the anti-trans activists. The idea that there is a particular way that women feel makes as much sense as the idea that there is a way it feels to be a person named "George." Yet there is an interpretation that *does* make sense. People can say "I feel like a 'Gaia' more than a 'Greta'" without committing themselves to the existence of universal Gaia feelings. Some people just think one name fits them better than another. "Gaia" can *feel right*, whereas "Greta" might feel wrong or uncomfortable. (This is the same sort of language we hear from trans folk about their gender: "The category 'trans woman' might be avowed or disavowed because … it does not fit or feel right.")[46] I do not know why this is the case. Perhaps it has to do with associations we have made throughout our lives; perhaps it is an aesthetic preference, or maybe for some people it is not a feeling at all but a conscious, even political, choice. The reason does not matter. What matters is that your name is up to you.

Two problems do arise, though.[47] There is a worry that the theory of gender as name is too intermediary. For example, for anyone who feels a sense of fit

43 Almost half the respondents in a survey of trans people "cited the congruency between their inner feelings and outer appearances as a positive aspect of claiming a transgender identity" (Riggle et al., "The Positive Aspects of a Transgender Self-Identification," 150).

44 Amy Eileen Hamm, "On Feeling Like a Woman," *Feminist Current*, July 7, 2018, https://www.feministcurrent.com/2018/07/07/feeling-like-woman/.

45 "Man! I Feel Like a Woman!" track 1 on Twain, *Come on Over*.

46 Bettcher, "Trans Women and the Meaning of 'Woman,'" 247.

47 Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising both of these issues. I address them here instead of in the following section because they relate directly to the previous paragraph.

with a gender/name, is *that* not the important thing? Is that not the determining feature? My answer is no for two reasons. First of all, it is possible to reject a gender/name even if there is a sense of fit, and in those cases, we should respect the individual's rejection. Second, given the diversity of reasons for adopting a gender/name, it would make the theory too disjunctive. In my view, it is not the reason behind the adoption of a gender/name but the very adoption itself that is the unifying and determining feature. The other worry that arises is what we might call the *wrong-reasons* issue. Some people might feel they fit a gender for what are intuitively bad reasons, such as associations they have made that are grounded in pernicious stereotypes or unjust societal forces. Somebody may think they are a man simply because they are ambitious and attracted to women, for example. While this is *a* problem, I do not think it is *my* problem. The ameliorative project is to respect FPA. If there is trouble here, it is trouble with the goal itself. Since this paper's aim is to find a way to vindicate FPA, I think the correct thing to say is that this person *is* a man even if he ought not to be. People can be politicians for the wrong reasons, and people can be men for the wrong reasons too.

An advantage of my view is that it can easily make sense of two often overlooked classes of people. The first are those who identify as more than one gender. Dembroff cites several real examples, such as a genderqueer woman.[48] While most theories of gender would struggle to take these folks at their word, for me it is straightforward. People can have more than one gender just as they can have more than one name. This makes it possible to truly say in a room of three people that there are two women and two nonbinary folks here, and there are two Sophies and two Smiths here. The other class of people are those who have one gender but have pronouns that do not "match" it. On my view, there is nothing odd about a woman with he/his/him pronouns.[49] They are just words used to refer to people and do not indicate anything about the individual, so such mixing is no problem at all.

The biggest advantage of this theory of gender is how it undercuts the opposition to ethical FPA. On other theories, there is room for people to argue that they are under no obligation to address someone in the way that person wishes to be addressed because they simply do not believe the person is the gender that person claims to be. If genders are names, then the force of this kind of opposition is restricted only to cases of insincerity. When our friend jokingly says his name is "Rumpelstiltskin," we do not have to address him as such because

48 Dembroff, "Beyond Binary," 11–12.

49 See, for example, Jules Ryan, "Why You Should Respect He/Him Lesbians," *Medium*, November 30, 2020, https://radiantbutch.medium.com/why-you-should-respect-he-him-lesbians-85dca31a5b4f.

we know he does not really want to be called "Rumpelstiltskin." When the speaker is sincere, though, it is a rather basic rule of respect and decency that we address people as they tell us to.[50] Families need not be torn apart by parents and siblings refusing to refer to a loved one by their chosen pronouns. If we all saw genders as names, the authority of the individual over their gender would be more easily recognized.

5. OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

Some may worry that my theory means gender is not real. They may insist that when we identify as a gender, we (try to) latch onto something genuine about ourselves. A quick reply is that names are real: I am really called "Graham." Yes, on my theory, genders are socially constructed—true in virtue of social practices of naming—rather than something biological or psychological. But that is the point. If you try to identify a shared golden nugget of a particular gender, you will fail to secure FPA. A helpful commenter raised the pertinent worry that if genders are equivalent to reference numbers, it feels as though we lose something important. This is true, but names are not *merely* reference numbers. It can be offensive to refer to someone using numbers instead of their name; the prisoner numbers used in Nazi concentration camps are a quintessential example of dehumanization. Self-endorsed names are far more than mere tools of reference. Conceiving of genders as names, then, does not mean conceiving of genders as inconsequential.

Jenkins raises a similar objection to a theory Bettcher mentions and that we could call the *mere self-identification* account.[51] I did not focus on this theory earlier because, as Jenkins writes, "it is not quite clear whether [Bettcher] fully endorses it."[52] The theory is minimal and could be constructed as follows: S is gender *X* iff S identifies as *X*. To identify as *X* is to have the relevant dispositions, such as being disposed to answer yes when asked if one is an *X*. Jenkins levels two objections against this theory that could also be charged against mine. The first is that "it fares very poorly at showing that gender identity is important and deserves respect. . . . Why should we care about dispositions to utter certain

50 I appreciate that there is a reasonableness constraint. Just as it may be permissible to refuse to call someone "King Underpants III," it may also be permissible to refuse to use "dumfulumfulumfelophegus" as someone's pronoun. The line between what is and is not acceptable will be fuzzy, but it is clear that existing names and pronouns in common circulation such as "Rachael" and "they/their/them" are perfectly reasonable.

51 Bettcher, "Through the Looking Glass."

52 Jenkins, "Toward an Account of Gender Identity," 727.

sentences?"[53] My theory can be seen as a fleshing out of mere self-identification in order to answer precisely this question. Names *are* important and deserve respect. People care about their names, and like with genders, some care more than others. "There is a vigorous protest when our names are mispronounced or misspelt."[54] This vigorous protest comes even though names do not have common uniform meanings. (They have *etymology*; e.g., "Graham" comes from Old English meaning gray home or gravelly homestead, but "I live in a Graham" does not mean I live in a gray home.) To quote Bruce Willis's character in *Pulp Fiction*, "I'm American, honey. Our names don't mean shit."[55] And yet they do have a quality I will call *significance*.

Consider Neo in *The Matrix*. Neo cares about being referred to as such. Agent Smith calls him "Mr. Anderson" instead, a clear analogy to the phenomenon of deadnaming.[56] If names do not have common meanings, why does Neo care? To Neo, "Mr. Anderson" *signifies* conformity. Yet he would not say that every Mr. Anderson must be a conformist. To take a more serious example, Muhammad Ali was named "Cassius Clay" at birth. His name was very important to him in part due to his change of religion. ("Cassius Clay is a slave name. I didn't choose it and I don't want it. I am Muhammad Ali, a free name—it means beloved of God, and I insist people use it when people speak to me."[57] Note that he would not say you are a Muslim man if and only if you are named "Muhammad.") People would deadname him, including the media, his parents, and even Martin Luther King Jr., leading up to his famous "What's my name?" title fight.[58] We can see very plainly that many people attach great significance to

53 Jenkins, "Toward an Account of Gender Identity," 727–28.

54 "What's in a Name?" *Guardian* (Nigeria), October 10, 2019, https://guardian.ng/features/whats-in-a-name-2/.

