Handout 21

Haslanger on Race and Gender

1. Haslanger's Approach

Three ways to figure out the meaning of X:

Conceptual - What is our concept of X
> Method: reflective equilibrium (compare to the ideational strategy)

Descriptive - What natural kind if any does our usage of "X" track
> Method: Look at the world and see what actual phenomena or concept might be pointing
> to. (Physical, biological, social) (compare to referentialism)

Analytical **-** What is the point of having a concept of X, what concept if any would do the work
best? What cognitive or practical tasks does having the concept enable us to accomplish and
what would best fulfill this role?

Haslanger favors the analytical approach. "The world by itself can't tell us what gender is, or
what race is; it is up to us to decide what in the world, if anything, they are" (34).

The idea is not to describe what we actually we mean, but how might usefully revise what we
mean for certain theoretical and practical purposes.

So What Do We Want the Concept To Do?

Haslanger will focus on:
(i)   The need to identify and explain persistent inequalities between males and females,
        and between people of different "colors"
(ii)   The need for a framework that will be sensitive to both the similarities and differences
        among males and females, and the differences among individuals in groups
        demarcated by 'color' – including concern to account for intersectionality of race,
        class, gender

3. Gender

Slogan in some literature "gender is the social meaning of sex. " Two problems with standard
accounts

The commonality problem – is there anything social that females all have in common? There is
tremendous variation in the social role of females in different times, places and cultures.

The normativity problem – Any definition of what it takes to be a woman will be value laden and will
marginalize certain females, privilege others, and reinforce gender norms.

Haslanger's account (p.42):

S is a woman if and only if:
  i) S is regularly and for the most part observed or imagined to have certain bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction;
  ii) That S has these features marks S within the dominant ideology of S's society as someone who ought to occupy certain kinds of social position that are in fact subordinate (and so motivates and justifies S's occupying such a position); and
  iii) The fact that S satisfies (i) and (ii) plays a role in S's systematic subordination, i.e. *along some dimension* S's social position is oppressive, and S's satisfying (i) and (ii) plays a role in that dimension of subordination.

S is a man if and only if
  i) S is regularly and for the most part observed or imagined to have certain bodily features presumed to be evidence of a male's biological role in reproduction;
  ii) That S has these features marks S within the dominant ideology of S's society as someone who ought to occupy certain kinds of social position that are in fact privileged (and so motivates and justifies S's occupying such a position); and
  iii) The fact that S satisfies (i) and (ii) plays a role in S's systematic privilege, i.e. *along some dimension*, S's social position is privileged and S's satisfying (i) and (ii) plays a role in that dimension of privilege.

Clarifications regarding Subordination and Oppression

Subordination and privilege are part of the structure of oppression. Oppression is understood as a *structural* phenomenon that positions certain groups as advantaged or disadvantaged relative to others. Some representative quotes (Haslanger 39-40):

Frye: "an enclosing structure of forces and barriers which tends to the immobilization and reduction of a group or category of people."

Young: "Oppression refers to the vast and deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms"
  Example: Taxi company

The importance of "along some dimension" – Black male example. In the US there are contexts in which being a *perceived male* is not something that that a Black man has "going for him" (systematic targeting by police), but there are also contexts in which Black males benefit from being male.

4. Race

* No racial genes responsible for the morphological and cultural patterns we associate with different races

* In different contexts racial distinctions are drawn on the basis of different characteristics (Brazilian and US classification schemes for who counts as "Black" differ, at different times Italians, Germans, Irish and Jews have been racialized in the US)

These considerations support the idea that race could be understood as a position within a social network.

Definition (p.44): "A group is racialized if and only if its members are socially positioned as subordinate or privileged along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.), and the group is "marked" as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of ancestral links to a certain geographical region."

5. Back to the Normativity and Commonality Objections

Commonality – is there social that all e.g. women can be said to have in common? Haslanger says: nothing like individual beliefs, values, psychological traits, etc. But what women have in common is a particular *type* of social position.

Objection: some women are not oppressed as women.
Response: There could be females who aren't women in Haslanger's sense. But that's okay. The analysis is meant to capture an important political category for critical feminist efforts and non-oppressed females do not fall within that category.
> ("it is part of the project of feminism to bring about a day where are no more women")
> (46).

Normativity – defining genders or races will inevitably privilege certain e.g women and marginalize others. Haslanger says: it is inevitable and important to choose factors for understanding races and genders which are significant for the purposes for which the definition is meant to be used. Certain people may not count as "real women" but Haslanger's thought is that this is not incompatible with the feminist and anti-racist values her account is meant to be in support of.

6. Negotiating Terms

Haslanger acknowledges that she is appropriating everday terminology for specific theoretical and political purposes and that this could potentially be problematic.

These analyses might not fit people's self-understandings of what's involved in being a certain race or gender. In particular, Haslanger is suggesting that we reject what have seemed to us to be positive social identities.

"I'm asking us to understand ourselves and those around us as deeply molded by injustice and to draw the appropriate prescriptive inference. This, I hope, will contribute to empowering critical social agents" (48).

This raises the question: Can there be non-hierarchical genders and races? Will there be genders and races "after the revolution"?

Gender

In theory Haslanger's account opens the door to the possibility of constructing non-hierarchical genders on the basis of non-hierarchical differences in social positioning between people marked as male and people marked as female.

Haslanger doubts that sex will ever completely cease to have social meaning because the differences in what human bodies contribute to reproduction, which bodies bear the main physical burden of reproduction, etc are socially significant facts.

Race

It's less clear whether there is reason for "color" to have social meaning "after the revolution." Though Haslanger proposes that perhaps we can use "ethnicity" to talk about something like race but that doesn't presuppose systematic subordination or privilege.

Another Objection: Trans-identities

Katherine Jenkins: Gender as class versus gender as identity. But how to use the word "woman?" Jenkins proposes that at least at this point in time, "woman" should be used to refer to a gender identity since refusing to do is a way of reinforcing transphobic ideology.

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