REALISM AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE[1]
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1. SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION AND ANTI-REALISM

Social constructionism is often thought to be a type of anti-realism. And certainly there are descriptions of the social constructionist project that make it sound very anti-realist, and it is taken to be anti-realist (perhaps even by definition) in most social theory. But the range of views that look aptly described as social constructionist seem to cut across the realist/anti-realist distinction; there are versions of social constructionism that are paradigmatically anti-realist, others that look more realist. For, example, Rae Langton's 'phenomenological gilding' and Asta Sveinsdottir's 'conferralism' both seem like versions of Humean-style projectivism (broadly construed).[2] In contrast, Charlotte Witt's functional essentialism and Sally Haslanger's structuralism look plausibly interpreted as versions of realism about social categories.[3]

In what follows, I'm going to focus on the work of Sally Haslanger, which I think can serve as an illustrative test case of social metaphysics. Haslanger herself explicitly claims that her version of social constructionism is realist, though she uses the minimal sense of 'realism' that just means 'truth apt'.[4] There's a further question of whether she thinks that questions about the metaphysics of social kinds are somehow non-projective, non-conventional, about the world rather than about our concepts, etc. The term 'realism' by itself probably isn't very helpful here—it can mean many different things in many different contexts. What I want to focus on is this paper is a cluster of ideas that are prominent in contemporary metaphysics and that are often labelled 'metaphysical realism'.

Metaphysical realism is perhaps best understood in contrast to contemporary forms of metaphysical deflationism, such as those defended by Amie Thomasson (2015), (2007),

[2] See Langton (2009) and Sveinsdottir (2013)

[3] See Witt (2011) and Haslanger (2012)

[4] Haslanger (2012)a, p. 198-200.

Eli Hirsch (2002), Matti Eklund (2013), and Agustin Rayo (2013), among others. Metaphysical deflationists think, roughly, that there isn't an objectively privileged metaphysical description of the world; what exists and what it is like depends in part on how we use our concepts to 'carve up' the world. (There are multiple candidate carvings, and which one is 'best' is a matter of how we use our words and concepts.) When we have disputes in metaphysics, those disputes are best understood as disputes about our words or concepts.

Metaphysical realists deny this. They think disputes in metaphysics are disputes about the world, not about our concepts. And some metaphysical realists go further. They think that among the things that exist, some things are more explanatorily important than others.[5] Maybe it's true that both holes and electrons exist. Nevertheless, electrons are explanatorily more significant than holes. Metaphysicians trying to give a good theory of the world should care about electrons more than they care about holes.

In what follows, I'm going to present my interpretation of Sally Haslanger's theory of social structures.[6] And I'm going to argue that Haslanger's account is best understood as a form of (non-deflationary) metaphysical realism about social structure. She's making a claim about the world—social categories are things, and when we talk about them we're talking about what the world is like, not what our words or concepts are like. Moreover, on her view social categories are among the most explanatorily important things that there are.

After putting forward my interpretation of Haslanger, I'm going to argue that her view has interesting consequences for how we think about metaphysical realism.

2. THE AMELIORATIVE PROJECT

Haslanger's methodology—especially her development of what she calls 'the ameliorative project'—can sound deflationist. But I think her approach, including her deployment of the ameliorative project, is better understood in non-deflationary terms. Haslanger argues that when asking what social kinds like race and gender are, we should

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[5] Thanks to Rebecca Mason for helping me frame the point this way.

[6] I certainly don't claim that this is the only way of interpreting Haslanger—most especially because she tends to change her views over time. I instead present this as one way of reading substantial parts of her work.

consider how an account of race or gender might best help us achieve our legitimate political and social goals.[7] So, for example, she says:

> I believe we should adopt a constructionist account not because it provides an analysis of our ordinary discourse, but because it offers numerous political and theoretical advantages. (2012c, p. 366).

And similarly:

> I believe that races and genders are real social categories to be defined in terms of social positions. I have come to this conclusion by considering what categories we should employ in the quest for social justice. (2012c p. 365)

The idea that we should weigh pragmatic considerations—such as what might best help us achieve our social and political goals—when considering what gender and race are makes it sound like our underlying conception of such categories is fairly deflationary - perhaps a version of neo-Carnapianism, for example. There are lots of different ways to carve up the (social) world. None of them is objectively privileged over any other. When deciding what social categories are, we should just pick the carving that best suits our social and political goals. (So the revisionary claim of the ameliorative project would just be: pick the carving that best suits the aims of justice, rather than the carving that best matches up with ordinary patterns of speech and communication.) But I think that pairing the ameliorative project for the metaphysics of social kinds with this kind of deflationary view of the relevant metaphysical questions gives an inadequate picture of what Haslanger is up to.

2.1 THE 'NOBLE LIE'

It seems like it ought to at least be possible for us to adopt a theory of a social category which is politically useful, but false. (Essentialism about gender seems to have played this role in second-wave feminism; the 'born this way' rhetoric from the gay rights movement might be doing something similar now.) But if all carvings of the social world are equally good, and what makes a carving the correct one just is that it best helps us achieve our social and political goals, the possibility of the effective falsehood

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[7] Haslanger (2012)b

disappears. A charitable reading of the ameliorative project should allow for the coherence or possibility of politically effective falsehoods.

