SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND THE POSSIBILITY OF EMANCIPATION

ABIGAIL KLASSEN

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN PHILOSOPHY
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

August 2016

© Abigail Klassen, 2016

ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I attempt to accomplish two main objectives. First, I attempt to clarify what social construction amounts to in contemporary analytic philosophy. Research on the social construction of social categories has done some work to delineate and clarify varieties of social constructionist projects, as well as varieties of social phenomena. However, little research has been done to examine the meanings and tractability of the notions that social constructionists employ. As a second objective, I therefore take on the task of making clearer the meanings and implications of "non-inevitability" and "amelioration." Both objectives involve attending to the programs of various social constructionists and attempting to merge their programs into a single coherent account. In so doing, I put forth my own construal of what social construction amounts to, as well as what it means to say that something is a social construction in both the institutional and non-institutional contexts.

I provide tractable and plausible, if coarse-grained, accounts of what social constructionists might have in mind when they cite the notion of non-inevitability in their projects. I also explore the plausibility of social constructionism's ameliorative or emancipatory potential, asking whether or how modifying our social categories and concepts can have ethical and political implications and asking what those implications might be. I defend social constructionist programs, especially those of the ameliorative variety, from the possibly vitiating forces of the status quo, as well as from relativism concerning what or who counts or should count as some social kind X and the issue of what determines or what should determine X's extension. Related to these issues, I explore the nature of the difficulties involved in changing aspects of the social world. Difficulties related to the possibility of change and amelioration include the complexity of multiple coexisting ideologies, the problem of how to isolate ideologies and their source(s), and the non-volitional character of beliefs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Muhammad Ali Khalidi. Your guidance, expertise, understanding, and patience added considerably to my dissertation project and my graduate experience as a whole. Further, your direction and our conversations greatly assisted me in all aspects of my research, writing, and thinking. MAK, though you did sometimes enforce a life without music or poetry, I am thankful for the times you brought me back to Earth when I was often floating too far and for too long. Thanks too for sticking by me through all of what being my being Abigail Klassen entails - the adventures and the many, many misadventures.

My sincere thanks to my other dissertation committee members, Professor Lorraine Code and Professor David Jopling, for your insights, input, and encouragement. Lorraine, I do ask myself from time to time, "What would Professor Code do?" You're a wonderful mixture of intelligence, caring, and snappiness. To Professor Ian Hacking as well, my thanks for your guidance and for the books and articles you've written that inspired me to take on the topic of social constructionism in the first place.

Thank you to Professor Shannon Dea and Professor Susan Ehrlich for taking time out from their busy schedules to serve as my external readers and to Professor Claudine Verheggen for agreeing to serve as the Dean's Representative for this project.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to Sally Haslanger (MIT), Marysia Zalewski (University of Aberdeen), Ron Mallon (Washington University in St. Louis), Ásta Sveinsdóttir (San Francisco State University), and John R. Searle (Berkeley) who provided me with opportunities to engage in discussion and expand my knowledge as a visiting student at their respective institutions. Coming to know them was extremely insightful in both an intellectual and a human context.

Many thanks as well to Julie Birkle and Debbie Lee Keltz-Wolk for their continuous support throughout the years, to the fourth floor janitor (Margaret?) for late night conversations and shared snacks, to Leslie MacMillan for a constant supply of Tim Hortons and Starbucks gift cards, and to Marc Champagne, Josh Mugg, and Andrew Molas for just being themselves.

My doctoral experience and this dissertation project would not have been possible without the financial assistance of the Department of Philosophy at York University. In this respect, a very special thanks goes out to the Department for granting me the Graduate Fellowship for Distinction in Philosophy. I am also grateful to the Government of Canada for SSHRC awards over the years and to the Province of Ontario for Ontario Graduate Scholarship funding.

Mom and Dad, I can't thank you enough for all you do for me. Mostly, thanks for making me laugh. As you both say, "At least visiting you is never boring."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ii
Acknowledgements iii
Table of Contents iv

General Introduction 1

Chapter One: Social Ontology, Social Categories, Kinds, and Powers
1.0 Introduction 8
1.1 An Overview of the Searlian Program 10
1.2 Searlian Collective Intentionality 13
1.3 Language and the Imposition of Function 21
1.4 Deontic Powers 25
1.5 Latent and Manifest Functions and Agentive and Non-Agentive Kinds 35
1.6 Other Outliers 38
1.7 Social Kinds, Realism, the Possibility of the Discovery of New Social Facts, and Critique 42
1.8 Ásta: Hyper-Contextual Property Conferral 49
1.9 Conclusion 59

Chapter Two: Social Construction and the Debunking Project
2.0 Introduction 60
2.1 Hacking's Delineation of Social Constructionist Projects 65
2.2 Hacking and Non-Inevitability 67
2.3 Hacking and Haslanger on Idea- and Object-Constructionism 69
2.4 Interactive Kinds and the Looping Effect 73
2.5 Haslanger's *Resisting Reality*: Approaches to the Question "What is X?" 76
2.6 Haslanger on Discursive Construction and Thick and Thin Social Roles 80
2.7 Positionality, a Return to Ásta's Conferralism, and Intersectionality 85
2.8 Haslanger on Ideology and Debunking Widowhood: Ideology/Hegemony 96
2.9 Conclusion 107

Chapter Three: On the Complexities of Ideological Analysis and Dispute
3.0 Introduction 108
3.1 Descriptive versus Critical Theories and Ideology in the Descriptive Sense 109
3.2 A Closer Examination of Haslanger's "Ideology," Ásta's Social Maps, Ideology/Ideologies, and Schemas/Structures 115

3.3 Haslanger and MacKinnon on the Epistemology and Metaphysics of Social Phenomena....127
3.4 Are Crop-Tops Cute? A Case Study in Ideological Dispute....129
3.5 A More Careful Examination of Seventh Grade Girls' Cute/Dork Ideology....134
3.6 Making Sense of Disagreement: Haslanger on the Objectivist, Subjectivist, and Framework Readings....142
3.7 Empirical Research Supporting Haslanger's Articulation of Puzzle 3....147
3.8 Recapping the Crop-Top Dispute....148
3.9 Conclusion....150

Chapter Four: "Non-Inevitability," the Hegemony of the Status Quo, and Relativism
4.0 Introduction....151
4.1 Non-Inevitability....153
4.2 Putting Social Phenomena's Commitments to Inevitability and Alterability into Practice....164
4.3 Getting Clearer on Alteration, Amelioration, Progress, and Debunking....167
4.4 The Status Quo Objection: A Return to Thick Conceptions of Widowhood....174
4.5 The Relativism Criticism: Solipsistic and Aporetic Relativism....185
4.6 Negotiating Disagreement....189
4.7 Relativism/Contextualism and Amelioration....196
4.8 Conclusion....207

General Conclusion....208

Bibliography....ccxii

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The thesis I defend is two-fold: I articulate what social constructionism amounts to and put forward a particular understanding of what it is for something to be a social construction. To do so, I integrate the contributions of some very different philosophers (John R. Searle, Ian Hacking, Sally Haslanger, among others) into a single coherent account.

In order to defend this thesis, my dissertation involves two main modes of analysis and critique. First, it attempts to clarify what social construction amounts to in contemporary analytic philosophy. This exercise involves analyzing differences between categories and kinds in the natural and social sciences, as well as in the everyday world. It also involves examining notions often employed, but rarely explained by social constructionists (e.g. "inevitability"). I pay special attention to "ways of being a person" or to "kinds of people," to use Ian Hacking's language. Within analytic philosophy, research on the social construction of social categories has done some work to delineate and clarify varieties of social constructionist projects, but much less work has been done in examining the plausibility of social constructionism's ameliorative or emancipatory potential. I attempt to provide such a critical response. As a second objective, I ask whether or how modifying social categories and concepts can have ethical and political implications and also ask what those implications might be. I approach the issue of what social constructionism amounts to using the conceptual tools of analytic philosophy, especially contemporary analytic metaphysics and epistemology. In later chapters, I draw on insights and tools provided by Karl Marx, as well as present day philosophers Linda Martín Alcoff, Lorraine Code, Brian Fay, and Raymond Geuss.

In current humanities and social sciences, it is almost commonplace to claim that certain categories and kinds are socially constructed. Usually, social constructionism is associated with the "science wars" and is taken as a radical antirealist position with respect to scientific findings and reality in general. Aside from a few exceptions, investigation into the metaphysics of social reality, rather than physical reality or reality writ large, has not received sufficient attention from analytic philosophers, especially from philosophers of social science, social ontologists, and metaphysicians. To date, most research into social kinds and categories conducted under the umbrella of social constructionism has focused on some particular category or kind (especially gender and race)[1], while less attention has been paid to social kinds in general or to the metaphysics and epistemology of social constructionism understood as a broad metaphysical or political program. The philosophers in whom I am interested are not best characterized as part of the current social constructionist trend in the social sciences and humanities, especially in gender, race, cultural, queer, and women's studies. Instead, the philosophers with whom I engage are better described as independently attempting to understand the metaphysics and epistemology of social categories, including what it means to say that these categories are socially constructed.

I contrast two broad kinds of social constructionism - (i) descriptive and (ii) ameliorative or emancipatory. Ameliorative or emancipatory constructionism is propounded by some social scientists, various branches of the humanities, grassroots interest groups, and philosophers. These constructionists attempt to show that categories and kinds usually thought to be natural or inevitable are really socially founded or non-

[1] Related and newly burgeoning disciplines include social and feminist metaphysics. Racial analyses are becoming increasingly predominant in the United States and in the United Kingdom, class analyses are becoming increasingly predominant.

inevitable and, as such, can be amended or even discarded altogether. It is also possible that some non-social kinds are mutable due to social factors,[2] but my concerns do not lie with such kinds. Sometimes a category is obviously social and in such cases, the goal of the social constructionist is to make clearer the metaphysics that underpins the category and to suggest that it is in some way problematic or unexpected. It is worth noting that the creation or discovery of an unexpected category is not always problematic. Across time, new categories and concepts such as *sexual harassment*, for example, have opened spaces for an entire new range of debate, as did feminism and numerous other categories, concepts, and theoretical lenses.

