

# Unsexing the Human: Marie de Gournay's *Equality of Men and Women* (1641)

a lecture by **Dr. Eloy LaBrada**

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**Friday, October 7, 2016, 3:00–4:30**

**Senate Chamber  
(Arts and Convocation Hall 3-26)**

**Abstract:**

This presentation will examine one of the first philosophical treatises on "sex" by the early modern French skeptical philosopher Marie de Gournay (1565-1645). Gournay makes the provocative claim that sex is not essential to being human and that, furthermore, sex is not a pre-given, natural fact but socially constituted all the way down. Gournay provides some of the first nurture over nature arguments about "sex," which in her terminology means something like the presumed natural differences between "men" and "women," arguing that natural sex differences do not exist. Drawing from contemporary social and feminist ontology, this presentation brings to light three innovative claims Gournay makes about the non-naturalness of sex, and shows why Gournay's innovative proposals are both promising and problematic for rethinking humanism, sex, and the subject. Gournay's work reveals how the categories of the human subject and sex were debated in the early modern era and compels us to consider what the contemporary legacies of that debate might be.

**Biography:**

Eloy LaBrada (Ph.D, Princeton University) is currently a CAST instructor working in the departments of Women's and Gender Studies and Philosophy. Prior to coming to the University of Alberta, he was a Visiting Assistant Professor in French, Philosophy, and Gender Studies at Middlebury College. He specializes in and has published on the philosophy of gender and sexuality, social ontology, the history of philosophy, and analytic feminism. Recent publications include "Categories We Die For: Ameliorating Gender in Analytic Feminist Philosophy," in *PMLA*, and *Inventing Agency*, a collection of essays co-edited with Claudia Brodsky, forthcoming with Bloomsbury Press.

