

# Trans Without the Gender?

## Sophie Grace Chappell -- Masterclass on Trans-Inclusive Philosophy

I see you're an audience from all over the place, and that's delightful. I want especially to express my solidarity with those who are joining us from The USA today. I realize what an absolute mess things are in The States at the moment, and, we are thinking of you in other countries. Of course, some of us have problems in our own countries too, but we're very much thinking of you, and we hope that, one way or another, the Trump nightmare will not last as long as it looks like it's going to. I hope that there will be some good surprises after all these horrible surprises that we've had in the last few days.

Okay. So, this is billed as a master class on transgender and trans inclusive philosophy. I don't know whether I'm in a position to give a master class for a number of reasons. One of them is simply that I think my own position about trans inclusive philosophy is not entirely mainstream. I think I'm a little bit out of the mainstream in some of the ways I approach this topic, and that's because I'm out of the mainstream in the way I approach every topic. But two things are particularly striking.

The first is that I see quite a lot of theorists of transgender, for example, Perry Zurn has just published an article in the [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#), and that's a very authoritative place to be publishing one's views about trans philosophy. And according to Perry, the fight for trans rights, which Perry is very very vehement about, of course, and rightly so, is tied up with a lot of other fights against racism, against ableism, against, homophobia, against colonial and market based politics.

And I don't necessarily disagree with Perry about all of that. It's when trans theorists, and Perry does this too, also take into their sights, things like rationality, things like logic, things like, what's often called the the Western canon of philosophy. (Thank you, Anthony, for putting up the reference to Perry's article.) Sometimes logic itself is said to be under fire, and there's a touch of that kind of thinking in what Perry says. And when this happens, well, I begin to show my own cards as a fairly straight down the line analytic philosopher who very much doesn't want to give away words like rationality, words like reason, words like truth, words like objectivity, words like science.

It seems to me unnecessary to think that all of those things are against us as trans people and as trans-inclusive philosophers. To think that all those things are against us seems to me unnecessary, seems to me a step that we don't have to take. And, of course, you might be thinking, and I'm sure you're right to be thinking if you are, "Well, she *would* say that, wouldn't she? Because she's a Platonist. She's a Plato philosopher, and she works with *The Philosophical Quarterly*, helping them edit that. So she's pretty much a straight down the line analytic philosopher. So no wonder she thinks that". And, I mean, I come out with my hands up at this point. Yes. Absolutely. I am, in some ways, a fairly straight down the line analytic philosopher. And that's one reason why I don't think we have to treat all these concepts, which some trans philosophers who are more radical than me do treat, with great suspicion. I don't think the suspicion is necessary. And I also think, and this is the second point about a more radical approach than mine, I think it's very often shooting ourselves in the foot, actually.

I think things like reason, rationality, truth, objectivity are on our side, and science and reality. I think they're on our side, not the cis heteronormative people's side, not the transphobe's side, but *our* side. And so I see it as unnecessarily damaging our own side to give away these words, these key concepts to the other side. I don't think we should do that. So that's one way in which I'm out of step, myself, with at least some of the more radical, trans-philosophers. They're all saying, oh, well, reason itself comes from the patriarchy. Reason itself is tied up with a Thanato logic of death and cultural imposition and colonialism. And I'm saying, whoa. Hang on a minute. Maybe not so quick. Maybe these things can be salvaged, and maybe we damn well need to salvage them because without reason, rationality, logic, objectivity, truth, there isn't much less standing in the way of the concept of argument. The concept of argument has gone out of the door if we abandon all those things. So that's reason number one why I'm not on the same page with them.

The second reason, and perhaps this is in contrast with the first reason, I mean, you could characterize the first reason as saying, I'm not on the same page as the radical left in this discussion. I mean, I'm not sure left/right terminology is all that helpful here, but it might give you some idea of what the contrasts are. So that's the way I'm not in tune with the radical left. I'm also not in tune with a more conservative impulse perhaps that some trans philosophers evidently feel, and that's to system build, to construct, a systematic theory of transgender. And here I have my suspicions too that too much is being given away. And this time, my suspicion is not that we're giving away too much because we're handing over key concepts that, if they're on *any* side, they're actually on our side, concepts like objectivity, truth, reality, logic, rationality. The fear is not that we're handing those concepts over to the opposition. Here the fear is that we're engaging in a game, the game of system building that we don't need to play. And that's why this evening's talk is broadly about the topic: Trans Without the Gender? That's my title this evening.