Sally Haslanger clearly and succinctly distinguishes between descriptive and ameliorative social constructionism in *Resisting Reality: Social Constructionism and Social Critique* (2012), though she does not suggest, of course, that the distinction between the descriptive and ameliorative is specific to social constructionism. Quite the contrary: indeed, she assumes that they are traditional ways of pursuing philosophical analysis. Descriptive programs ask "What is X?" where X is some category or kind and ameliorative or emancipatory versions ask "What do we want X to be?" or "What *should* X be?" Ameliorative projects thus have both descriptive and normative components since the possibility of the latter is, at least to some extent, parasitic on the former.

By way of contrast with ameliorative or emancipatory social constructionists, the descriptive social constructionist resembles the social ontologist. Rather than advancing an ethical or political agenda, the descriptive social constructionist is primarily interested in making clear the metaphysics of social kinds. A difference between social ontologists and descriptive social constructionists, as I see it, is that the former propound more

[2] For an account of the possibility of interactive (Hacking-style) non-human kinds, see Khalidi (2010).

general projects (e.g. What are the conditions of possibility of any social world?) and the latter focus on the metaphysics of some particular social phenomenon or category (*adoption*, *schizophrenic*). Both descriptive and ameliorative social constructionist projects represent metaphysical programs since they attempt to reveal the nature of social categories or kinds. In the case of ameliorative versions, the metaphysical picture that the constructionist presents - one that typically purports to show that some kind usually thought to be natural, given, fixed, or necessary is really non-inevitable or socially founded or constituted - is introduced to allow for the possibility of critique which, in turn, can lend itself to reform.

Social construction can be of at least two other forms, which although easily delineated analytically, are not usually mutually exclusive in practice, and are difficult to disentangle. Idea-construction[3] is the thesis that some or all of our classifications or categorizations of phenomena, things, and people into kinds depend on social rather than natural factors.[4] Ontological construction is the thesis that some kinds and human differences (e.g. gender, race, body size, stature) are not natural, but are caused or constituted by social factors.[5] This thesis stands in contrast to the notion that the existence of such differences points to the existence of natural kinds, and thus, that the differences are mind- or concept-independent aspects of reality rather than the results of the categories that human beings use to describe reality. The construal of some human differences as amounting to differences in kind is faithful to the distinction between

[3] I write 'idea-construction' rather than 'idea construction' in accordance with Hacking's usage from *The Social Construction of What?* (1999). Idea- versus object-construction is a topic I address in the following chapter.
[4] This version is analyzed by Hacking (1999).
[5] Thanks to Sally Haslanger for pointing out that the contrast between the natural and the social has also been challenged by social constructionists. As such, it may seem awkward to invoke the contrast in characterizing their views. Despite the importance of this challenge, I bracket the issue herein.

categories and kinds, which at least some realists would maintain. Though the distinction between idea- and ontological construction is sometimes difficult to draw, I attempt as much as possible to keep the distinction clear when discussing particular categories and cases.

When referring to a mental item, I use italics (e.g. *woman*) and when referring to instances or tokens of a concept, kind, or set, I write in plain characters (e.g. woman). Unless noted otherwise, I use 'category' and 'kind' interchangeably to maintain consistency with ordinary language. There is also the distinction between categories and properties of which to remain mindful. To say that Mary is a woman, for instance, is to say that Mary belongs to the category *woman* and that *being a woman* is a property that Mary possesses. The category *woman* encompasses those individuals who have the property *being a woman* and individuals who possess the property *being a woman* fall under the category *woman*.

This dissertation deals with social kinds in general, but mostly with ways of being a person. In addressing ways of being a person, following Hacking's usage, my use of kind-terms corresponds to "kinds of people." In adopting Hacking's sense of "kind," I make use of a notion that is colloquial and thus also vague. The meaning of "kind" that Hacking intends is the meaning captured by such ordinary utterances as "She is such and such kind of person (a mother, a meth addict, a stamp collector)." Ways of being a person refer to intensional descriptions that people take up (or apply to others) and live out qua some kind (an uncle, a binge eater, a professor). Importantly, Hacking's use of "kind" implies no essentialism or other features typically associated with kinds as they are described in the natural kind tradition. Though Hacking subscribes to nominalism, I leave

it as an open question as to whether kinds of people correspond to universals or to sets of particulars, but do not address this issue further herein. It is important to note as well that Hacking's understanding of nominalism is non-standard. Though nominalism is usually regarded as a metaphysical thesis that denies the existence of abstract universals, Hacking's nominalism says nothing more than that the world is not already made with a pre-packaged structure.

The theme of "kinds of people" is closely associated with the themes of personal identity and identity understood more generally. These issues are orthogonal to my interests herein. My interest in accounting for what it means to say that so and so has such and such an identity or is such and such a kind of person is better characterized as an interest in asking what it means to say that so and so is categorized as a certain type of person or belongs to some category (e.g. *man*, *manic depressive*). In everyday life, when we say that people share an identity, we mean that they are similar in some respect or that they share a property or a set of properties. What they share need not be an Aristotelian essence (a stable and intrinsic feature). They could also share some feature that is social, historical, or contextual. When I refer to individuals as "sharing an identity," the sense I intend is the colloquial meaning.

In largely restricting my analysis to social kinds and especially to kinds of people, I do not directly examine categories and kinds in the non-social domain (e.g. quarks, leptons), but sometimes include discussions of kinds in the non-social domain by way of contrast. Since this dissertation focuses on social kinds of human beings (on ways of being a person), before proceeding further, it is necessary to draw out differences between social and human kinds. There exist human kinds that are not social, but which

can be instantiated by human beings, the kind-terms of which can be predicated of human beings (e.g. "Sandy has cancer," "Tim is infected with HIV-1"). For both non-social and social reasons, such kinds can also organize people's lives, as well as delimit, to varying degrees, what people can and cannot do. There also exist social kinds that are not human - to use an example from Marc Ereshefsky's "Bridging the gap between human kinds and biological kinds" (2004), *dominant male* as applied to macaque monkeys.

I stipulate, in a manner I believe to be consistent with John R. Searle's work on social ontology from 1995-2010, as well as with the work of Amie L. Thomasson (2003), Haslanger (2012), and Ásta Sveinsdóttir (2013), that social kinds are mind- or concept-dependent and involve the assignment of a function, feature, or property where the assignment of that function, feature, or property, as well as the conditions for qualifying as the sort of thing capable of having that function, feature, or property is dependent on the projection of that function, feature, or property by human attitudes.[6] The existence of some social kinds, properties, and institutions may be directly dependent on human attitudes (e.g. that Barack Obama was President of the United States in the year 2012, the existence of wives) while in other cases, their existence may be dependent on human attitudes, though the kind itself or tokens of the kind need not be represented as existing by some, all, or any human beings (e.g. economic recessions, racism; cf. Thomasson (2003), Searle (2010), Khalidi (2015)). The existence of an economic recession, for example, indirectly depends on social attitudes because whether or not its existence is recognized or represented as existing by anyone, its existence is dependent on other social kinds being explicitly represented as existing (e.g. *money*, *consumer goods*) (cf. Thomasson (2003), Searle (2010), Khalidi (2015)). Thus, some social kinds are mind-

[6] By "human attitudes," I mean mental states, propositional attitudes, or the possession of concepts.

dependent,[7] but not concept-dependent. For an economic recession to exist, the concepts *money* or *capital* must be represented as existing, but *economic recession* itself need not be.

CHAPTER ONE: Social Ontology, Social Categories, Kinds, and Powers

1.0 Introduction

The main goal of this dissertation is to elucidate what social constructionism amounts to and to put forth an understanding of what it is for something to be a social construction. I begin this task by elucidating and problematizing aspects of John R. Searle's *The Construction of Social Reality* (herein, *CSR*) (1995). *CSR* is one of the earliest attempts by an analytic philosopher to say what social construction amounts to. For this reason, Searle's account is a good place to begin to examine the ontology of social kinds. Within the terms of my distinction between social constructionism (a program that advances a political or ethical agenda) and social construction or social ontology (programs that propound descriptive accounts), Searle is best characterized as a social ontologist insofar as he aims to give a logical analysis of the conditions of possibility of a social world, and more specifically, of the conditions of possibility of social facts and institutions. Searle's account is not an origins story, which is to say that he is not attempting to provide an account of what causes the existence of social reality writ large - an endeavor that might require reference to everything from the Big Bang (or whatever newest theory is favoured) forward. Rather, his program attempts to describe the constitutive elements of

[7] Gideon Rosen's "Objectivity and Modern Idealism" (1994) convincingly shows that the idea of mind-dependence itself requires considerable clarification. Hence, invoking mind-dependence as explanatory in delineating the social from non-social is perhaps worrisome. I note this worry, but acknowledge that adequately addressing the issue far surpasses what I am capable of attending to within this dissertation.

social and institutional reality. His program is thus neither time- nor place-specific, but attempts to delineate a universal theory. Ranging from *CSR* to his more recent works, *Philosophy in a New Century* (2008) and especially *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization* (2010) (herein, *MSW*), Searle's program is, on the whole, concerned with social ontology rather than social construction*ism*.[8] This is to say that Searle does not engage with past or present social constructionist programs in the social sciences and humanities - a fact that points to the sometimes divergent concerns between social ontologists, on the one hand, and the social sciences and social constructionists on the other. Social sciences and social constructionism investigate the contours of particular social practices (e.g. divorce) and institutions (e.g. Western universities), sometimes advance critiques, and sometimes also provide reformatory agendas.