2.2 MIS-DESCRIBING DEBATES

Combining the ameliorative project with deflationism about the metaphysical questions turns debates in social ontology into meta-level debates about the social utility of those positions. But this seems to misdescribe what's going on in these debates. When Haslanger objects to biological essentialism about gender she isn't merely objecting to the latter's bad political consequences. She's also claiming that the view doesn't adequately describe social reality ('Intuitions'). It's not just that the view is inefficacious, it's also that it's descriptively inadequate. Haslanger seems to be implicitly assuming that there's a way the social world is, and that in giving a theory of social kinds we are trying to adequately describe the way the social world is.

2.3 DIRECTION OF EXPLANATION

A deflationist approach also seems to confuse direction of explanation for some questions of social justice. A successful account of gender ought to say that trans women are women; it would be unjust not to classify trans women as women. But at least part of that injustice, on most accounts, consists in failing to treat trans women as what they are. That is, it's unjust to say that trans women aren't women because trans women really are women.[8] But the 'ameliorative project + deflationism' approach seems to get the direction of explanation the wrong way around. It would say that it's a constraint on a theory of gender to have the claim 'trans women are women' be true (only) because it serves our social and political goals to treat trans women as women. But why does it serve our political and social goals to treat trans women as women if there aren't any facts about what genders are independent of what our political and social goals are? How do we even specify what those goals are in the absence of independent facts about categories like gender? So, for example, we might think it's a goal of social justice that we treat all women as women. And so, by the lights of Haslanger's ameliorative project, we want a theory of gender that does that. But in the absence of social categories that are determined independently of our social goals, it's hard to see how we'd even go about applying the ameliorative project.

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[8] Haslanger's own original presentation of her view struggles with this issue. She can say that some trans women are women, but only those trans women who 'pass' as women. Katharine Jenkins (forthcoming) persuasively argues that Haslanger is best understood as defending a theory of *gender role*. But gender role isn't the full story about gender - we also need a story about gender identity.

3. HASLANGER AS A METAPHYSICAL REALIST

I think Haslanger is better understood as advocating metaphysical realism about social categories, and that the ameliorative project can be understood in realist terms.[9] As I understand Haslanger, her defense of the ameliorative project is actually making a relatively familiar claim about theory choice: in evaluating our theories, we need to consider whether they are expressively and explanatorily adequate. The not-so-familiar claim she is making, however, is that what we consider as constraints on expressive and explanatory adequacy can vary depending on what the subject matter of our theorizing is. And when we're giving a theory of social categories, part of what we need to account for and explain (part of the 'manifest image' that any good theory needs to be able to explain) are 'thick' or normative considerations like injustice and unfairness.

So, for example, Haslanger argues that when people give theories of categories like gender and race they

> 'are not typically trying to answer the normative question: is this unjust? Is this oppressive? In the context, it is usually pretty clear to everyone that an injustice has occurred or is occurring. A large part of what theorists of oppression try to do is explain how and why certain recognizably unjust social structures work to the advantage of some and not others. Part of the project is descriptive/interpretive, calling upon us to see the system as a system, to see the unfairness, the injustice.' (2014, p. 35)

For Haslanger, that a view has socially or politically unacceptable consequences is taken to be *evidence* of that view's shortcomings.[10] If a view doesn't adequately address or

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[9] Haslanger herself says this fairly explicitly:

"My claim is not that my account [of gender] 'analyzes our concept', in the sense that it provides an interpretation of what people have in mind when they use the term, or that it is what determines the extension of gender/race language in a Fregean way, but that it captures the social reality that underlies our thinking and speaking, but is hidden from view." ('Reply', p. 29)

'I maintain that my analysis of gender is descriptive, in fact, descriptive of the material reality of gender, even if it is not descriptive of anyone's thinking about gender. In short, I am offering a theory of what gender is, not what some people think it is, or what they think it should be. This is the goal of real definition.' (2014, p. 31)

[10] See especially the discussion of neo-descriptivism on p. 433-4 of (2012)d

explain structural inequalities and hierarchies (which, again, are taken as part of the 'manifest image'), then that's a mark against that theory.

One objection to Haslanger here—-which I suspect will be a common one—is that this method of theory choice just amounts to wishful thinking. We might wish that the correct theory of race or gender would help us address social injustice, but that doesn't mean we should consider justice as a criteria when evaluating theories. But I think this objection mischaracterizes Haslanger's view. It's important to understand the ameliorative project as Haslanger presents it: in contrast to eliminativism or error theory.[11] Haslanger is asking what the point of having a (non-eliminativist) theory of categories like gender would be, given that we seem to have so many confused, misleading, and false beliefs about such categories. And her answer is that we need theories of social categories like race and gender to explain and understand certain types of hierarchical injustice. Without appeal to these categories, our explanatory resources—and thus the expressive adequacy of our theories—would be impoverished. When she says we should consider how a theory of such categories helps us to achieve our legitimate political and social goals, she can be understood as saying something very straightforward: we should consider how a theory of such categories helps us understand and explain oppression, with the assumption that understanding and explaining oppression will help us to address it ('Social Construction', p. 211). On this reading, she is simply giving a basic demand of expressive and explanatory adequacy. But what she's further claiming is that, in giving a theory of social categories, part of what needs to be explained are things like injustice and oppression, and that explaining injustice and oppression is part of how we fight it.