55 Tarantino, *Pulp Fiction*, 1:12:56–59.

56 Lilly Wachowski of the Wachowski sisters, both now out as trans women, has confirmed their film *The Matrix* is an allegory for trans issues. Adam White, "The Matrix Was a Metaphor for Transgender Identity, Director Lilly Wachowski Confirms," *Independent*, August 21, 2020, https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/matrix-trans-metaphor-lana-lilly-wachowski-red-pill-switch-sequels-a9654956.html.

57 Qtd. in Joshua Casper, "Cassius Marcellus Clay and Muhammed Ali: What's in a Name?" *History News Network*, May 14, 2019, https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/171955.

58 Before the fight,

> Ali complained: "Why do you call me Clay? You know my right name is Muhammad Ali."
>
> Terrell didn't understand why Ali was upset. He answered plainly. "I met you as Cassius Clay. I'll leave you as Cassius Clay."
>
> "It takes an Uncle Tom Negro to keep calling me by my slave name," Ali said. "You're an Uncle Tom." (Jonathan Eig, "What's My Name? The Title Fight in

their names. If we treat genders as names, then unlike under the mere self-identification account, we can show that genders are important and deserve respect.

It is important to stress that there is a big difference between intentionally using the wrong name and intentionally misgendering someone. We afford greater protections against the latter for good reason.[59] While Ali was hurt by incidents such as the one above, the harms perpetuated against trans people are far more severe and systematic. This difference is consistent with the proposal that names and genders are determined in the same way because the harms of misgendering include not merely the violation of FPA but also a great number of other things, not least of which is the increased likelihood of experiencing violence. I do not in any way suggest that society currently divides and oppresses on the basis of proper names as it does with (real or perceived) gender. The purpose of the previous paragraphs was to show that treating genders as names does not undercut the subjective importance some people give to their own genders, nor does it undercut the respect we give to other people's gender identities.

Some may insist that the idea that genders are determined like names undermines their lived realities. "My body dysmorphia is real and is what makes me a woman," someone may tell me. My reply, if it would not be too hurtful at the time, would be that body dysmorphia is neither necessary nor sufficient to be a woman. It sounds pedantic (because it is), but perhaps this person's body dysmorphia *caused* her to identify as a woman. The relationship is causal, not constitutive. And this does not make it any less important. A possible retort is that the causal relationship is sometimes the other way around. For some, it is not that they desire (say) top surgery and this desire causes them to identify as a man. Instead, they already identify as a man and desire gender-confirmation surgery as a result. I agree that this happens too. The "initial" reason to identify as a given gender may be dysmorphia, or it may be something else entirely. All of this is compatible with my theory.

From here we arrive at Jenkins's second objection to Bettcher's mere self-identification account, which also applies to my view, with respect to the need for trans-related healthcare (TRH). Just as "it is difficult to perceive any relationship at all between a linguistic disposition and the sort of felt need for one's body to be different that would prompt the desire to access transition-related healthcare," it is difficult to perceive a relationship between names and access to such

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Which Muhammad Ali Asserted His Identity," *Undefeated*, June 4, 2016, https://theundefeated.com/features/whats-my-name/)

Note that the insult "Uncle Tom" is "just" a name too, but it has extreme social significance. Other names with (less extreme) shared public significance are "Becky," "Chad," and "Karen."

59 Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this point.

healthcare.[60] My response is twofold, looking first at purely moral justifications and second at pragmatic issues of persuasion.[61] What morally justifies access to TRH? Fundamentally, it is the great benefit to the patient and the great harm it helps to prevent. That trans people are typically the people who require this healthcare is only contingent (on societal attitudes, pressures, and associations made between genders and bodily appearances/functions). This fact commits me to the view that if a woman has body dysmorphia and wishes to remove her breasts as a result, then she is just as entitled to healthcare access as a trans man who desires the same surgery. There are complicating factors, of course, since for many trans folk it is not *only* distress and discomfort with one's body that matters but other things too, such as fitting in with the rest of one's gender. Still, in principle I am happy to bite the bullet: if two people would genuinely experience a similar benefit from surgery and they would face a similar amount of harm in being denied it, their entitlement is the same regardless of their genders.