I begin by elucidating Searle's account in *CSR*, taking his program as instructive both for what it gets right and for what, in my view and in the views of others, it oversimplifies or gets wrong. I then elaborate aspects of Searle's *Philosophy in a New Century* and especially *MSW,* the latter work mainly comprising, in light of others' objections and his own rethinking, a revisiting and revamping of some details of his original program in *CSR*. Objections against, as well as amendments and responses to Searle's account that I bring forth in this chapter are mainly drawn from Amie L. Thomasson (2003), Muhammad Ali Khalidi (2015), and Ásta Sveinsdóttir (2013).[9] Issues

[8] This is so despite the title of his 1995 work, namely *The Construction of Social Reality*.
[9] Herein, I refer to Ásta Sveinsdóttir as "Ásta." As she explains:

> I don't have a last name ("Sveinsdóttir" is a description), so the appropriate way to cite my work is as one would a classical or medieval author without a last name, e.g., Hildegard of Bingen. In-text citation would be (Ásta Sveinsdóttir 2008) the first time mentioned in a work and (Ásta 2008) thereafter…. (http://astasf.weebly.com/writing.html)

I touch upon in this chapter, which arise in light of the Searlian account, as well as those of Thomasson and Ásta, will receive more careful explication, problematization, and critical analysis in further chapters. The goal of this chapter is to sketch a plausible working account of what social ontology and social construction (rather than social constructionism) amount to, and especially, to delineate and describe the many varieties of social kinds that exist and in what ways their metaphysics and epistemologies differ. I introduce the possibility of kinds of social kinds not explored or overlooked by current theorists of social kinds and take up the task of defending their existence and drawing out their consequences in further chapters.

1.1 An Overview of the Searlian Program

In *CSR*, Searle suggests that the construction of social reality encompasses three features: the assignment of function, collective intentionality, and the imposition of constitutive rules. According to *CSR*, all social or institutional facts are introduced by means of the following rule, which human beings collectively apply[10] to parts of reality: "X counts as Y in context C" or for short, "X counts as Y in C."[11] A better way to understand this rule is to say "X counts as Y in C" is the logical form of any statement of a social or institutional fact. For Searle, a social fact is institutional if it carries a deontic component and a status function exists if the function could not be accounted for or carried out solely in virtue of X's physical properties. For terminological consistency, I follow Searle in

[10] I address what it means to say that rules can be applied collectively throughout the remainder of this chapter.

[11] For Searle, language, or more generally, the ability to symbolize - to allow one thing to stand for another - is a necessary and ineliminable aspect of the construction of social reality. He accepts that other animals may possess the ability of allowing one thing to stand for another (e.g. to see a rock as a tool). However, since, presumably, other animals do not have linguistic capacities, they are unable to have institutional kinds since the possibility of deontic powers depends on having the capacity for using constitutive rules, which, in turn, Searle sees as requiring language.

treating any fact involving (or parasitic upon) the social as a social fact (Searle 1995, 26 & 38). Following Joshua Rust in *John Searle and the Construction of Social Reality* (2006), I treat institutional facts as a subclass of social facts. I also follow Rust in drawing a distinction between institutional facts and social facts (i.e. non-institutional social facts). Both institutional and non-institutional social facts are those facts that depend for their existence, if only derivatively or implicitly, on acceptance of the rule "X counts as Y in C." Non-institutional social facts do not require the recognition of some formal authority for their existence and do not carry with them deontic powers.

On the Searlian account, collective acceptance determines and baptizes *the general conditions* under which X counts as Y in C, but in the case of some social kinds, collective acceptance is not always thereafter required to decree each token of X a Y. What gets collectively decided is the conditions under which some X counts as a Y in C. In other words, to decree some *subsequent* X as a Y in some context is not typically required. To state the point differently, because Searle's account is a constitutive account, it follows that after the initial baptism, any X meeting the conditions for counting as a Y in C thereby counts as a Y whether all or any of us explicitly recognize it as so.[12] This issue will be more fully explicated in Section 1.2. The Searlian relation between collective acceptance and constitution from *CSR* can be formulated thus: (i) we collectively accept that X's meeting Z in C constitutes X's being Y and (ii) X's meeting Z in C constitutes X's being Y. For Searle, unlike non-institutional social facts,

[12] Is Searle therefore committed to the existence of, for example, Canadian spinsters - that is, unmarried women (over 50?) who reside in Canada in 2016? *Spinster* has lost currency and social significance in our time and place, but according to Searle, it seems that there are a great number of spinsters in existence in Canada if meeting the general conditions of counting as some social category (X counts as a spinster in C) is sufficient to make extant such objects. Searle may have no comment on this issue, as spinsters, as he sees it, do not count as institutional kinds. Nevertheless, the issue raises concerns over how and whether Searle's program can capture the changing (and sometimes wholesale disappearance) of the existence and associated "constraints and enablements," to use Ásta's (2013) language, of social kinds.

institutional facts carry deontic powers. That is, they impart new obligations, rights, honours, and so on either directly onto Y or onto the possessor of Y. For a variety of reasons, non-institutional social facts do not meet the Searlian criteria for qualifying as an institutional kind. This usage of "institutional social kind" and "non-institutional social kind" is consistent with Searle's program at the time of *MSW*'s publication in 2010.

CSR addresses the following questions: how are social and institutional facts possible and how are such facts structured (Searle 1995, 2)? Searle's response is connected to his positions in the philosophy of mind and to his more general ontological commitments. His broad attempt in *CSR* is to situate intentionality within a naturalist program, meaning one that is consistent with "the atomic theory of matter and the evolutionary theory of biology" (Searle 1995, 6). Searle writes:

> We live in exactly one world, not two or three or seventeen. As far as we currently know, the most fundamental features of that world are described by physics, chemistry, and other natural sciences… [The] existence of phenomena that are not in any obvious way physical or chemical gives rise to puzzlement. (1995, xi)

CSR attempts to offer a remedy for this puzzlement. In *MSW*, he is equally emphatic that in attempting to provide a resolution, "we have to avoid postulating different ontological realms, a mental and a physical, or worse yet, a mental, a physical, and a social" (Searle 2010, ix). Searle's guiding question in *CSR* is the following: "How does a mental reality, a world of consciousness, intentionality, and other mental phenomena fit into a world consisting entirely of physical particles in fields of force" (Searle, xi)?

For Searle, collective intentionality[13] plays a starring role in answering this question since it is an essential feature of any social or institutional fact (Searle 1995, 26). Though ultimately physical, a Searlian world also contains irreducible properties, including intentional states. Searle is explicit in his position that since all mental states exist in brains and because the social world just *is* the manifestation of a plurality of intentional states, the facts and institutions of the social world are observer-relative. To gloss Searle's most mature position in *MSW*, the consequences (or what he calls the "systematic fallouts")[14] of concept-dependent social kinds are observer-relative in the sense of being mind-dependent (Searle 2010, 6).[15] Although the facts of the social world are observer-relative, the attitudes people have are observer-independent (Searle 2008, 27). To state the point slightly differently, "the observer-relative existence of social phenomena is created by a set of observer-independent mental phenomena, and our task is to explain the nature of that creation" (Searle 2008, 27).

1.2 Searlian Collective Intentionality

For Searle, collective intentionality is a not a capacity restricted to human beings, but is exhibited by many other animals. In the case of human beings, collective intentionality

[13] The bare capacity for collective intentionality is what Searle calls a Background capacity. The capacity for collective intentionality is not itself intentional. It is not itself characterized by any particular *aboutness* and it is not volitional.

[14] Searle acknowledges the existence of consequences of social kinds or in Searlian language, the existence of "systematic fallouts," in his post-1995 work.

[15] Unlike in his 1995 work, by 2010, likely in response to objections from Thomasson (2003), Searle recognizes the existence of social facts and kinds that exist despite not requiring for their existence human attitudes directed specifically towards them. To use Thomasson's (2003) example, the existence of an economic recession is mind-dependent, but it is not concept-dependent. The existence of a recession is mind-dependent since irrespective of whether anyone has attitudes about recessions *per se* and irrespective of whether anyone notices the occurrence of an economic recession, there may still be an economic recession occurring. The existence of a recession depends on people having concept-dependent attitudes towards such things as money and consumer goods, but not necessarily towards recessions themselves. Indeed, no one need possess the concept *recession* for a recession to occur. However, since a recession can only exist where individuals possess such concepts as *money* and *exchange*, economic recessions are mind-dependent, but not concept-dependent.

encompasses various kinds of activities, including the collective imposition of new features onto extant material objects (e.g. that this piece of gold in this particular form and in this context constitutes an engagement ring) and collective intentions to engage in some activity as a "we" (e.g. "We intend to go to the protest."). Instances of collective intentionality range from cases where the individual goals, behaviours, and beliefs of members are qualitatively identical to cases where they are only similar or related. In Searle's view, a commitment to collective intentionality is rooted in the intuition that collective intentional behaviour is distinct from individual intentional behaviour and that the former is not tantamount or reducible to the sum of the intentional behaviours of its members qua individuals. As Searle emphasizes, in one case, the behaviour of individuals might constitute two or more sets of individual acts and in another, the very same physical movements might amount to a collective action.

> There is a big difference between two violinists playing in an orchestra... and discovering, while I am practicing my part, that someone in the next room is practicing her part, and thus discovering, by chance, we are playing the same piece in a synchronized fashion. (Searle 1995, 25)

The difficulty is in explaining in what this internal difference consists.