So, for example, consider Haslanger's application of the ameliorative project to her discussion of race. Haslanger makes clear that the goal is not to shift the meaning of race terms or to be revisionist about 'our concept' of race; rather, the goal is to reveal surprising information about what categories—what aspects of the world—our racial talk might in fact be tracking (2012d, p. 440-441). This project is in part what Haslanger calls an 'unmasking' project. We tend to think of race as something biological—that racial talk is 'tracking nature's joints, not ours' (2012e, p. 402). So one goal of a successful theory is to explain how something we thought was a natural category 'is in fact social' (2012e, p. 402). Part of what is relevant to this kind of 'unmasking' project are moral and political considerations—the way race is used to divide people, to disadvantage some and

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[11] Haslanger (2012)b, (2012)e

privilege others, etc. A successful theory of race, according to Haslanger, needs to be able to express and explain those facts about social disadvantage and oppression. On this reading of the ameliorative project, Haslanger is engaged in fairly standard methods of theory choice which are perfectly compatible with non-deflationist realism.

4.. REALISM ABOUT SOCIAL STRUCTURES

4.1 STRUCTURAL EXPLANATION

If we interpret Haslanger as a metaphysical realist, then we're left with the question of what exactly it means to be a social constructionist realist about social categories like race and gender. According to Haslanger, social categories like gender and race are *structures*.[12] There isn't anything universal about the social role or social experience of being a member of a particular race or gender—such roles can and do vary drastically across places and times, across classes, sexualities, cultures, etc. What is universal, however, are certain hierarchical structural features.

So, for example, we associate specific social positions, social roles, social attitudes, etc as the kind of things that *should* be had by women, in virtue of perceived features of biological sex. What these particular roles, attitudes, etc are varies fairly drastically. What stays constant, however, is that women's perceived characteristics of biological sex play a justificatory role in women's occupying *some social position or other*, and the positions they occupy are in fact subordinate.

That is, there are always social roles and positions which end up being the kind of thing we assume women ought to occupy—though what these roles and positions are varies—due to beliefs about what follows from female sex, and especially from a female's role in biological reproduction. We then devalue these roles and positions, whatever they are. Occupying such a role or position puts a person at a material disadvantage, and restricts their access to economic and interpersonal resources.

And so, on Haslanger's view, gender can't be identified with any of the particular social roles or positions, in part because they vary so much and in part because the roles and

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12 Importantly, Haslanger doesn't think all social categories are structures, in her sense of 'structure'. We get structures only when a particular category becomes particularly entrenched and stable.

positions themselves don't explain the subordination of women. Gender[13], for Haslanger, *just is* the broader structural feature: the systematic privileging of some and disadvantaging of others based on perceptions of biological sex. That's what explains what women and men have in common with each other across places, cultures, times, etc. And that's what explains the way in which societies seem to systematically disadvantage women, even though they do so in strikingly different ways.

4.2 THE METAPHYSICS OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Social structures, for Haslanger, are created by complex, repeated patterns of interpersonal social interactions. But they are not identical to those patterns. Their existence is both caused by and sustained by those patterns of interaction, but the structures themselves are something else. Moreover, once a structure exists, it explains the continued existence of the particular pattern, and makes that pattern harder to change (2012f, p. 411-15).

By way of analogy, think of wheel ruts (the deep indentations in a dirt road made by wagon wheels.) Ruts are caused by repeated patterns of travel—different wagons going over the same bit of road over and over. But once a rut is there, its something separate from the individual paths of any particular wagon, even though it's continued existence relies on the continued travel of wagons along the same path. Moreover, once there are ruts in a road, those ruts explain why wagons continue to travel the way they do, because once there are ruts in a road it's really hard to drive a wagon anywhere but the ruts.

Mere social patterns—norms of fashion, etiquette, convention, custom, etc—are relatively fluid and change easily over time. Once a structure is created, however, certain aspects of social interaction become more regimented. It then becomes difficult to change the underlying patterns of interaction and behavior because the structure itself constrains which such patterns are seen as acceptable. And so, on Haslanger's account, 'social structures cannot be identified simply as schemas [where schemas are 'intersubjective patterns of perception, thought, and behavior'] because social structures have material existence and a reality that 'pushes back' when we come to it with the wrong or an incomplete schema.' (2012f, p. 415)

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[13] Or, again, perhaps more accurately *gender role*

On this view, social structures are real—as real as anything—but they are *made*. They aren't 'joints in nature', they're joints in the social world. We created them, and our collective social activity is responsible for their continued existence, but they're no less real as a result. There are ways of dividing up the world which are 'natural division[s]. . .that is, a division which rests entirely on the natural properties of things' (2012g, p. 300). But there are also, equally important, social divisions. According to Haslanger:

> Constructionists reject the claim that [social structures] are natural kinds, that is, they allow that [social structures] are kinds, but hold that the division rests at least partly on social properties (being viewed and treated in a certain way, functioning in a certain social role, etc) of the things in question. This requires understanding social kinds as just as fully real as natural kinds. ('2012g, p. 300-301)

Haslanger argues that we need social structures to explain the overarching structural features of human social interaction—features which she says aren't adequately explained by individual action or belief, or by the particular social roles that individuals occupy. She draws analogy to structuralist explanations in mathematics, but I'm not sure this analogy is apt. A hallmark of many (though not all) versions of structuralist realism in both mathematics and physics is the claim that individual existence is somehow derivative from/dependent on/explained by the existence of the broader structure in which the individuals are located. Haslanger (in contrast to, e.g., Witt (2012)) doesn't seem to want to make that sort of claim.