I have [a paper](#) on the internet, which I think is coming out in some collection. I'm not sure what's happening to it. I never know what happens to my papers once I've written them. But it's on the internet, Trans Without the Gender, and question mark on the end of that. And what I'm doing when I raise that question is I'm wondering how much we need to go into the game of system building in order to understand trends. And in more conservative parts of the academy, in more, if you like, right wing parts of the academy (Anthony is really quick at Google), in more conservative parts of the academy, you get philosophers whose career aspiration is to build theories of various things. Theories of substance. Yes. We have those in the academy.

Although people on the radical left sometimes worry about essentialism as they call it, an Aristotelian substance theory, I don't, as I say, myself see any intrinsic threat at all to trans philosophy in talking about substances or talking about essences. But, the idea that we need a theory of transgender and maybe a theory of gender and maybe a theory of gender identity and maybe a theory of gender identification, these are all things that have been distinguished. I'm suspicious of it for a reason that puts me in this crude spectrum way to the left of some theorists who you find in the academy. My suspicion is this. It's a kind of gatekeeping suspicion. (I see what you're saying there, Elke. I prefer the term ungendered, Soudelka. Thank you for that point. We might come on to talking about trans abolitionism, sorry, *gender* abolitionism a little bit later.) Some people want us to build a theory of what gender and transgender and gender identity and gender identification, what all of those things are. And my worry about that ambition to build a systematic theory is, first of all, a worry about gatekeeping. I worry that there's a demand out there, which I certainly see in some trans exclusionary people, there's an impulse out there to say, you're not allowed to be trans until you can give me your theory of being trans. "You say you're trans. Okay. Go on. Justify yourself. What do you mean you're trans?"

What a wearily familiar trope. How is identifying as a woman any different from identifying as an attack helicopter? What gives you the right to go around calling yourself trans or transgender? In its simplest and crudest form, often found on shock jocks on the radio, it's the question, "Define *woman* or define *man*. Until you have a theory of what it is to be a man or a woman," these people say, "you can't have a theory of what it is to be transgender. And until you have a theory of what it is to be transgender, you're not allowed to be transgender." That's the gatekeeping worry, and I think that's an absurd demand.

I'm currently sitting on a sofa. I expect most of you are sitting on a chair. I can't give you a necessary and sufficient conditions definition of what it is for anything to be a chair. I'm also drinking a cup of tea, as you see. Here it is. I can't give you a necessary and sufficient conditions definition of what it is to be tea. Nonetheless, I sit on chairs, and I drink tea, and I am transgender. And, since I'm a trans woman, I am a woman. And all of these things are true, and you can't go imposing on people the gatekeeping obligation to have a theory of chairs before they're allowed to sit on them or a theory of what tea is, a necessary and sufficient conditions definition of tea, before they're allowed to drink tea. By the same

token, you can't impose on trans people the requirement that they antecedently be able to define woman and man and transgender and have a theory of all this stuff before they're allowed to be it. And I think this gatekeeping is enormously dangerous. One of the reasons why I think it's very dangerous, well, there must be lots of reasons which are perfectly obvious to you why it's dangerous. But one of them is (I will sometimes type into the chat here. I'll use the chat as a kind of whiteboard at times.) instead of being transgender people, we're often told that we're *transgenderists*, and that's a term which had more currency in the old times than it has now. And what is that *-ist* doing on the end? Well, *-ism* or *-ist* is a suffix which turns a kind of human being into a kind of ideology, a kind of theorist.