With respect to individual intentional behaviour, convergence on goals and actions with others is accidental. For Searle, it is only where convergence is non-accidental that we have an instance of collective intentionality: the sum of individual intentions "does not add up to a *collectivity*" (Searle 1995, 24). Consider a case of collective intention understood as an everyday ordinary intending: "We (Jack and Jill) intend to study together." The difference between individual and collective intentionality lies in the form of the content of the individuals' thoughts, or to state it differently, the difference is in the psychological mode of their thoughts. Individual intentionality

involves "I-thoughts" and collective intentionality involves implicit or explicit first-person plural thoughts, namely "We-thoughts." To say that Jack and Jill are collectively intending to study together would be cashed out by Searle thus: Jack's brain contains a thought with the content "We (Jill and I) intend to study together" and Jill's brain contains a thought with the content "We (Jack and I) intend to study together." Contrast this with one attempt to reduce collective intentionality to individual intentionality where Jack's brain would contain something like "I intend to study with Jill and I believe that Jill intends to study with me and I believe that Jill believes that I intend to study with her." Jill's brain would contain the same form of thought, but with the names reversed. Searle remarks very simply that "every attempt at reducing 'We intentionality' to 'I intentionality' that I have seen is subject to counterexamples" (Searle 1995, 24).

Although I will not question Searle's account of collective intentionality or its *sui generis* nature, I will spell out a few of its consequences. According to Searle, collective intentionality is a necessary component of the possibility of social facts. Although he does not explicitly endorse this view, I suggest that whenever the content of a thought involves concepts or conceptions,[16] a rule with the form "X counts as Y in C" has been utilized. For instance, if the content of a propositional attitude includes "That professor has a strange gait," then a competent user of the concept *professor* has made use of the (collectively accepted) rule "We accept or make it the case that X counts as Y (a professor) in C." An ignorant user unintentionally imposes an idiosyncratic version of the rule and one who consciously disagrees with the socially sanctioned rule makes use of the form "X counts as Y in C," but utilizes different criteria than the collective for

[16] Where an individual's conception aligns or matches the correlative socially sanctioned concept to a significant extent, the individual possesses the concept. When his or her conception does not match the concept, he or she possesses only a conception of the concept.

determining under what conditions X counts as a Y in C. Again, though Searle does not say so himself, his position is consistent with the following possibility. When individuals' concepts align with the collectively accepted rule for determining the conditions under which X counts as a Y in C and when individuals mistakenly take themselves to possess the collectively accepted concept, in both cases, the form of the rule that undergirds concept use is the same: "We collectively accept that such and such makes X a Y in C."

But the rule that "We collectively accepted that X counts as Y in C," stated as such and without further clarification, is too strong in the sense that it requires that the rule involves the application of a prior rule - a rule that, in turn, requires a prior rule and so on. In short, if I am committed to the view that every time the content of my thought involves, say, *women*, and if entertaining *women*-thoughts involves the application of "We accept or make it the case that X counts as Y (a woman) in C," then I am committed to a view subject to scepticism about rule-following. Searle claims that the explanation for the content of my entertained thought cannot involve intentional contents, but that, nonetheless, the explanation must accommodate the necessary preconditions for the functioning of intentional contents (Searle 1995, 132). He attempts to avoid scepticism about rule-following thus: once you have internalized the rule, say, "X counts as Y (a woman) in C," you no longer need to apply it each time you entertain *woman*-thoughts. Rather, you become disposed to see certain Xs as counting as Ys - a disposition that is part of one's Background,[17] wherein lies an individual's non-intentional, non-propositional attitudes and dispositions.[18]

[17] Searle is explicit that his account of the Background resembles Bourdieu's account of "habitus" (Searle 1995, 132).

[18] A careful exposition of the Background is found in the sixth chapter of Searle's *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995). To elucidate the function of the Background, consider another of Searle's examples:

Consider Searle's example:

> A woman takes her shopping list to the supermarket. The list is an explicit statement of desires, and in the course of the shopping the woman will be dealing with money and merchandise. Do we want to say that in addition to the desire for the items she is buying, she has a desire to follow the constitutive rules of money or that she is unconsciously following the constitutive rules of money? I find those claims implausible. (1995, 137-138)

For Searle,

> [t]here is a parallelism between the functional structure of the Background and the intentional structure of the social phenomenon to which the Background capacities relate. That strict parallelism gives us the illusion that the person who is able to deal with money, to cope with society, and speak a language must be unconsciously following rules… Of course there are rules and often we do follow them, both consciously and unconsciously, but
>
> 1. The rules are never self interpreting [sic],
>   and
>   They are never exhaustive,
>   and
> 2. In fact in many situations, we just know what to do, we just know how to deal with the situation. We do not apply the rules consciously or unconsciously. (Searle 1995, 142-43)

His thesis of the Background states:

> [T]he literal meaning of any sentence can only determine its truth conditions or other conditions of satisfaction against a Background of capacities, dispositions, know-how, etc., which are not themselves part of the semantic content of the sentence. (Searle 1995, 130)

Moreover, the thesis of the Background "can be extended from semantic contents to intentional contents generally" (Searle 1995, 131). According to Searle:

1) The Background enables linguistic interpretation to take place.
2) The Background enables perceptual interpretation to take place.
3) The Background structures consciousness.

> Consider the skilled professional playing baseball. After he hits the ball he runs to first base. Now if we ask, Why does he do that? we can say: He wants to get a hit; he wants to get on first base; he wants to do that because he wants to score runs; and he wants to score runs so that his team can win. But what role do the rules of baseball play in this explanation? Do we also want to say that he wants to follow the rules of baseball? That seems a little odd; that is more appropriate to the beginner. Unless there is some dispute, the rules of baseball don't concern the expert at all; he is too far advanced to be worried about the rules of baseball. (Searle 1995, 137)

4) Temporally extended sequences of experiences come to us with a narrative or dramatic shape. They come to us under what for want of a better word I will call "dramatic" categories.
5) Each of us has a set of motivational dispositions, and these will condition the structure of our experiences.
6) The Background facilitates certain kinds of readiness [know how, dispositions to].
7) The Background disposes me to certain kinds of behavior (1995, 132-137).

Further,

> [i]ntentional states function only given a set of Background capacities that do not themselves consist in intentional phenomena… I have thus defined the concept of the 'Background' as the set of nonintentional or preintentional capacities that enable intentional states of function…. (Searle 1995, 129)

By "capacities," Searle means "abilities, dispositions, tendencies, and *causal structures generally*" (Searle 1995, 129). "Enabling" too is intended as a causal notion. "We are not talking about logical conditions of possibility but about neurophysiological structures that function causally in the production of certain sorts of intentional phenomena" (Searle 1995, 130). He thus assumes that intentional states may be conscious or potentially conscious (Searle 1995, 130). Hence, the worry that each application of a concept requires the application of a rule, which itself requires the application of a rule, and, in turn, that rule requires the application of another rule, and so on, is, Searle thinks, dissolved.

On the Searlian program, an instance of bona fide[19] collective intentionality is only manifest where the content of individuals' thoughts about Y (some concept or intention) align or are at least not mutually internally or externally incompatible. In other words, bona fide cases are those cases where the content of individuals' concepts or

[19] Searle does not use the language of bona fide collective intentionality since he restricts his definition of collective intentionality to cases where the content of the rule "we collectively agree that…" in fact matches or is consistent with others' use of the rule.

intentions actually align and not cases where they are only believed to align by a party or parties. It is worth noting that Searle does not address or even touch upon the possibility of the latter scenario. Tyler Burge's (1979) version of semantic externalism is consistent with Searle's views on the extension or the reach of collective or communal agreement, as well as on the criteria for determining when some X counts as a Y (where Y is a member of a kind or an object falling under some concept). However, Burge's account focuses precisely on the possibility of a mismatch between one's idiosyncratic conception of some concept and the socially sanctioned concept. This is a virtue of Burge's account and a shortcoming of Searle's.

This being said, though Searle does not explicitly address the possibility that an individual merely *takes* his or her conception to be in agreement with collective usage, this possibility is nonetheless consistent with his program.[20] Even earlier than the publication of *Philosophy in a New Century* in 2008, Searle writes the following about We-intentions and collective intentionality:

> The real distinction between the singular and the collective case is in the type of intention [belief, attitude, social-concept use, and so on] involved, *not in the way that the elements in the conditions of satisfaction relate to each other*. (1992, 412)

The possibility of error is specific to We-intentions and to collective intentionality understood more broadly to include beliefs, social concepts, and so forth. In Searle's own words, this is because

[20] Searle's account would be more comprehensive and representative of the actual social world if he did account for this possibility explicitly. However, he might retort simply that such mismatches are representative of actual social circumstances, but do not undermine his account since his program is intended to attend only to the general conditions of possibility of a social world. Such outlying situations, he may retort, can be left to investigation by social scientists and other theorists interested in exploring the actual contours and particularities of our social categories, institutions, and goings on.

> collective intentionality in my head can make a purported reference to other members of a collective *independent of the question of whether or not there actually are such members*. (1992, 407)

Noting the consequences of Searlian We-intentions is important in attempting to make sense of real complexities and disagreements that occur within the social world, something important, if not for the social ontologist, then for the social constructionist. For example, a person may be unaware that his or her collective intention, belief, or concept use (or better, any of their thoughts or intentions in the form of, at least implicitly, the first-person plural) is not qualitatively identical, similar, or related to those of others, though the person takes them to be. The implications of this possibility are not sufficiently acknowledged by Searle. Since one cannot be omniscient about others' intentions, beliefs, or the content of others' concepts, a group to which I belong might intend to do X or mean something by a social kind-term without there being a qualitatively identical We-intention in my brain or without my realizing that my concept usage does not align with the collectively accepted usage. There might very well be a We-intention to not-X in my brain and my use of some concept, e.g. *wife*, may not match others' uses. In the latter case, everyday communication may not require that my conception of *wife* match the socially or community accepted concept *wife* perfectly, but in certain circumstances - for instance, in a debate about whether marriage can involve multiple wives - the differences between the meanings of social-kind terms (say, *wife*) and the real-world implications of these differences become more obvious, and oftentimes, more morally and politically relevant and urgent.