A closer analogy can be found in discussions of non-locality and emergent properties. For Haslanger, it's not that what individuals are is somehow explained by their position in a broader structure. Rather, individuals collectively interact to form a complex system. And once that system gets complex enough, properties of that system emerge which aren't explainable simply via reference to the individuals, and which have causal influence on the behavior of those individuals.

The striking feature of categories like gender and race, for Haslanger, is the way in which structural hierarchies are maintained across cultures, contexts, places, and times—even though the way in which they are maintained differs dramatically. Again, consider gender role. What we think of as 'women's work' or 'women's roles' varies greatly, but there's almost always something(s) we think women ought to do in virtue of being women, and

whatever that thing is ends up being devalued along some dimension. Individual facts about women's roles, women's jobs, women's position in a particular social setting, etc don't explain this structural commonality. We need something unifying to explain the striking commonality of gender oppression.

For Haslanger, what explains this commonality just is social structure. Gender and race are social structures that we made. They are joints in the social world. They aren't natural, but they're real. And their reality shapes the way in which social groups organize themselves. It's 'better'—in the sense of 'correct', or 'corresponding to the way things are'—to sort roles and behaviors according to assumptions about biological sex in a way that is in fact hierarchical, or to sort people into social groups based on perceived assumptions about their geographical origin in a way that is in fact hierarchical. It's not of course 'better' in any normative sense. It's normatively bad. Haslanger argues (going back to the ameliorative project) that part of the reason we need theories of gender and race is to understand just how engrained these oppressive structures are, so that we can begin to work at dismantling them.

5. HASLANGERIAN REALISM AS A CHALLENGE TO SIDERIAN REALISM

Haslanger presents us with an intriguing idea: the joints *in reality* might go beyond the joints *in nature*. If we take the latter to be things which are fundamental, things which the world comes 'ready made' with, things which are not constructed by human thought and practice, things which are in no way arbitrary, etc, then genders and races are not joints in nature. In a very important sense, our choice to divide people in this way was and is arbitrary, and depends on human thought and convention. Nevertheless, for Haslanger, gender and race are not matters of mere social convention or projections of social beliefs. They are real—-they explain things, they cause things, we need to understand them to understand the structure of the world, etc. But they are real because we made them.

On Haslanger's view,social structures are joints in reality—-places where an important, metaphysically perspicuous distinction is carved—-but they are determined by and dependent on somewhat arbitrary social conventions. That is, collective human activity can create joints in reality, even when that collective human activity isn't tracking anything that's naturally or objectively privileged. That our social categories are created by human social practice doesn't, for Haslanger, make the division between, say, men and women 'subjective' or 'conventional' in any familiar sense of those terms. On

Haslanger's view, that division isn't a matter of how we think about people or what concepts we project onto people. It's a deep fact about how the world is. It just isn't a natural fact. But I'm going to argue that Haslanger's view—that the collective social activity of human beings needs to be a part of our ultimate metaphysical explanation of the world—-is difficult to articulate on some popular ways of thinking about metaphysical realism.

Theodore Sider, in his *Writing the Book of the World*, gives the perhaps the most detailed defense of metaphysical realism in the contemporary literature—one that attempts explain both what such realism consists in and how such realism can lay the groundwork for distinguishing between 'substantive' and 'non-substantive' ('shallow', 'terminological') disputes.[14] To do this, Sider adopts a primitive, unanalyzed notion of 'perfect joint carving', and then constructs a comparative notion of 'partial joint carving'. The project is an ambitious one—to show how, not only his own view, but metaphysical realism in general can be successfully articulated and defended against the challenges of anti-realist constructionists like Nelson Goodman and deflationists like Eli Hirsch and Amie Thomasson. But my worry is that Sider's deployment of joint carving is overly restrictive—he may manage to explain how *some* disputes are substantive, or how we could be ontological realists about *some* types of entities. But his view encounters problems when applied to a picture like Haslanger's.

Let's first consider the question of whether Sider's view can capture the substantiveness of disputes about Haslangerian social categories like race and gender. Whether or not you think her theory of social categories is correct, it seems pretty clear that social structures are not, on Haslanger's view, subjective, projectivist, or anti-realist in the familiar sense. Nor is it correct to classify questions of gender and race as 'shallow' or 'terminological'. But whether Sider's picture of substantivity can capture this will hang on the issue of whether —-and to what extent—-questions about such social categories can be classified, for Sider, as reasonably joint carving *in Sider's sense of joint-carving*.

Before we address joint-carving directly, though, note that Sider seems to assume—-whether or not the details of his account ultimately commit him to this—-that objectivity

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14 Sider (2011), p. 44. Lest it seem like I'm simply picking on Sider, the reason I'm focusing on his work so closely is he has attempted to articulate and defend ideas which are very common in contemporary metaphysics, but which are often simply assumed or gestured toward.

and realism are tied to counterfactual robustness and non-arbitrariness. The Haslangerian project, in contrast, draws this connection into question.

For example, Sider says that:

> 'the appropriateness of the language and imagery of realism and objectivity comes in degrees. Even if contents for moral language are selected by facts about us, morality seems more realistic and objective if those facts are counterfactually robust and universal across different societies - if they reflect the human condition rather than historical accident' (p. 59, note 18).