Compare another term, which is now, rightly, pretty much discarded. People used to talk about homosexualists. Horrible word. What the word suggests is that there is this theory, this ideology of being homosexual, which these homosexualists, these wicked homosexualists are going around imposing on everyone, and they're brainwashing the kids. They're spreading a woke mind virus of homosexuality. And when we're referred to as transgenderists, exactly the same semantic suggestion is in the air, I think, and it's one to resist. I'm not a transgenderist. I'm a transgender person.

I recently had a run-in with a pack of extremely vicious transphobes because I gave a paper. I live in Scotland. I gave a paper near Saint Andrews, and the local *coven* is perhaps the appropriate word; they seem to think of themselves as witches. They're not proper witches either. But the local coven of transphobes were up in arms about my giving a talk in Pittenweem Church, and they described me as a transgender activist. You may have seen online this trope of saying, oh, transgender people are alright. It's the trans *activists* who are the problem.

And then it turns out that a trans activist is anyone who puts up the slightest peep of resistance to trans exclusionary ideology, It's pretty much all of us, except the ones for whom the penny is not yet dropped. And I loathe being called a trans activist because a lot of what I do, I only do because it needs doing. In a better world, I would spend less time talking about transgender because I wouldn't *need* to spend so much time talking about transgender because, I mean, it's like fighting flat earthers. In a sane world, nobody needs to do that stuff because everyone has the sense not to be a flat earther in the first place, and so the issue barely comes up. Unfortunately, we live in a world where, as anyone who's on the internet will be aware, there are, unbelievably enough, flat earthers around, and there are lots of people who are pretty flat earthers about transgender. And so we need to combat that, and so we need to do some activism. That doesn't make anyone who isn't spending 24/7 on such activities into a transgender activist. I'm not a transgender activist. I'm a philosopher who happens to be trans. So, as well as that gatekeeping worry, the other worry is about systematic theory, and this comes from my broader, theoretical orientation as a philosopher.

I wrote a big book called [Epiphanies](#), this is the first plug in the talk, which came out from OUP in 2022. And *Epiphanies* is about what we do in ethics if we don't do systematic theory building in ethics? And I'm against systematic theory. I've now written three books about it actually. And the theme of being anti-theory comes up also in the book I've written about, about transgender. (Thank you, Anthony. That should have said 2024.) [Transfigured](#) came out last year from Polity Press, and in each I talk about the priority of experience to theory just as I do in *Epiphanies*, but with specific application to transgender. So I'm suspicious of theory about transgender for those reasons. First of all, because I think there's a gatekeeping concern here. I think people are trying to get us to give us their theory, give them our theory of trans, and, until we do, we don't have the right to be trans, which is absurd because of the parallels with chairs and with tea and also because no one needs a theory of cisgender in order to be cisgender. They're just allowed to do that. Right? It's being trans that you have to justify, apparently. Well, no, you don't. Lots of people are trans who have no theory at all of what it is to be trans, and that's fine. They don't need to have a theory. So first, the gatekeeping worry, and second, the anti-systematic worry. I'm an anti-systematicist, in ethics or, an anti-systematic ethicist.

I believe that constructing systems in ethics like consequentialism or Kantianism or whatever, is putting us into a position where we're funneled down an increasingly narrow track, and what we end

up doing is trying to produce the perfect sausage machine, the perfect moral theory, which is a function from facts and principles to decisions. And it's a kind of sausage-machine view of ethics. You have a situation, that's the facts, you have some moral principles, you crank the handle, and out comes the thing you should do in that situation. And that's what consequentialism and Kantianism in their pure forms -- consequentialism, also known as utilitarianism, and Kantianism -- that's what these theories in their pure forms are supposed to give us. There are other theories out there which are supposed to do the same. And I just don't think that life is that simple.

I stopped thinking that life is that simple a long time ago now, getting on for 20 years ago. And I began to think instead of trying to construct theories, we shouldn't be looking for the perfect theory of ethics or of methods or anything else. We should be looking instead at experience, not for a simple system which tells us how to live, but at the way we live already and at what we can learn from the way we live and at the things that are important to us. So I think a question we need to ask ourselves is: What is it like to be a human being? What's it like to be me? What matters? What's big on my normative horizon from where I'm looking at things now? How might I critique what I take to be important looking at things from where I'm looking now? How might I come to a better understanding? And there are lots of ways in which that might happen, and the point is precisely the variety. The point is that life is complicated, and a simple theory is never going to give you all the answers that you want. And having taken that view about ethics in general, I want to take it about the ethics of being trans as well. I don't think that we have a simple theory of being trans, and I don't think we need one. I think what counts is not theory, but lived experience.