1.3 Language and the Imposition of Function

For Searle, language undergirds our capacity for constitutive rules, which in turn, is a condition of possibility of institutional facts.

> Language is the presupposition of the existence of other social institutions in a way that they are not the presupposition of language. This point can be stated precisely. Institutions such as money, property, government, and language cannot exist without language, but language can exist without them. (Searle 2008, 28)

Searlian institutional facts are those social facts that involve the collective imposition

> of a function on a phenomenon whose physical composition is insufficient to guarantee the performance of the function, and therefore the function can only be performed as a matter of collective acceptance or recognition. (Searle 2005, 124)

In *CSR*, he characterizes institutional facts as dependent on collective attitudes to project new features, properties, and importantly, *new powers* onto already existing objects (e.g. a man is conferred the property of *being the Pope* and, in turn, has the right to use the title "Pope so and so" in official correspondences, a piece of paper comes to count as *a marriage certificate*). For Searle, many status functions are created by a particular kind of speech act, namely declarations. Cases of applying status functions to extant material objects or persons are called "Status Function Declarations." Declarations combine word-to-world and world-to-word directions of fit. In the former, we alter the speech act to match reality. In the latter, we alter reality to match the content of the speech act. In the case of a declaration, "we alter reality to match the propositional content of a speech act and so, we attain a world-to-word direction of fit and we manage to do so precisely because we represent reality as being so changed" (Searle 2010, 12). Accordingly, by declaring that some ring is an engagement ring and not *just* a promise ring or what have you, it follows that the ring *is* an engagement ring, at least for the

people who declare or treat the ring as having that function. By Searle's lights, not all status function declarations need to be made explicit by means of a speech act, but "all of human institutional reality," though as we will see later in this chapter, not all of social reality "is created and maintained in existence by (representations that have the same logical form as) [status function declarations]" (Searle 2010, 13). Searle writes:

> I have sometimes spoken as if the collective imposition of functions were always a matter of a deliberate act or set of actions. But except for special cases where legislation is passed or the authorities change the rules of the game, the creation of institutional facts is typically a matter of natural evolution, and there need be no explicit conscious imposition of function - whether status or other type of function - on lower-level phenomena. (2005, 125-6)

Though Searlian social ontology is a socially constructed social ontology and thus entails individuals having the ability to unconsciously or consciously alter social kinds and institutions, social kinds are usually taken for granted - the complex ontology of social kinds is, in the ordinary course of things, hidden. As Searle writes:

> Children learn to see moving cars, dollar bills, and full bathtubs; and it is only by force of abstraction that they can see these as masses of metal in linear trajectories, cellulose fibers with green and gray stains, or enamel-covered iron concavities containing water. (1995, 4)

As an addendum to his account, one should note that it is only *familiar* social kinds, rather than social kinds writ large, that have taken for granted ontologies. Without this caveat, it would be difficult to explain the phenomenology of moving into strange situations, environments, or foreign cultures.[21] When social phenomena are foreign or otherwise not taken for granted, our epistemic and metaphysical relation to such

[21] This addendum is also addressed by Thomasson (2003) in her discussion of individuals' and communities' metaphysical and epistemological relation to "foreign" individuals' and communities' social kinds. For Thomasson (2003), our relation to another community's social kinds mirrors each of our relations to natural kinds.

phenomena resembles our relation to natural kinds. This claim will be addressed more carefully in my discussion of Thomasson's work in Section 1.7 of this chapter.

The existence of social and institutional kinds does not add new material objects to reality, but does add "epistemically objective *features*... where the features in question exist relative to observers or users" (Searle 1995, 10). A logical consequence of Searle's account is that "for any observer-relative feature F, *seeming to be F* is logically prior to *being F*, because… seeming to be F is a necessary condition of being F" (Searle 1995, 13). "X counts as Y in C" is thus a constitutive rather than a regulative rule. The rule "drive on the right-hand side of the road," for instance, regulates driving in some countries, but driving can exist prior to the existence of that rule (Searle 1995, 27). Constitutive rules, however, are a condition of possibility of other activities. Consider, as Searle does, the game of chess. The rules of chess are *constitutive* of chess. You are simply not playing chess if you do not follow most of the rules of chess. By contrast, you may still be driving even if you break many rules of the road (Searle 1995, 28).

To use Searle's language from *CSR*, social facts are self-referential since for some kind Y to exist and be the kind of thing it is, it is a necessary and sufficient condition that some X is collectively used as, regarded as, or believed to be Y (Searle 1995, 32). He notes that this condition holds for the type or kind considered as a whole, but not always for every token of the type or kind.

> A single dollar bill might fall from the printing presses into the cracks of the floor and never be used or thought of as money at all, but it would still be money. In such a case a particular token instance would be money, even though no one ever thought it was money or thought about it or used it at all. (Searle 1995, 32)

In "one-time" cases, it is sufficient for a type to be regarded as a Y in order for every token to count as a Y. In "token-by-token" cases (to be examined more fully later in this chapter), each instance of a type must be regarded as an instance of that type for each token to count as a Y. Searle writes:

> If, for example, we give a big cocktail party, and invite everyone in Paris, and if things get out of hand, and it turns out that the casualty rate is higher than the Battle of Austerlitz - all the same, it is not a war; it is just one amazing cocktail party. Part of being a cocktail party is being thought to be a cocktail party; part of being a war is being thought to be a war. (1995, 33-34)

Searle's paradigmatic social kinds are those with institutional natures (e.g. marriage, money). These social kinds have the features they do on account of explicit, collectively recognized, and officially backed rules or laws that specify under what conditions some X counts as a member of some category Y.

On the Searlian program, collective acceptance determines the *original* conditions under which an X comes to count as a Y and in the case of institutional kinds, collective acceptance also determines which deontic features Y possesses. Thereafter, collective acceptance maintains the status function assignment, and in the case of an institutional kind, it sustains the formal and sometimes substantial fulfillment of its deontic powers. However, as I have mentioned, in the case of some institutional kinds (e.g. instances of legitimate American five-dollar bills), after the original baptism, collective acceptance is not always thereafter required to token every instance of some X as a Y. Post *CSR*, Searle has also come to accept the existence of another category of kind, namely "systematic fallouts." These are kinds that do not meet the criterion of self-referentiality and which are mind-dependent, but not necessarily concept-dependent (e.g. economic recessions, racism, superstition; cf. Thomasson (2003), Searle (2010), Khalidi (2015)). Sexism, for instance, is mind-dependent, but not concept-dependent since sexism can exist in a

society in virtue of individuals' concepts (*femininity*, *masculinity*) and concept-dependent practices (that *marriage* involves a union between and only between members of the opposite sex) without all of the individuals who comprise the society or even anyone at all possessing the concept *sexism*.

1.4 Deontic Powers

For Searle, deontic powers are connected to institutional kinds and include rights, duties, obligations, requirements, permissions, authorizations, certifications, and so on (Searle 2010, 91 & 123). Being a police officer, for example, entails the obligation to serve and protect some community or jurisdiction and the authority to arrest given certain conditions. The deontic powers attached to being a police officer exist only because they are collectively represented, recognized, and accepted as existing and because there is some authority or official power that enforces the deontic powers. In light of criticism, in *MSW* Searle writes that by making use of the notions of recognition and acceptance in *CSR*, he did not thereby intend to imply that collectively accepted status functions and institutional facts require assent or approval (Searle 2010, 8). He writes: "Hatred, apathy, and even despair are consistent with the recognition of that which one hates, is apathetic toward, and despairs of changing" (2010, 8). It is consistent with Searle's account that one accepts (in the sense of "acknowledges" rather than "assents to") the deontic powers associated with some institutional fact or status (say, *being a police officer* and the deontology that such a status entails) without assenting to all or any aspects of the deontology, which ensues from being a police officer. In short, one need not assent in order to recognize.

For Searle, institutional status functions and deontic powers have a one-way metaphysical dependence. Having some institutional status entitles you to enjoy or suffer the corresponding deontology. However, having an institutional status does not, in and of itself, guarantee that the corresponding deontology will be substantially fulfilled. In such cases, in virtue of being Y, you are entitled to D (benefits, obligations, power), but your status as Y may not be recognized, in which case your entitlement to D is not (fully, if at all) substantiated. If one is wrongly taken to be Y, one may be taken to be entitled to D and may enjoy or suffer D substantially despite not being entitled to enjoy or suffer D because one is not really a Y. In other words, it is one thing to have the status and it is another thing to have the deontic powers associated with the status and these can, in some cases, come apart. The creation of a status function and being recognized as possessing that status function simultaneously creates entitlement to the status function's corresponding deontology. Since Searle's account focuses on and is only intended to apply to institutional kinds - that is, to kinds backed by official authority, his program effectively covers only a small range of social kinds. In *MSW*, Searle draws a distinction between institutional and other types of social kinds, namely non-institutional social kinds, based on whether the kind is connected to deontic powers. "In my culture, being a bore, an alcoholic, or an intellectual are not institutional facts… [b]ecause no special collectively recognized deontology is implied by these descriptions" (Searle 2010, 92). His program thus overlooks a variety of kinds, status functions, and social properties found in the social world. For instance, *being the wife of a famous hockey player*, *being butch*, or *being asexual* are properties that are not entirely (if at all) accounted for by locating them within an institutional structure, and yet significant privileges or burdens

can come with possessing such properties. Indeed, the majority of social categories may lie outside the purview of Searle's analysis.