Real life is different. If a person requested surgery on the basis of affirming their name, they would not be treated seriously. Consequently, if the medical profession shifted toward thinking of gender as name, perhaps this would lead to practitioners taking gender-affirming healthcare (even) less seriously than now. This would be awful. If gender is name, how could we continue to press the case for access to TRH? First of all, we can fall back on what I take to be the genuine moral justification: it is beneficial to the patients. TRH saves lives. If that is not enough, there are two other things to try. One is to utilize the distinction discussed in section 1 between metaphysics and terminology. Gender *terms* are determined like names, but perhaps this is consistent with other philosophers' metaphysical theories of gender. If so, the case for TRH can be made on the basis of those social realities instead of on the basis of application conditions for gender terms. The other way to press for TRH involves acknowledging the difference between gender itself and the way society operates. An analogy here is with racism and race, where academic theory often comes apart from public attitudes. Even if we discover that race does not exist at all, this does not imply racism does not exist. Likewise, if gender is "only" a name, this does not mean people will automatically be accepted as the genders they are, and TRH can help in this regard.[62] In general, racial and gendered (and other) oppression and

60 Jenkins, "Toward an Account of Gender Identity," 728.

61 Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on this and for suggesting what is now the second part of my response.

62 For example, Britons tend to support transgender people using facilities for their gender *unless* it is specified that they have not "undergone gender reassignment surgery," in which case Britons tend to oppose (Matthew Smith, "Where Does the British Public Stand

hardships go on, even when (and often especially when) based on race-related or gender-related falsehoods.

The final objection is an interesting one, and my reply will take us on a brief journey through the metaphysics of time and the possibility of backward causation about social facts. The objection is that my theory cannot accommodate a common phenomenon: some trans people do not merely identify as a gender from the present onwards, but avow that they *always were* that gender, even before identifying as such. The objection comes from correspondence with Will Gamester, and the phenomenon is described by Bettcher when discussing the mere self-identification account: "Admittedly, this means trans women who don't yet self-identify as women aren't yet women (in this sense). That said, once she does self-identify as a woman, she may well re-assess her entire life by saying she's always been a woman (something we should respect too)."[63] This is a curious thing. Names do not quite work this way, but a similar social norm is in play when it comes to backward reference. It is a standard rule of etiquette that we refer to, say, Muhammad Ali's early life in the way I do in this sentence—by using the name "Muhammad Ali" even though he was named "Cassius Clay" in his early life. It is easy to see why we do the same (unless instructed otherwise) with gendered pronouns. However, it is natural to say "Muhammad Ali's name as a youngster was 'Cassius Clay,'" which does not map onto the gender case as many would desire. We now come to a choice point, and I will end by describing the three routes we could go down. Since I do not know which route is best, I will leave the choice to you.

1. *Embrace it*. Like the defenders of performance theory in section 3, we could take a hard line toward the recently transitioned trans woman who wishes to reassess her life as always having that gender. "I'm sorry but you weren't a girl," we might say, "and if you think you were, you're reading too much into gender. It's just a name, and you've changed it." Again like the defenders of performance theory, we can add that it is very sad and unjust that the trans woman did not get to change her gender earlier. This hard-line option still gets us *present* FPA. However, if we want to respect *retroactive* FPA, we will have to abandon the analogy with names when it comes to how gender is determined across the board. We will have to make some new rules about how genders work when determining one's past. I suggest another analogy: annulment. On one way of looking at it, having a marriage annulled does not simply add a new social fact; it erases an old one. After an annulment, the marriage is *null and void*, meaning it did not take

on Transgender Rights?" YouGov, July 16, 2020, https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2020/07/16/where-does-british-public-stand-transgender-rights).