So everything I've said so far, you'll be dismayed to hear since I've been speaking for about twenty five minutes now, is just a warm up. I want to say something specific to a particular account of what it is to be trans, and this is why the paper is called "Trans Without the Gender" or "Trans Without the Gender, Well, Almost."

I want to say something about a book by, at the time the book was written, they were called Rich Rowland. It's now [Rachel Cosker-Rowland](#). She wrote it during the course of her transition, and the pronoun for her when the project started was *they*. By the end of the project, the pronoun is *she*, so if I appear to call Rachel Cosker-Rowland by what is now her dead name, I apologize in advance. It's because I first wrote my critique of her work at the beginning of the process in her life that has led her to where she is now, and things weren't quite aligned then as they are now.

So, anyway, people want to set up theories of transgender. That seems to be the mainstream activity. Philosophers think, a lot of philosophers think, that what they need to do in order to protect trans people in the current maelstrom that we find ourselves in, both in Europe and also now in the US, and this has switched around. Two years ago, the good place to be was the US, at least if you weren't in the Midwest. And the UK was TERF island. The UK was quite a bad place to be, and now it's the other way around. I mean, we still have our TERFs, I'm afraid, but our situation is now much easier than what's going on in America. But both in America and in Britain and also in Continental Europe, there is this idea that the thing to do to defend trans people is to build a big, all embracing systematic theory of gender. And I don't want to offer an account of transgender that has that sort of universalist ambition, the kind of ambition that systematic theories of anything have, a theory that's supposed to be moreover, a world domination enterprise.

It's another thing that bothers me about systematic theory as usually practiced. Systematic theory doesn't have to be this way, but as usually practiced, systematic theory is all conquering. If consequentialism is true, then Kantianism can't be true and vice versa. If theory A of transgender is the truth, then theory B of transgender can't be the truth. And in the case of ethics, I tend to suspect that, actually, there are cases which do look very apt for a utilitarian treatment. And my usual example of this is the building a road, the building a bypass case. So you want to build a big new trunk road past a town, and you're trying to decide the route for it, that's an instance where it seems to me cost benefit

analysis is probably apt, but that doesn't mean that every case falls the same way. That doesn't mean that consequentialism does everything.

And, likewise, with Kantianism, there are cases that seem to me good cases for Kantianism, in particular, the basic Kantian idea that we shouldn't restrict or impede other people from having the right to be agents at all. We shouldn't undermine their agency. That seems right to me. And it means, for example, that we have a duty to others to make sure that they're, as far as it lies within our responsibility, to make sure that they're in the world of reality, that they're in contact with the truth. And that means that other things being equal, other people have a right to hear the truth from us. And I think that's a Kantian conclusion, which you can reach from Kantian premises. I don't think the view goes as far as Kantian self thought. I don't think you can generate an absolute prohibition on all lying even to axemen at the door out of that. But I do think the reasons why, in general, other people have a right to hear the truth from us, I think the reasons for that are roughly speaking Kantian. I think the limitations of that right come when people forgo their right to hear the truth from us, and I think they can forgo that right much more easily than Kant thought. For example, if someone's trying to kill my family, you know, the axe murderer at the door, then they come to the door and say, Is your family here? They don't have the right to hear the truth from me. They forfeited it by the fact that they're carrying an ax, and clearly have murderous intentions.

Nonetheless, Kantian principles do something, and so do consequentialists. And what goes wrong in ethics, in systematic theorizing in ethics, is when one theory is supposed to do everything. And, likewise, I want to suggest with systematic theory of transgender, if these theories were allowed to coexist and each of them do just a bit of the work, then I would be less worried than if any of them is supposed to be the truth about all trans people and the comprehensive truth about all trans. So, that has an implication.