However, even in restricting our attention to Searle's account of institutional facts, questions arise. One might wonder whether an institutional fact can remain "the same" if some or most of its deontic powers are collectively represented and officially backed as having changed? Searle is silent on the issue. Consider the following example to flesh out the question. In some parts of the world, it is now conceptually and legally possible for a man to rape his wife. But *marital rape* is only possible once a husband loses his rights to his wife's body or is shown never to have possessed such rights in the first place. Has the status function *husband* changed in places where husbands' deontic powers have changed? Or is it rather that the status function has remained constant, but that the function's deontic powers have changed? The boundaries of when a status function has changed, as well as when a status function comes in or out of existence can be hazy, as well as dependent on location and time. How many deontic powers must disappear or be added before a status function is no longer "the same" status function?[22]

How many features of the concept *marriage* can change before the concept is no longer viable? Of course, analogous questions can be asked of any concept or category. Though these questions are interesting in terms of the actual contours of particular societies and cultures, none of these questions show a deficiency internal to Searle's program. According to Joshua Rust (2006), this is because Searle is interested in the logical structure of institutional reality and is "prepared to leave it to the social scientists

[22] These issues will be more fully addressed in the following chapter where I focus more specifically on the relationship between status functions and deontic features, or to state it a bit differently, on the relation between social categories and kinds and the prescriptions, conventions or, to use Ásta's (2013) language, "the constraints and enablements" that they carry. To use Haslanger's terminology (2012), this issue relates to "thick" and "thin" social positions (see especially p. 126).

to contend with difficulties involved in saying something substantive about what our [particular] institutions [this hospital, the bureaucratic structure of this particular airline] actually look like" (55). Yet in asking these questions of Searle's program, though not necessarily demanding answers from Searle himself, we see a distinction between the interests, on one hand, of social ontologists and philosophers of social construction, and on the other hand, of advocates of social constructionism and social scientists. If we are interested in the logical form of social categories, then we are interested in issues of category individuation, the centrality of deontic powers to institutional categories, among other issues. Searle is not concerned with particular questions about open relationships or the status function of single fathers in the United States, for example, but is interested in more general questions (e.g. What are the conditions of possibility for such institutional categories existing at all?).

In *MSW*, problematizing his original account of institutional kinds as found in *CSR*, in what he calls "limiting cases," Searle is willing to countenance the existence of "stand-alone" or otherwise limited deontic powers in cases of institutional status function assignment.

> In *The Construction* I said that in general, institutional facts carry deontic powers but that there were some exceptions, most notably… honorific cases. If somebody gets an honorary degree from a university or someone is awarded the title of Miss Alameda County, they acquire a new institutional status, but they have no new powers. But now I think it is more useful to treat honor as a kind of deontic power. A limiting case perhaps, but still a kind of power - honor is supposed to be accorded respect, for example. So I now say that all status functions create deontic powers. (Searle 2010, 24)

Why does Searle accept that being awarded the title of "Miss Alameda County" counts as an institutional status, but not accept being recognized as, or even merely seeming to be, an alcoholic as an institutional status function? According to Searle,

unlike being awarded the title "Miss Alameda County" and thus, being endowed with the deontic power of "honour" (a limiting case, since the title brings little power other than the honour of the title itself), being labeled an alcoholic carries with it no deontic powers since it carries *no* codified privileges or obligations for the individual who is or is taken to be an alcoholic. For Searle, there is a significant difference between having weak deontic powers, i.e. being honoured as "Miss Alameda County" and thus being able, for example, to use that title in official correspondence and possessing no deontic powers at all.[23] Searle's reasoning seems to be that being an alcoholic or being thought to be an alcoholic might lead people to treat you in a certain way or to regard you in a certain light, but people are not required or obliged by law or some other authority to treat you in some manner on account of your status and therefore, *alcoholic* does not serve as an institutional kind.

Here, one might object that the label *alcoholic* shames the person upon whom the label is placed just as the title "Miss Alameda County" honours the person with the title. Why should it matter, at least in terms of whether or not a category assignment counts as an institutional kind, whether one is shamed or honoured in light of their status? Again, by Searle's reasoning, *alcoholic* does not amount to an institutional kind since other people are not obligated by authority or some other formal entity to act in any particular way towards the alcoholic in virtue of his or her being an alcoholic. But, contra Searle, one might object that some kinds of people *are* obligated to act in a particular way towards alcoholics, e.g. medical doctors and social workers. Here, Searle's position is

[23] Here, one might ask Searle whether I am really obligated to address Sandy, this year's "Miss Alameda County," as "Sandy, Miss Alameda County." It would be polite, perhaps, to address Sandy as such, but the notion of my being remiss in simply calling her "Sandy" seems too strong. The notion of being remiss in not referring to Sandy as "Miss Alameda County" seems awkward or absurd precisely, it seems, because the title brings with it such weak deontic power.

unaffected since obligations on the part of medical doctors and social workers to act in certain ways towards alcoholics follow from medical doctors and social workers being endowed with the institutional status *medical doctor* or *social worker* and the corollary deontic powers of *medical doctor* and *social worker*. The obligations to aid the alcoholic or intervene in the alcoholic's life flow from *their* institutional statuses. Interestingly, however, insofar as officially recognized alcoholics in certain parts of the world have the rights to aid, e.g. anonymous and free access to Alcohol Anonymous programs, *alcoholic* sometimes functions as an institutional kind.

What is crucial for Searle is the distinction between social facts and institutional facts. He might say that social categories that are without deontic powers are social, but not institutional. By the time of writing *MSW*, interestingly, Searle considers friendships, dinner parties, and chitchat in elevators to be institutional kinds. He takes them to be institutional because he claims that categories or kinds that carry uncodified positive rules of conduct and obligations or deontic powers are institutional facts (Searle 2010, 91). Unfortunately, he fails to address the issue any further. Even earlier in Searle's *Philosophy in a New Century*, agreeing with one of his students, Searle writes the following, but again, does not follow up on the thought any further in writing.

> When I pointed out in a lecture that being a nerd was not a status function, one of my students told me that in his high school it definitely was, because as the class nerd he was expected to help other students with their homework. He was under certain sorts of collectively [if not institutionally] recognized obligations. (Searle 2008, 47)

Searle's comment suggests that he is willing to broaden the scope of what he countenances as an institutional kind. *Being a nerd* has a social function and carries with it uncodified obligations. In this case at least, Searle suggests that some categories that seem social rather than institutional may turn out to be (at least weakly) institutional or at

minimum, to carry honours or obligations. However, since friendships, dinner parties, chitchat, and nerds are the only named instances of social kinds that Searle lists as possessing collectively, but not actually institutionally recognized obligations (they carry merely uncodified positive rules of conduct), and because he writes nothing more on the issue, I bracket his comments and thus, his willingness to commit to the possibility of including outliers such as *nerd* under the category of institutional kinds. Herein, "institutional kinds" thus refers only to the original type of kind Searle intended in *CSW*: institutional kinds name those kinds that carry deontic powers, enforced by some official authority.

Rather than following Searle in including non-institutional kinds, which also entail collectively recognized obligations and rights under the category of institutional kinds, it is better to follow Ásta's lead in "The Social Construction of Human Kinds" (2013) and create a new name for non-institutional social kinds that entail constraints and enablements, but which are maintained and enforced by unofficial social power - call this type of kind, as does Ásta, "communal" or "constraining and enabling kinds."[24] Introducing these kinds as another type of social kind allows us to keep distinct status functions and corollary deontic powers backed by official authorities from status functions and corollary constraints and enablements backed by unofficial social power or coercion. In the case of constraining and enabling kinds, one can be subject to a script attached to a social role or property that constrains or enables without being officially and collectively acknowledged as having (or being given) some status function and without being officially or legally obligated to follow the constraints and enablements of the

[24] Throughout the remainder of this dissertation, I adopt the language of "constraints and enablements," "constraining and enabling kinds," and "communal kinds" from Ásta (2013).

script attached to the status function. Similarly, others are not obligated by an official authority to behave in any particular way towards another person who falls under the category of some constraining or enabling kind, though they may feel social pressure to act in a particular way towards them or may act in a particular way towards them out of habit.

Imagine a household with some children and three adults, two of whom are the children's biological parents. The biological parents are also drug addicts. The other adult member in the household, call him Tim, is not anyone's biological parent, but an individual who happens to be particularly good with the children. Unlike the children's biological parents, Tim is mentally stable and physically healthy. When it comes to the needs of the children, Tim is the most responsible adult in the household. Over time, one can imagine that the immediate community will come to expect that Tim (and not the children's biological parents) make decisions about, say, what to do if one of the children gets a fever, how to administer discipline, and so on. In such a case, it seems that Tim effectively has authority, albeit unofficial authority, to make decisions with respect to the children. He also seems to have obligations (or at least takes on the responsibility of parental obligations) towards the children. On Searle's account, Tim is not the children's primary caregiver in an institutional sense since the category is a legal category and on this point at least, Ásta would agree. Still, Searle's account fails to explain why community members endow Tim with the privileges and burdens that come with functioning (non-institutionally) as the primary caregiver of certain children. It is precisely these sorts of situations that Ásta's program is meant to account for. Ásta's program will be spelled out more fully in Section 1.8 of this chapter.

In this imagined case, it seems that one can be subject to the constraints and enablements that come from being assigned a status function by means of a communal rather than an official attribution of status. This small example points to one of several shortcomings of Searle's account and suggests a more complicated picture of the assignment of properties, functions, and roles in the social world, as well of as the constraints and enablements that follow from such attributions. As Ásta's account shows, in focusing on institutional cases, Searle's account does not consider the ways in which an individual or group can be constrained or enabled in some context in virtue of being attributed a property or a social role by a group or by some individual (rather than by society at large or by an official or formal authority). According to Ásta, it is the actual constraints and enablements that an individual encounters in some context that determine his or her social role or function and not, as Searle would have it, the other way around. Thus, on her account, and unlike Searle's, Tim *is* the primary caregiver on account of a communal attribution of the property *being a primary caregiver*.