Now, I'm not quite sure what it is to 'reflect the human condition', but I'm assuming it means something like express a universal aspect of human society or human thought. On that reading, though, why think that 'reflecting the human condition' has anything to do with realism or objectivity? For a social constructionist, neither gender nor race 'reflect the human condition' - indeed, a major reason for adopting a social constructionist theory of such kinds is to explain why they don't 'reflect the human condition'. They are created divisions between people which haven't always been there and could have been otherwise. Indeed, for Haslanger, the goal of feminism and anti-racism is to do away with gender and race as they currently exist. But as Haslanger's view shows us, there's a difference between thinking that something is natural, counterfactually robust, or part of 'the human condition', and thinking that it merits the language or realism and objectivity. It is precisely Haslanger's view that some parts of the world—parts which are just as real as anything else—are made, and could easily have been made differently. Once this view is on the table, the connection between being universal/counterfactually robust/not a matter of historical accident and being real seems opaque.

In a similar vein, Sider construes realism and objectivity about morality, beauty, justice, etc as tied to joint carving, which he glosses as thinking that 'morality, beauty, and the rest are *built into the nature of things*' (p. 62, my emphasis). To give up this idea of joint carving just is, Sider claims, to give up on objectivity—and to do that is to 'diminish the value of truth' (p. 62). Again, for Haslanger, social structures like race and gender are absolutely not 'built into the nature of things'. But it's unclear why this should have consequences for realism or objectivity or the value of truth.

Sider's rhetorical glosses aside, the central issue here is whether Haslangerian social structures can be said to be reasonably joint-carving (again, in Sider's intended sense of joint-carving.) Sider suggests a picture of comparative joint-carving (or relative fundamentality) which corresponds to the familiar 'levels hierarchy' picture of science—physics is very fundamental, chemistry fairly fundamental, biology somewhat less so, etc (p. 130). On this picture, the closer a discourse is to physics, the more fundamental it is.

Prima facie, this picture suggests that Haslangerian social structures are extremely non-joint-carving, given that they are complex, gerrymandered, multiply-realizable aspects of human society. For example, not only is gender a matter of complex social interactions, it is also varies dramatically across times and places. Moreover, the members of the category have little in the way of intrinsic similarity with one another, and their individual social roles differ (e.g., what it is to be a professional black woman will be is very different from what it is to be a working class white woman).[15] So if we're just thinking about joint-carving via a typical levels-hierarchy picture of relative fundamentality, social structures don't look very joint-carving.

But Sider offers some additional criteria by which we can judge partial joint-carving. It's difficult, however, to see how these criteria can make the case that Haslangerian structures are reasonably joint carving. The first is Lewisian naturalness—adapted to Sider's framework, we could say that the shorter a term's definition in a fundamental language, the more joint-carving that term is (p. 130). This won't help for Haslangerian structures, since they will plausibly have extremely complicated and very long definitions in a fundamental language (and other things we might mean by our gender and race terms might well have simpler such definitions—more on this later).

The second is law-likeness—'the degree to which the noting figures into simple and strong generalizations' (p. 131). Plausibly, Haslangerian structures might feature in such generalizations. But there's a wrinkle—law-likeness by itself can't be a measure of partial joint-carving since 'once can cook up simple and powerful generalizations with even

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[15] It's worth emphasizing that the joint-carvingness of Haslangerian social structures doesn't stand or fall with the joint-carvingness of explanatory categories in the social sciences. Haslangerian social structures are, arguably, not the kind of thing studied by the social sciences. Social sciences tend to be concerned with local (more easily empirically tested) phenomena, such as gender *in a specific time and socio-political context*. Just as in traditional metaphysics, in social metaphysics we think that the entities we're discussing may be explanatorily significant while not obviously being the things that scientists are studying.

highly non-joint-carving notions' (p. 131). So law likeness becomes a measure of joint carving only when applied to 'somewhat definitionally structural notions' (p. 131). Since we don't yet know whether Haslangerian structures fall into this category—and we've got some good evidence that they don't—law-likeness by itself won't help.

A third criterion for partial joint carving is somewhat vaguely described as 'a class of elements' from explanation in the special sciences: probability, unification, causation, etc (p. 131). I'm not clear exactly what's intended in this very brief passage, but I take it that the suggestion is that the concepts which allow for the explanatory utility (and perhaps autonomy) of the special sciences might be part of the criteria for joint carving. Recall, though, that the Haslangerian project of explanation is not explanation from the social sciences; it is explanation in social metaphysics. The kinds of concepts she appeals to—injustice, oppression, power imbalance, hierarchy—are 'thick' concepts not obviously of the sort that Sider wants to include here. They are, at the very least, not the same sorts of explanations typically given in the social sciences. This point becomes especially pressing if Sider wants—as I assume he does—to avoid allowing a certain kind of 'bootstrapping' claim to joint-carving. So, for example, I take it that Sider doesn't want to allow that morality is at least partially joint carving because of how it features in moral explanation. And I don't yet see a way that Sider could use the explanatory significance of social structures to support their partial joint-carving without allowing for this kind of bootstrapping.

Finally, Sider also suggests (p. 132), somewhat perplexingly, that part of what matters to partial joint carving is value or utility in explaining things we care about. Some aspects of comparative joint carving can, for Sider, be subjective. Maybe a race of super-smart aliens with better knowledge of physics wouldn't care about economics; but we care about economics - and economics has explanatory significance for things we care about - and that matters in considering how joint carving economics is. This consideration, though, seems to be a relatively minor one, and can't *by itself* make a case for even partial joint carving. Morality doesn't—automatically—get to be even partially joint carving simply because it helps us talk about or explain things we care about. This would be to conflate metaphysical and conceptual substantivity (p. 73). So while its subjective value matters for Sider's account of joint carving, it seems that it can matter only insofar as it bolsters the other criteria for joint carving.