I'm going to move on to criticize accounts of gender, and there are a lot of them. This is probably the dominant form of accounts of gender. I want to criticize accounts of gender that say gender is a matter of how you are treated in society or how you are entitled to be treated in society. And, so to be a transgender person is to have certain rights, certain expectations fulfilled about how other people treat you, and then there are various accounts of how that should go. Now I think that such theories get things the wrong way around. If there's anything that's universally true, it's not I should be treated thus and so, therefore, I'm transgender. It's the other way around. It's rather because I'm transgender, therefore, I should be treated thus and so. So I have a reservation about all these theories.

But having said that, I also want to say, since I'm not myself in an empire building occupation, I'm not trying to get a single theory of trans that covers all cases. My account of trans bases things fundamentally on the body and on the way our bodies are, and on the way we want our bodies to be, and on the way we conceive ourselves. It's not about how we're treated, in *my* view. But because I'm not a systematizing empire builder, I can happily say that it's my view of what trans is about, but then immediately add a rider: well, maybe it's not like that for all trans people. Maybe there are other trans people for whom the social aspect of being trans is the key thing, and maybe there are people for whom norms about how we're treated are the be all and end all of being trans. That might be fine for some trans people; it doesn't fit me. So, for example, with Rachel Cosker-Rowland's account, I find myself saying, maybe her account is true of some trans people. It doesn't fit me, and I can see lots of other trans people that I don't think it fits, either. And so I want to propose an alternative understanding of transgender from Rachel Cosker-Rowland's. And, my understanding, as I say, is not meant to be all embracing, but it might well have the consequence that Rachel's account is not at any rate true of everyone. And if Rachel's account is *meant* to be true of everyone, then I'm disagreeing with her.

Now it's important to say that, since I've been talking about solidarity, it's important to say that, I want to reach a lot of the same conclusions as all the gender theorists that I'm going to be talking about, only from different starting points. I want to reach the same trans-inclusive conclusions about trans



people having a free and equal place in society, both in the US and in Britain and in Europe. We should have full trans equality. We shouldn't be the objects of discrimination. It's just a lot of that seems to me, if it follows from anything rather than just being self evident in itself, if it follows from anything, it follows from broad principles about justice. It doesn't follow from us having a systematic theory of transgender. We don't need that as a place to get our conclusions about trans equality from.

And my starting point in all this, as I say, is experience, and so here's a quick autobiographical bit. I've been aware all my life, from when I was a toddler of a mismatch between my sense and how my body ought to be and how my body apparently *was*, which was, male. That mismatch distressed me and left me feeling wrong. And it's the kind of distress which leads some trans people, including me, to reach for the phraseology of being born in the wrong body. And that's the phraseology that there are lots of trans people who object to. There are also lots of TERFs who object to it, of course. There are lots of transphobes and trans exclusionary people who say, "You can't be born in the wrong body. You're just born in the body you're born in." People say that on both sides of the aisle. Sometimes people say it, with a backup of, rather crude and Bible thumping theology, God doesn't make mistakes. Sometimes people back it up by saying, well, what you need to drop here is the assumption that anybody is intrinsically male or intrinsically female.

And, there I reach a point of solid disagreement with both these camps. On "God doesn't make mistakes," I want to say to them, well, first off, that seems a rather cruel and harsh thing to say to people who, for example, are born with hair lip or with spina bifida or with cerebral palsy or with other forms of condition. If God doesn't make mistakes, then, why aren't they being invited to do nothing at all about the way they were born, when for many people like that, the right thing to do, on their own account is for something to be done to enable them to live free of that condition. So God doesn't make mistakes seems to me a cruel thing to say. And the second thing to say about it, of course, something that some disabled rights activists also say is, well, if God doesn't make mistakes, then maybe trans people should be saying, "I was born like this, and that's no mistake." And that's something that I would want to say. I don't regard the mismatch between the gender I was assigned at birth and the gender I'm happy in as a matter of a divine mistake at all.