Searle's program fails to address social roles or functions governed by the basic formula "X counts as Y in C," but where corollary constraints and enablements are imprecise or backed, not by official authority, but rather by coercion or habit. Enabling and constraining kinds may enable or constrain to varying degrees of force or scope and may carry *positive* powers (obligations, rights, or privileges *to*), negative powers (constraints), or both. Some constraining and enabling kinds are robust (e.g. *being a Southern belle in the late eighteenth century*) in the sense that they place more expectations on the behaviours of both the individual qua some constraining and enabling kind and for others in their dealings with an individual conferred as Y. Other constraining

and enabling kinds are less robust (e.g. *being female in San Francisco in 2016*). Correlatively, failure to behave according to the scripts attached to constraining and enabling kinds can result in heavier or weaker social sanctions. For elucidation, being female often counts as a constraining kind in American or Canadian Philosophy Departments, but may count as an enabling kind in a nightclub in America or Canada, for example. If one fulfills one's prescribed role(s) as a female well, a woman can, in many instances, enter a heterosexual nightclub for free, while men have to pay a cover fee at the door.[25] Some social roles or functions are culturally codified and others are contextually codified. In other words, restricting our analysis of constraining and enabling kinds solely to institutional kinds fails to attend to the messy, intricate, and bloated social ontology that we live out in everyday life. It is my contention and that of others, especially Sally Haslanger in *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (2012) (hereafter, *Resisting Reality*) and Ásta, that Searle's institutional kinds comprise but one version of constraining and enabling kinds.

In the chapters that follow, I focus on constraining or enabling social categories that do not conform to Searle's analysis of institutional kinds. I count as a constraining or enabling kind any kind that constrains or enables the person categorized *or others* in their dealings with the categorized person(s) by means of uncodified rules of conduct - that is, social scripts enforced by social pressure rather than by some official authority. Since I take constraining and enabling kinds to be kinds that place obligations, constraints, or enablements upon others and not just upon the person to whom the constraining or enabling kind is conferred, I therefore diverge from the original meaning of constraining

[25] I acknowledge that some may not view this as an "enablement," but rather a symptom of sexism. Women often get into nightclubs for free in order to encourage more men to pay to enter in order to be in close proximity to women, and in turn, to hopefully generate more money for the club.

and enabling kinds that Ásta puts forth in her 2013 article. On my account then, and unlike Searle's, insofar as others sometimes *feel* strongly obligated to act in certain ways towards an alcoholic, *alcoholic* counts as a constraining or enabling kind for those who confer the property upon themselves and for those who confer *being an alcoholic* upon others.

There is another wrinkle to consider: one might feel obligated not to indulge an alcoholic's drinking or feel obligated to suggest to the alcoholic that he or she seek help for his or her addiction. Like Searle's example of a nerd, *alcoholic* may also sometimes function, in his terms, as a weak institutional kind, and in my terms, as a constraining or enabling kind. If one is, for instance, the primary caregiver of a child, putting their child's interest first, they may feel an obligation to seek help for their addiction. Insofar as a person is officially recognized as an alcoholic, they may even be legally obligated to give up their rights as the child's primary caregiver - that is, they may be obligated to give up their institutional function. Depending on the situation, *alcoholic* is a good candidate for a social kind that can function as a generic (non-institutional) social kind, a constraining or enabling kind, or as an institutional kind.

1.5 Latent and Manifest Functions and Agentive and Non-Agentive Kinds

In *CSW*, Searle argues that institutional facts are created and sustained by collective acceptance of constitutive rules of the form "[some material] X counts as Y in context C." He takes this constitutive rule to be a condition of possibility of any social fact (Searle 1995, 281). But in *MSW* he declares that he now sees that "X counts as Y in C" is but one form of a status function declaration. In *CSR*, Searle already proposes such distinctions as "agentive" and "non-agentive" functions and "manifest" and "latent"

functions. He suggests that agentive functions "are never intrinsic but are always observer-relative" (e.g. it is not intrinsic to a rock that its function can sometimes be that of *a paperweight*) (Searle 1995, 14). In *CSR*, he also countenances "non-agentive" and "latent" functions. The former applies to non-social phenomena and the latter to social phenomena. To gloss Searle's view, both latent and manifest functions are mind-dependent. The only difference is that latent functions are not explicitly known in the community in which they occur. To flesh out this difference, consider the function of religion. Even if religion really does serve the function of maintaining the status quo, such a fact, known or unknown to anyone, is parasitic on the manifest function that some of us do in fact attach to religion (e.g. to worship God, to secure a place in Heaven). The possible latent function of religion (e.g. to perpetuate the status quo) is different from its manifest function (to worship God), but the possibility of the former is parasitic on the latter.

The issue of latent functions is better addressed in *MSW*. Peculiarly, in *CSW* Searle does not see the existence of latent functions as posing a threat to his claim that *all* social and institutional facts can be captured by the rule that by collective acceptance and recognition, some material object X thereby counts as a Y in C. This might not constitute a problem for Searle's overall position. He can respond by saying that the claim that all social and institutional facts can be captured by the rule that by collective acceptance and recognition, "X comes to count as Y in C" only applies, and was only intended to apply, to manifest functions. Searle might reply that his original formula was simply not intended to capture latent functions. In any case, one important point to take from his account of manifest versus latent social facts is that all social functions and facts, whether

manifest or latent, involve, at least at base, collective intentionality and the imposition of agentive functions. By Searle's lights, in the case of latent facts (for instance, the possibility that religion's main function is to maintain the status quo), none of us need represent latent social and institutional facts as existing in order for those facts to exist. But the collective recognition of the manifest functions of religion must be explicitly represented as existing in order for the latent function to exist. The existence of latent facts is parasitic on the existence of manifest status functions and on the existence of institutional facts that do involve collective intentionality and the collective imposition of function.

Searle also distinguishes between agentive and non-agentive functions. We do not discover the function(s) of a Y term (an agentive function) in the manner that we can potentially discover the function(s) of non-agentive functions. To use Rust's (2006) example, in Searlian terms, that the function of a heart is to pump blood is at least a potentially discoverable non-agentive function. If one considers the following three kinds of things, each of which possesses an agentive function - a paperweight, money, and Presidency of the United States - on the Searlian program, only the latter two kinds of things qualify as institutional facts (Rust 2006, 13; see Searle 1995, 38). All three kinds of things have status functions, but while money and Presidency have institutional agentive functionality, a paperweight has only non-institutional agentive functionality because, as Rust glosses Searle's position, unlike a paperweight, money and Presidency "either confer or directly implicate rights and obligations in a way that noninstitutional agentive functions do not" (Rust 2006, 13). To put the point differently, having a paperweight does not give me any rights to engage in any behaviours and nor does it

impose on me any obligations, although it does, nonetheless, serve a function for me (i.e. keeping my papers from blowing off my desk if there is a gust of wind).

The distinction between agentive and non-agentive institutional functions can be brought out in the following manner.

> [The difference] can be easily seen by looking at cases of breakdown. Just as a heart might be dysfunctional if it does not pump blood, a feather is dysfunctional as a paperweight in a way that a rock normally would not be. If one of the functions of the President is to sign or veto Congressional bills, a President who skirts this obligation is not just dysfunctional, but is *remiss*. The crucial difference between institutional agentive functions and noninstitutional agentive functions is that the former implicate the possibility of remission. (Rust 2006, 13-14)

That one can be remiss in their capacity qua Y is peculiar to institutional kinds (both as Searle defines institutional kinds and in the case of what I delimit as constraining and enabling social kinds). The notion of remission in virtue of one's position as Y will be more carefully addressed in the following chapter.

1.6 Other Outliers

In *MSW*, likely prompted by Thomasson (2003) and others, Searle analyzes the existence of so-called freestanding Y terms - Ys that are not created by the rule that some X (a material object) counts as Y in C. To elucidate such kinds, he considers the formation of a corporation (cf. Thomasson (2003)).[26] Unlike a simple case where a line of stones is turned into a recognized boundary marker between communities or nations, the creation of a corporation involves no extant material or persons who are then simply turned into a corporation by means of a status function declaration.

> The law does not say that some preexisting X becomes a corporation; rather, it says that a corporation *may be formed*. It says that the performance of… written

[26] I address freestanding Y terms more carefully later in this chapter in my discussion of Thomasson (2003).

> speech acts - *executing and filing articles of incorporation… counts as* the creation of a corporation - "*[t]he corporate existence begins upon the filing of the articles and continues perpetually*"…
>
> In this case, we seem to have created a remarkably potent object… out of thin air. No preexisting object was operated on to turn it into a corporation. Rather, we simply made it the case by fiat, by Declaration, that the corporation exists. (Searle 2010, 97-8)

It therefore appears, at least prima facie, that there are important provinces of social reality for which Searle's constitution rule that "X counts as Y in C" does not apply because there is no underlying X term (e.g. in the case of obligations, debts, corporations, and so forth). Such Y terms do not easily correspond to any physical X and as such, seem to be "free-floating" or "freestanding." At first blush, the existence of such Y terms seems inconsistent with Searle's contention that everything that exists is part of physical reality. But for him, freestanding Y terms *are* real (i.e. have ultimately physical substrates). How is this possible? For Searle, at least by the time of his writing *MSW*, such Y terms have full-blown existence in the manner of ordinary, that is, non-freestanding Ys. As with ordinary Ys, the existence of freestanding Y terms is temporal as well as dependent on contexts of human representations, declarations, and actions. The existence of freestanding Y terms is consistent with Searle's naturalism, which says that every X and Y is one and the same part of physical reality, which, for Searle, is the only reality there is. Freestanding Y terms depend for their existence on the existence of physical objects, but there is no definite physical object X that needs to exist in order for Y to exist. Since freestanding Ys' existence is concept- or mind-dependent and because concepts or mental attitudes, or more broadly, intentionality or *aboutness*, are had by brains and brains are part of the physical world, the existence of freestanding Ys does not, by Searle's lights, pose a challenge to his naturalism. By means of a declaration, a

freestanding Y term can come into existence and survive across time just in case the Y term is collectively recognized and remembered.