We're thus left without much of a positive case that Haslangerian structures can be even partially joint carving, in Sider's sense of joint carving. But the issue is more complicated than merely whether Haslangerian structures can be reasonably joint carving. For debates about gender to be substantive, we also need it to be the case that there are not other candidates for the meaning of our gender terms[16] which carve at the joints *equally well*. Let's imagine two candidates for Haslanger's functional definitions of the gender role woman. The first is the one Haslanger herself provides, the second is a slight modification—instead of singling out a class of people who are typically observed or imagined to have biological features associated with a female's role in biological reproduction, we instead single out a class of people who *actually have* features associated with a female's role in biological reproduction. These views will disagree about who the women are—the latter will only classify those persons with specific body parts as women, whereas the former will classify only those *perceived* to have them as woman. Haslanger does not think these two candidates are equally good. She thinks the former is a better, more explanatory account of gender than the latter. But it's hard to see how the advantage of the former could be explicated via a difference in degree of joint carving. The former view isn't cast in more joint carving terms than the latter—if anything, the opposite is true—and doesn't pick out a more joint carving set of people than the latter.

The worry here, for Sider, is that on Haslanger's view the advantages of the former view over the latter view aren't themselves cast in terms that are particularly Sider-joint-carving. Both the actual body parts associated with reproduction and our perceptions of people as having such body parts can play roles in causal explanations, are explanatorily unifying, etc. But for Haslanger, our public beliefs and perceptions matter more *for gender* than body parts do. We disadvantage some people and privilege others, Haslanger argues, based on appearance, and how we associate that appearance with reproduction. There are, of course, specific ways we disadvantage people with certain kinds of bodies —we make reproductive health care hard to come by, we don't take painful conditions like endometriosis and fibroids seriously, we don't offer adequate maternity leave, etc. But Haslanger thinks these kinds of disadvantages arise because of gender divisions (and not vice versa).

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[16] The gender terms in question here are probably best understood as technical terms. Haslanger is clear that she's not attempting to give an account of what people mean by their ordinary usage of race and gender terms.

Yet for Haslanger the fact that we base our gender division on appearance is deeply contingent. We could've arranged ourselves into genders based on who actually has what kind of body; we just didn't. We happened to care—despite there being no deeper facts or joints in nature in the area—more about reproductive appearance than reproductive fact. And this is exactly the kind of situation Sider describes as a species of *subjectivity*. According to Sider, 'a sentence is subjective [in the specific sense he outlines] if and only if its truth-value depends on which of a range of equally joint-carving candidates is meant by some term in the sentence, where the candidate that we in fact mean was selected in a way that is not arbitrary, but rather reflects something important about us' (p. 59). This looks like a good description of Haslanger's view. There are equally joint-carving candidates we could mean by our (technical) gender terms. The reason our terms pick out what they do reflects something important about us—what we care about, what we decided to privilege, how we somewhat artificially decided to divide people. Haslanger's view thus looks like it should be classified, on Sider's picture, as a species of subjectivity.[17] And subjectivity, for Sider, renders debates non-substantive ('shallow, nonobjective, conventional, terminological' (p. 44)).

But partial joint carving is only part of the picture. For Sider, ontological realism is the claim that ontological questions can be posed in *perfectly* Sider-joint carving terms. And regardless of whether they can be *partially* joint carving, it's implausible that the

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[17] Sider discusses social construction briefly, and (mistakenly, I think) characterizes it as a type of conventionalism: 'Conventionalism (or social constructionism) about. . .gender and race might be construed as the view that sentences about these subject matters express propositions that are in some sense about social conventions. Were our conventions different or nonexistent, there would exist different (or even no). . .men and women. . .since what it is to be [a man or woman] involves social conventions' (p. 56, note 13).

Conventionalism, for Sider, is type of nonsubstantivity. Or, more carefully, a specific version of conventionalism - candidate-selection conventionalism - automatically yields nonsubstantivity. Other species of conventionalism he identifies, such as content-conventionalism, do not have this automatic result, but seem nevertheless to yield nonsubstantivity in many/most paradigmatic instances, given how unstructured and vague many of our social conventions are. Several of Sider's key examples of nonsubstantivity ('Any liquor served in a v-shaped glass is a martini', 'Any man eligible for marriage is a bachelor') seem to be instances of content-conventionality, for example. It's true, for Haslanger, that when we talk about gender and race we are in some sense talking about social conventions. Social conventions (or better: social schemas) are what collectively create and sustain the existence of social structures. (E.g., 'We are not simply cogs in structures. . .of subordination, we enact them. And something about how we represent the world is both a constitutive part of that enactment and keeps it going.' (p. 411 'But Mom')) Likewise, were our conventions different there might've been very different structures created, and were our conventions nonexistent there would be no such structures. But that doesn't make our discussion of these social categories merely about social conventions, or a type of conventionalism in Sider's sense.

questions of whether there are Haslangerian genders or races could be perfectly joint carving. And if they can't, Haslanger doesn't count as an ontological realist about social categories on Sider's picture.

Care is needed here. The question isn't whether genders or races are fundamental (section 8.7). This is to confuse Sider's view with an 'entity fundamentality' view which he explicitly rejects. Rather, the question is whether genders and races fall in the domain of the existential quantifier of a perfectly joint carving language. The existence of genders and races might be fundamental even if their nature is not. (Cf. Lewis on mereology - it's plausible that for Lewis tables are in the domain of the fundamental quantifier, because of his universalism about mereology.)