But on the other hand, when people who are more radical in their trans theory than I am say, well, "There's no such thing as a male sexed body or a female sexed body. Your starting point is all wrong when you say that it seems to you that you were born in the wrong body, Sophie Grace. Your starting point is all wrong because there's no such thing as a wrong body. All bodies are equally open to the impress of society. Nobody is in itself intrinsically male or female." That seems to me, I'm enough of an Aristotelian to think that that is not right. I think there are clear markers of a biological sex. And it seems to me that for a lot of trans people, including me, the whole of our lives is precisely about learning to live with the fact that you're born, and assigned a birth, a gender that goes with having a body which is shaped one way, and you yourself don't feel happy or fitting in that state, in that body.. You feel dysphoric, and you want to do something about it. And then the question is what?

So this is a place where it seems to me, our emphasis is at all about the body. And what we're looking for is a way of finding a way to be happy in the body that we've got, perhaps by modifying that body. So one way that trans people go is to alter the body so that it literally becomes a body of the other sex from your birth sex. And, yes, I do mean literally. Very briefly, to rehearse a much more complicated argument extremely quickly because I'm slightly running out of time now, very briefly, sex is a cluster concept. Biological sex is a cluster concept. It doesn't hang just on chromosomes. It doesn't hang just on external anatomy. It doesn't hang just on internal anatomy. It doesn't hang on hormones. It doesn't hang on how you're perceived or how you perceive yourself. It's a cluster concept. There's a whole row of boxes that one might tick. It doesn't hang on gonad size either. There's a whole cluster of boxes that you might tick. People in general line up with the cluster, *stereotypically male*, or the cluster *stereotypically female*, but lots of people don't line up that neatly. And in particular, and because it's a cluster concept, some of those boxes are changeable. What's in those boxes? What's some of those boxes are changeable? In particular, hormones, phenotypical morphology of the body, and, of course,

whether you are taken to be a woman or a man. All of that is changeable, and changing enough of it is literally changing the sex. So that's one thing you can do. The second is to alter your social presentation so that you're *taken* to be someone of the other sex, that is, simply to pass. And the third is to alter your social presentation so that you're taken at any rate to be someone who's transgender, and you learn to be content and settled in that role.

So those are three ways of learning to cope with the predicament. And, on this account, it's all about the body. And I want to contrast this approach, which leads us to the kind of picture of transgender that I want to adopt, which bases transgender fundamentally on the bodily individual's relationship with their body, with people who think that gender is all about how you're treated. And this is something, I'm gonna close by reviewing some views about this, all of which I'm disagreeing with because none of them, as far as I can see, base being trans on the bodily requirements that I've identified.

So here's the list:

- Asta says X is a woman if and only if X merits the *response* in a situation that X be treated in manner M, where you go on and define what manner M is. So that's about how you're treated.
- Judith Butler: they say that to be a woman is to engage in a performative category within the discursive heteronormativity. That's gender as performance. That's not exactly about how you're treated; it's about how you perform. But, again, that seems to me. with all respect to Judith Butler, to get things wrong because, I think I mean, on *my* view, trans is about the body; it's not about how you perform. To say it again, maybe there are trans people for whom Judith Butler's definition fits. It doesn't fit me.
- Sally Haslanger says that X is a woman if and only X is a member of a social class whose unifying feature is social subordination based on one's presumed or perceived female biological role in reproduction. And I disagree with what Sally says because, of course, this definition of Sally's is heading via the phrase "social subordination" towards the view that to be a woman is necessarily to be a member of an oppressed class. And so Sally is a gender abolitionist because she thinks we should get rid of that oppression and therefore of the *class* women. And, since I'm more tied to the body and to biology, I don't take that view.
- Katherine Jenkins says for A to have the gender identity G is for A to experience the norms that are associated with Gs in their social context.
- Catherine MacKinnon says to be a woman is to have a particular place in an eroticized hierarchy of sexual domination and subordination. Again, that has a distinctly gender abolitionist tone.
- Jennifer McKittrick says, you have gender identity G if and only if you have sufficiently many, sufficiently strong dispositions to behave in particular ways in particular situations and one society considers behaving in those ways in those situations to make one a G.
- And Rachel Cosker-Rowland says, for it to seem to you that gender G1 fits you is for you to see strong fit-based normative reasons for yourself and/or others to conceive of you and treat you as a G1 for its own sake and for it to seem to you that gender G2 does not fit you. It's for you to see strong, fit-based normative reasons for yourself and/or others to not conceive of and treat you as a G2 for its own sake.