63 Bettcher, "Through the Looking Glass," 396.

place. This view of annulment is that the act engenders backward causation, preventing a legitimate marriage from occurring in the past. Perhaps genders could work in the same way. If you now decide you are genderqueer, you may (or may not) choose to "annul" your previous gender and say you were never anything but genderqueer all along. And there are two different ways to interpret this.

2. *Future realism*. If the future exists and is "set," then any future annulments are already out there, preventing their respective marriages from occurring. Thus, if Baldrick in the year 1534 said "Henry VIII is married to Anne Boleyn," he was speaking falsely: it was never true that a legitimate marriage took place. Likewise, if a trans woman decides as an adult that she was always a girl growing up, then when she was growing up, she was wrong to refer to herself as a boy. This may sit very well with many trans folks. One potential downside is that it allows people to correctly disagree with a person's avowal. Young people who say they are transgender are often met with dismissal. "It's just a phase," their parents say. "They're not really transgender. They'll grow out of it." And indeed, for some it is just a phase (not that phases are bad). According to *future realism*, the parents may well be correct, since the future child could declare that they were never transgender at all. There is always the epistemic possibility that our future self will reinterpret our current gender. The final authority, on this picture, comes from the individual at their oldest, when they have the ability to determine the gender of all their past time slices. This is still a version of FPA, and we might call it *deathbed FPA*.

3. *Complete FPA*. We may subscribe to a view of backward causation according to which Baldrick spoke truly in 1534 when he said that Henry and Anne were married, but anybody who *now* says that Henry and Anne were married is speaking falsely.[64] Baldrick spoke truly because in 1534 the annulment had not happened, and so, back then, nothing was preventing the legitimacy of the marriage. Once the annulment had occurred, though, it was no longer the case that their marriage was legitimate. This does lead to some strange sentences, such as "Baldrick spoke truly when he said that Henry and Anne were married, but Henry and Anne were not married." Nevertheless, perhaps by using crafty subscripts, we can make sense of it.[65] Applying this to gender, where does this view of retroactive social facts take us? It yields the ultimate version of FPA: at any point in time, you are in complete authority over your current and past gender. A child sincerely avowing "I am a boy" is correct at the time, and their older self

64 This view of the changing past is endorsed by Barlassina and Del Prete, who argue that the proposition that *Lance Armstrong won the year 2000's Tour de France* used to be true but no longer is ("The Puzzle of the Changing Past").

65 The easiest way may be to make truth time relative: the proposition that *Henry and Anne were married in 1533* is true-at-1534, and it is false-at-1537.

who declares "I was never a boy" is correct also. This option gives us the benefits of the two previous options. Like the first option, you have *present* FPA. You are not held hostage to your future self; others cannot dismiss your present gender identity on the basis of a correct prediction that you will retroactively change it in the future. And like the second option, you have the power to reinterpret your earlier life as you see fit. Perhaps you have always been a particular gender all along, or perhaps your gender was not always fixed. It is up to you. It is up to you right now, it will be up to you tomorrow, and it was up to you in the past. On this picture, at every point in your life, your authority is absolute.

6. CONCLUSION

I have argued that we should treat genders as names in the sense that they are up to us, indicate nothing for certain about the bearers beyond how to refer to them, and yet often have strong personal significance. My argument rests on two big starting points: that ameliorative projects are feasible and that we ought to respect an individual's authority over their own gender, at least in interpersonal contexts. I hope to have shown that there is a way in which self-identification makes sense, is true, and yet does not make gender entirely empty. If I am right, then the debate really comes down to those starting points. If we have the power to choose what concept of gender to use going forward, what work do we want it to do? As I mentioned in section 1, we might have different priorities in different contexts. Structural oppression may best be analyzed using wholly different concepts; some people may need a safe space away from folks who resemble paradigmatic men; and we certainly should never lose sight of biology-based issues such as abortion access and tampon taxes. Yet when it comes to interpersonal contexts, I feel strongly that the balance of reasons weighs in favor of calling people what they wish to be called. Conceptual stubbornness will be an obstacle, but a great deal of hardship can be avoided if we can learn to be flexible and think of gender as name.[66]

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