That being said, it's hard to see how Haslangerian social structures could fall in the domain of the most fundamental quantifier. They are unnatural, created things based on relatively arbitrary distinctions between groups of people. Part of what causes and sustains them are our collective social practices and beliefs. If a purely joint carving language is meant to describe the 'ready made' world, the world as it is independent of human thought and language,[18] etc, then genders and races don't seem like the kind of thing a fundamental language will quantify over.

Making this worry more precise is difficult, because Sider's concept of fundamentality (=structure =perfect joint carving) is something he takes as primitive. But Sider argues for the importance of fundamentality (and our epistemic grasp of it) based on its role in explaining things like objective similarity, intrinsicality, spacetime, laws of nature, natural properties, and so on. He further says that whether something 'carves [perfectly] at the joints has nothing to do with [its place] in human languages, conceptual schemes, biology, or anything like that' (p. 5). So it's at the very least difficult, given the general descriptions of fundamentality that Sider gives, to see how social categories—things which are created by and dependent on collective human social interaction—could be fundamental in Sider's sense.[19]

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[18] Sider sometimes suggests that allowing structure (=perfect joint carving) to be 'tied to human history, biology, psychology, or interests' would thereby make structure subjective (p. 38). But it isn't overly clear what 'tied to' means in this context.

[19] There are other sense of 'fundamental'—some with very rich traditions in the history of philosophy—according to which it would make perfect sense to say that such categories are fundamental. See Witt (in progress).

Sider's glosses on fundamentality aside, here's a way of pressing the worry. Sider says that our fundamental theory needs to be 'pure' (section 7.2). Basically, this constraint means that nothing which is itself non-fundamental can be included in our fundamental theory. To be an ontological realist about genders and races, by Sider's lights, we need to say that genders and races are included in our fundamental theory. But the existence of genders and race are explained by all sorts of things—-collective human norms, attitudes, and social behavior—which won't, given purity, themselves be part of our fundamental theory.[20] So a fundamental theory that quantifies only over, say, atoms in the void and social structures just looks like a bad theory—-the existence of the social structures looks like magic.

And so, on Sider's construal of ontological realism, Haslanger is not an ontological realist about social kinds. To me, this result suggests that Sider's construal of ontological realism is impoverished, rather than that Haslanger is misdescribing her view. Sider takes the issue of ontological realism to be the issue of whether 'ontological questions are 'deep', 'about the world rather than language', etc' (p. 168). And certainly Haslanger is not making ontological claims which are shallow or about language. Furthermore, Sider construes the methodology of ontological realism as broadly Quinean—we should believe in the ontology of our best theories (p. 169). And as I am interpreting Haslanger's ameliorative project, this is likewise exactly how Haslanger understands ontological commitment. The key difference is what is taken into consideration in determining our 'best' theory. Haslanger's point, in developing the ameliorative project, is that part of what matters when we are trying to determine our ontological commitments—part of the 'manifest image' that we need our overall theory to explain—-are things like injustice, inequality, and subordination.

I take the general moral to be this. Sider is trying to argue against various forms of metaphysical deflationism and anti-realism. He wants to give an account of what it means for the world to be really 'out there', waiting to be discovered, rather than a construct or carving of our thoughts. But in rejecting Goodman-style constructionism, he goes too far. His overlapping glosses of objectivity, joint carving, realism, etc all rely on a picture of inquiry that aims to track the way the world is 'in and of itself', independent of human thought, human action, or human society. And this might well be the appropriate way to

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[20] At least on the assumption that the distinction between the fundamental and non-fundamental needs to do important work.

think about inquiry in the physical sciences, and in some parts of metaphysics. But it is not at all obvious why it should be the way to think about ontological realism, objectivity, substantivity, etc in general. Haslanger is just as opposed to Goodmania as Sider. She does not think that our thoughts somehow 'make' the world. But she does think that we are part of the world, and that collective human activity can affect the way the world is —-can affect what is real, and what is objectively 'out there'. That's not to endorse any sort of anti-realism or deflationism. It's just to say that part of the way the world is (*really is*, bang the table as much as you want) is the way we make it. And this view—which again I think can plausibly be seen as a realist middle ground between Goodman and the austere ontological realists who think all we need is physics and logic to tell us what there really is—is invisible on Sider's picture. It gets lumped together with subjectivity and ontological deflationism, which seems to clearly be the wrong result.

6. HASLANGERIAN REALISM AS A CHALLENGE TO SCHAFFER'S PERMISSIVISM

Jonathan Schaffer also defends metaphysical realism, but via a somewhat different approach. He argues that the interesting or substantial debates in metaphysics should be understood as debates about fundamentality and grounding. Is an entity fundamental (=ungrounded)? If not, how is it grounded? These are the substantial questions of metaphysics. According to Schaffer, this allows us to reinterpret many traditional debates in metaphysics, including debates about realism:

> 'The philosopher raised on the Quine-Carnap debate who turns to the central metaphysical questions will leave confused. She will find debates such as: (i) metaphysical realism versus idealism, (ii) realism about numbers versus constructivism, (iii) realism about universals versus nominalism, (iv) substratum versus bundle theories of objects, (v) dualistic versus materialistic theories of mind, (vi) substantival versus relational theories of space. . . . She will find little disagreement about what exists, but profound dispute over what is fundamental. Starting with (i), the debate over metaphysical realism, both the realist and idealist accept the existence of rocks. There is no dispute about what exists. Rather, the dispute is over mind-dependence: are entities like rocks grounded in ideas, or independent of them? The debate between the realist and constructivist about numbers in (ii) likewise concerns mind-dependence. The questions is whether numbers are independent of the mind, or based on our concepts. Turning to (iii), the debate over universals, both the realist and nominalist accept the existence of

general properties. The dispute is over whether properties are fundamental, or whether they are derivative. For the predicate nominalist who treats properties as 'shadows cast by predicates,' the issue is once again not one of existence but one of mind-dependence.' (2009, p. 362)

More generally, Schaffer says that the substantial questions in metaphysics are not questions of existence. Questions of the form 'Does x exist?' are almost always uninteresting, and they are uninteresting because they are easy. (The answer is almost always 'yes'.) Schaffer argues for permissivism about existence—lots and lots of things exist. Indeed, if you can name it, it probably exists.[21] But this permissivism is warranted because, for Schaffer, existence itself is not a cost to simplicity or parsimony. ('What Grounds', 'Multiply'). When considering virtues like parsimony and simplicity, Schaffer argues, we should only consider what a theory says is fundamental, not what it says exists. Schaffer thus argues for 'a permissive and abundant view of what there is, coupled with a restrictive and sparse view of what is fundamental.' (2014, p. 1)

The root of Schaffer's permissivism is the claim that non-fundamental (=grounded) entities are 'an ontological free lunch'. And the motivation for this claim stems from the idea that entities which are non-fundamental (=grounded) are in an important sense not metaphysically significant. The fundamental (=ungrounded) entities explain everything else. They are the reason the world is the way it is—everything else 'flows from' them. If God wants to create a world like this, all she has to do is create the fundamental entities, and she'll then get all the non-fundamental by default.

But why think there is such a tight connection between fundamentality/ungroundedness and metaphysical significance? Haslanger's argument for the reality of social structures puts pressure on this. Haslangerian social structures are grounded—grounded in a complex network of human thought, norms, and behavior. But the reason Haslanger advocates for realism about social structures is precisely that she thinks that this complex network of human thought, norms, and behavior doesn't, by itself, explain what the social world is like: it's enough to explain why genders and races come to exist, but not enough to explain what genders and races are, or what they do.

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[21] Schaffer doesn't specify exactly *how* permissive. Is there any entity corresponding to every predicate? To every [predicate, context] pair?

Schaffer himself is happy to grant the importance of structural or non-localized explanations. Indeed, it's the combination of such explanations with his claim that only the fundamental is metaphysically explanatory that serves as one of his major arguments for priority monism.[22] We should, Schaffer argues, take the world itself as the one fundamental entity in order to allow for these sorts of structural or non-local explanations.

But this is quite a striking claim. Why accept the principle that only fundamental entities are metaphysically significant/explanatory and endorse priority monism, rather than simply reject the principle about the unique significance of fundamental entities? One upshot of careful work on social ontology is plausibly that there are quite a lot of interesting questions in metaphysics that aren't really concerned with fundamentality.

Moreover, Schaffer-style grounding seems like too coarse of a tool to properly describe debates about realism in social ontology. For Schaffer, debates about realism can be re-described as debates about grounding: whether you are a realist about the xs depends on how/whether you think the xs are grounded. But in cases of social ontology, many parties —including both realists and anti-realists—seem to agree on questions of grounding. So, for example, Sveinsdottir (2013) would agree with Haslanger that gender is grounded in a complex network of human thought, behavior, and norms. But Sveinsdottir's account of gender is much more deflationist that Haslanger's—she is (more or less) a projectivist about gender. And Sveinsdottir's view is plausibly characterized as a type of metaphysical anti-realism: gender is constituted by, and in a real sense 'constructed by' our collective patterns of thought and behavior.

The reason that Haslanger is a realist social constructionist about gender and, for example, Asta Sveinsdottir is not is that Haslanger thinks that, although genders exist in virtue of human thought and behavior, they are something over and above human thought and behavior, whereas Sveinsdottir does not. Likewise, Haslanger thinks that gender itself plays an important causal and explanatory role, whereas Sveinsdottir does not. But none of this looks easily explicable in terms of grounding. The debate over gender realism isn't a debate about how/whether genders are grounded. It's a debate about what (if anything) they do, and what (if anything) they explain.

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[22] Schaffer (2010)

The reality and importance of social ontology is plausibly one area in which the entity-grounding approach defended by Schaffer might come apart in significant ways from the fact-grounding approach to realism defended by Kit Fine.[23] For Fine, grounding doesn't by itself give us a guide to what is fundamental (what exists 'in reality' or what is 'real'): he explicitly allows that propositions about what exists 'in reality' might be grounded, and likewise that propositions which are ungrounded might not be about what exists 'in reality' (2001, p. 27). A Finean view could thus allow that facts about Haslangerian structures are grounded, but real. Fine thinks that the default assumption is that the grounded is not real, but also suggests that this default assumption is easily cancelable by the kind of metaphysical reasons Haslanger appeals to. Fine's approach - unlike either Schaffer's or Sider's - can simply allow that Haslangerian structures are real/ fundamental, since he means something very different by 'fundamental', and his notion of fundamentality doesn't preclude facts about social entities from being fundamental/ real.

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