So those are the different accounts of gender that base it in either how you're treated or in a kind of performance of gender in your society or in oppression. And those are three linked concepts: the concept of performance, the concept of how you're treated, the concept of oppression. And I want to say, if that's what gender is, and if we define transgender, we define what transgender is by way of what gender is, then I'm not on the bus. I want to take a different view. I want to say that being trans, in that case, is not about gender. It's about having a trans body. It's about having a relationship with your body, which is, perhaps initially, for people like me, necessarily initially, at any rate, a dysphoric one. You get to be unhappy with the way, you came out, the way you were born, the way you started off, and you learn to do things about that in order to live a life which gets you somewhere different from your starting point and perhaps, depending on how it goes, all the way across from the category man to the category woman or vice versa or perhaps to some more fluid position in between those categories. But

in all cases, it's to do with your relationship with your body. Now, I think that account still has important consequences for how people are treated. In particular, I think one of the key things about trans people, and one of the key things that goes missing in a lot of discussion of trans people, one of the key things about us is a lot of us are not clocked.

So for trans people, there are those who, like I suppose myself, are routinely seen as being transgender. But there is perhaps a majority, certainly of trans men, maybe of trans women too, who are not simply not noticed. They're not picked up. They're not read as trans. They're seen as the gender that they identify with as opposed to the gender that they were born into, and they naturally and understandably are very happy with that because it's the outcome they wanted all along, and they live in that gender. And as a result of that way of living, they're treated according to that gender. So that is a good outcome for them. It's important how outcomes go for trans people whether or not they're clocked as trans. Obviously enough, that goes without saying.

There's another important class who are now becoming rather more prominent, and that is the class of people who are actually cis but are misread or misclocked, especially by exclusionary people, as being trans, and are therefore subjected to various kinds of bathroom persecution and the like because people think they're trans when actually they're cis. And this can happen for a number of reasons. One of them is simply butch appearance. One of them is, I mean, deliberately cultivated butch appearance as you get in some subgroups of the lesbian world, you get people who deliberately cultivate a butch appearance. You also get people who just look that way, and you get people who have various conditions including polycystic ovarian syndrome that can cause people to, who are born female, assigned female at birth, cause them to look a lot more like a lot more, quotes, like trans people, unquote, than other cis women do, and that can get them in trouble. So, in all these classes, it's obvious that they should be treated with dignity and respect. Despite the unusual past that they have, which are not cis past in their relationship with their own bodies, it follows, I think, from principles of justice that they should be treated equally and fairly. I don't think we need a big systematic theory of trans to explain why they should be treated justly and fairly. It's just a matter of basic justice and fairness that they should be treated that way, the same as anyone else in society.

But as I say, the key thing for me is the body. Norms about how we're treated follow from our relationship with our body. It's not the other way around. It's not the norms of how we should be treated dictate our relationship with our body. It starts with the body. And that's how I experience trans. As I say, I think that puts me in conflict with those theorists of trans and gender who want to offer one, all embracing explanation of all trans people. But if we can just get to a situation where we're saying, well, there's this trans theory, which fits some trans people, and there's this account of what it is to be trans, which fits others, and none of them is the single systematic theory that does all the work everywhere, then, just as with the case of consequentialism and Kantianism, I will be rubbing my hands and saying my work here is done.

We've allowed ourselves to get into a situation where instead of trying to have a single theory that covers all cases, we recognize that life is more complicated than that, and we recognize that different kinds of need can be met by different kinds of theory, or account, maybe something that's too simple or too narrative in structure even to be dignified by the name theory might be what we need in some cases. So I'm a kind of pragmatist. I want a much more down to earth and relaxed approach, and I don't think we should be in the business of trying to go for a single all out theory of gender that's supposed to cover everybody. And if someone doesn't fit that theory, then that's their problem and not the theories. That seems to me to be putting things quite the wrong way around. Jesus once said the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. I want to say likewise that philosophical theorizing is made for human beings, and it should fit human beings and not the other way around.

So, I run on a little longer than I intended to. There's a lot I could have said that I haven't said. There's a lot that I've said that I wasn't entirely expecting to say when I started this evening, but it seemed useful



as contextualizing. I very much hope that what I've said is helpful and thought provoking, and, rather late, I'd like to invite your questions. Thank you.

## Q&A

Elke -- concept of "ungendered" -- we're all the same -- dividing by gender is silly -- same as separation by shape of ears -- like every bead on abacus -- all different characteristics of gender -- all over the place

- all spectrum -- arrange differently --
- took set and put in one place -- not allowed to move -- no single human being fits that

SGC-- lots of friends who are non-binary

Elke - non-binary-- already forces into discussion

SGC -- going to sound very rad left here

- history prioritized maleness and male power -- translate homer
- homer's iliad begins with brutal use of force on women
- not binary but uniary → either man or imperfect man
- brutal history to do with power -- so through most of history in west, because those born with XY and male equipment, typically stronger, sex-based oppression throughout history -- because it suits them --
- self-serving emphasis on that distinction
- a side of west that's ugly -- best thing to do is recognize it's there and try to learn our way out of it

Alexandra -- happy to learn a position without strict definition -- always has difficulty understanding isms and exclusions that keep dividing people into groups -- there are 2 things -- body and that which makes us happy -- don't see why

SGC-- I agree -- one thing that's important and alarming in US -- demand for trans rights is demand for bodily autonomy -- power and ability to do what I chose within my body -- with usual JS Mill constraints -- attack on it with trans people -- cass report --

- attack on bodily autonomy = attack on abortion rights -- right to make own choices even when under -- based on Gillick consequences -- young person -- [Victoria Gillick](#) -- in 1985 -- ability to decide even if under age of adulthood whether or not to carry preg
- attack on young people to decide -- also attack on Gillick competence -- both sides are aware of this -- predictable once Gillick is overturned (like by Cass) -- right to people under 16 to abortion will also come into question
- what pro-choice advocates are on about -- disastrous to let it go in either case

David → thesis on rationality -- got me thinking about disability justice by trans, women of colour, etc.

- their emphasis on not just self-conscious trans-activism -- taking that turn back from rw pundits
- idea of madness as part of trans-justice project
- want to introduce as a challenge to premise or leg this project is standing on -- want to know if we can fit it into this -- where it would go in terms of rationality

SGC -- when trans advocates are accused of being delusional or lunatics, we should not only -- not just insist we're sane, also challenge assumption of aggression against us -- that if were lunatics, then don't deserve to be listened to -- having mental health condition is NOT synonymous with being trans -- overlap sometimes -- just as most contingent properties overlap somewhere

- ideas can dismiss or devalue by calling mad or delusion is a dangerous idea
- should just say -- not mad -- also -- even if we were, how does that give right to dismiss us

David -- world trying to build -- another world that's possible

- want to unpack -- someone like sinha -- trying to display to you that trans life can make another world possible by demonstrating that rationality of 18th century -- since nero -- is something we can depart from -- recognize us from what we are and what we create

SGC -- getting close to position dig in heels against -- happy for people to say there are adventures in re-thinking who we are and what we are -- will take us somewhere new and revise concept of rationality -- fine with that

- one of things people complain about-- epiphanies -- not straight arguments -- moved out of rationality -- need broader conception of rationality -- sb/b imagination, experiments, all kinds of possibilities in way to open possibility -- but NOT get rid of rationality -- if impoverished view of rationality -- not rationality to attack, but that perspective
- epiphany = moments of vision
- huxley -- doors of perception -- lots of epiphanies from mescaline

Sophie-Grace.Chappell@open.ac.uk - please contact with further question