Responding to critics' objections to *CSW*, in *MSW* Searle attends to the following criticism, namely that "[i]f institutional facts exist only because they are believed to exist, then how can we discover new facts about them? How can the social sciences tell us anything new" (Searle 2010, 116)? According to *CSW*'s program, institutional and social facts exist only if they are represented as existing, but by the time of his writing *MSW*, Searle acknowledges that there seem to be cases of social facts that "exist independently of anyone's representing them as existing, and can indeed be discovered independently of anyone's opinions" (Searle 2010, 116; cf. Thomasson (2003), Khalidi (2015)). Searle's defense is that, like economic recessions, any such social facts are systematic fallouts or consequences of so-called ground floor institutional facts. By "ground-floor facts," he means those facts that exist because of collective acceptance and the usual imposition of some status function (i.e. they are constituted, created, and maintained by the rule that "X counts as a Y in C"). "The totality of such facts will have higher levels of description… but these fallouts are constituted by the ground floor institutional facts" (Searle 2010, 116). It is worth noting that Searle does not clearly explain what he means by "consequences" or "systematic fallouts." Most importantly, he does not sufficiently defend the claim that they are always *just* "fallouts" of the more usual concept-dependent social kinds.

In any case, Searle proffers the following example of a systematic fallout - one he takes to be trivial and yet illuminating of the nature of the existence of such a variety of fact.

> It has been discovered in baseball that, statistically, left-handed batters do better against right-handed pitchers, and right-handed batters do better against left-handed pitchers. This is not required by the rules of baseball; it is just something that happens. I propose to call these "third person fallout facts [or, more simply, fallout facts] from institutional facts"… They are "third personal," because they need not be known by participants in the institution. They can be stated from a third-person, anthropological view. (Searle 2010, 117)

Presumably prompted by Thomasson's (2003) criticisms against his 1995 program, in *MSW*, Searle also accepts the existence of economic recessions as another example of a systematic fallout. Unlike the case of the existence of a recession, however, Searle writes:

> [I]n the case of the existence of money… if no one had ever believed that money existed… under these or some deontically equivalent descriptions, then such institutional phenomena could not exist. So you have the paradox that a phenomenon can be intentionality-relative and yet we can then discover intentionality-independent facts about that phenomenon. Thus… recessions are mind-dependent but not intentionality-relative. (2010, 117)

How do ordinary status functions (i.e. those functions that exist on account of collective acceptance of the constitutive rule "(some extant material) X counts as Y in C"), latent functions, freestanding Y terms, and the existence of systematic fallouts all hang together? In *MSW*, Searle acknowledges the existence of systematic fallouts, which commits him to accepting into his social ontology more social facts than those which follow directly from his 1995 rule that "(some extant material) X counts as Y in C." Latent functions, systematic fallouts, and freestanding Y terms bloat the Searlian social world. In some cases, there need not be any extant material X that correlates one-to-one with the existence of Y (say, in the case of a corporation). Ys are created, not from nothing, but from no *thing* - that is, from no already definite extant material X. In *MSW*, Searle contends that, nevertheless, both freestanding Y terms and systematic fallouts can be easily accommodated by his original 1995 account because the existence of both types

of kinds is dependent on the existence of other kinds that are explicitly represented as existing - that is, their existence is dependent on the existence of other concept-dependent Ys.

This section has offered an exposition of the progression of Searle's views from *CSR* to *MSW*. Searle's most mature position in *MSW* accounts for four kinds of social facts and institutions (i) those captured by the original rule that "X (some extant material object) counts as Y in C," (ii) latent social functions, (iii) freestanding Y terms, and (iv) systematic fallouts. His program has been shown to apply effectively only to institutional social kinds (that is, kinds backed by official authority) and to phenomena dependent on institutional social kinds and facts.

1.7 Social Kinds, Realism, the Possibility of the Discovery of New Social Facts, and Critique

Like Searle, in "Realism and Human Kinds" (2003), Thomasson is concerned to show how objects, functions, and statuses, which depend on subjective intentional states for their existence, can nonetheless exhibit epistemic objectivity, and further, to show how they are real despite their failure to meet the standards of a general and robust realism, a realism that includes mind-independence as a necessary criterion. Thomasson is in agreement with the spirit and goals of Searle's overall program, but disagrees with some details of his account, especially his 1995 account. Her main claim in "Realism and Human Kinds" is that to make sense of the kinds of the everyday world, as well as those studied by the social sciences, we require a more careful ontological, epistemological, and semantic analysis than has as of yet been provided of the ways in which social and human kinds differ from those of the natural sciences.

Unlike natural kinds, social kinds (prime ministers, oncologists, universities) depend on the existence of human attitudes (intentions, beliefs, practices, actions, and the like) for their existence. According to Thomasson, realism is constituted by three connected claims: (i) the ontological position that some things exist and have natures independent of human attitudes, (ii) the epistemological position that coming to acquire knowledge of such mind-independent kinds is an issue of "substantive discovery in the face of possibilities of gross error and ignorance," and (iii) the semantic position that reference to such kinds "proceeds via a causal relation to an ostended sample" in such a way that the term's extension is determined by the nature of the kind itself instead of by our attitudes or concepts, thereby permitting us to refer to the kind irrespective of whether we are ignorant or in error of its nature (Thomasson 2003, 580).

She characterizes "general realism" as countenancing as real not only those things that are mind-independent, but also things that depend on human attitudes for their existence and nature (i.e. kinds that are mind-dependent). According to Thomasson, general realism furthermore accepts as real those things that exist only because they are explicitly represented (concept-dependent kinds), as well as things that exist as a result of social interactions and which supervene on other things explicitly represented as real (and which are therefore parasitic on attitudes that are concept-dependent). On Thomasson's view, the realist criterion of mind-independence involves two principles: the Independence and the Ignorance/Error Principles. The Independence Principle states that there are kinds that have existence independent of the mental (Thomasson 2003, 582). The Ignorance/Error Principle is dependent on the idea that some kinds have natural boundaries (i.e. the extension of a kind is not dependent on or determined by human

attitudes). That some kinds have natural boundaries, what Searle calls "brute facts,"[27] is expressible by the Ignorance Principle: if some kinds have natural boundaries, then the conditions that determine whether something is a member of such kinds are independent of whether the conditions are accepted by anyone (Thomasson 203, 582). The Error Principle says that some kind-membership conditions are determined by factors independent of human attitudes and that it could therefore be the case that our beliefs and principles about the natures of some kinds are entirely incorrect (Thomasson 2003, 583). Thus, a kind has natural boundaries if and only if it is the case that we could be both in error and ignorant about the boundaries of a kind. As Thomasson notes, kinds with natural boundaries are tied to a realist epistemology that necessitates that any facts about a kind's existence and nature are (at least possible) substantive discoveries subject to confirmation and error, rather than determinable by conceptual analysis alone (Thomasson 2003, 584). Further, the semantic theory that suits kinds with natural boundaries is a causal theory of reference: the existence of already existing boundaries determines such kind-terms' extensions. Usually, independence and natural boundaries "stand or fall together" (Thomasson 2003, 584). But Thomasson's paper presents a challenge to this idea.

Institutional kinds and facts most obviously depend on human attitudes (e.g. that Joseph Aloisius Ratzinger was once Pope Benedict XVI, that some piece of paper constitutes a marriage certificate). Thomasson notes that some institutional facts must be created "token by token" (Thomasson 2003, 585-6; see also Khalidi (2015)). Other institutional facts are created by accepting general rules such that anything that has the

[27] More specifically, for Searle, it is not the boundaries themselves that are brute facts, but rather propositions about those boundaries.

relevant features counts as having the institutional feature - for instance, any bill issued by a Canadian mint with the right engravings counts as a Canadian twenty dollar bill (cf. Searle (1995), Khalidi (2015)). These kinds have existences that depend in part on attitudes that human beings have towards them, though attitudes need not be manifested towards their particular instances (Khalidi 2015, 96).

As I have already addressed, Thomasson points out that some institutional entities come into existence not by someone's projecting new powers, features, or properties (and so, new facts) onto extant material Xs - a point directed at Searle's 1995 program, and a point which Searle concedes in *MSW* in his accommodation of freestanding Y terms. Some institutional entities involve the creation of new abstract institutional objects like laws or corporations (Thomasson 2003, 587; see also Searle (2010)). She refers to these as "abstract cases." What is crucial about these cases is that a Y term exists where there are no definite material objects or concrete entities (Xs) that count as Ys in circumstance C. Laws, for instance, are created by allowing that "under certain conditions, undertaking concrete activities (writing characters, raising hands, etc. in the right context of a legislative body) counts as creating a new entity, a law" (Thomasson 2003, 287). Again, as Searle concedes in *MSW*, conferring a new feature onto an extant material object does not create a law. Though a law is created by concrete activities, it "is not itself identical with (or materially constituted by) any of these concrete activities or instances of it" and it therefore "cannot be accounted for merely in terms of new properties applied to old material objects" (Thomasson 2003, 587).

The Independence Principle and the Error/Ignorance Principle fail in both the concrete and the abstract cases. Since institutional kinds are dependent to some extent on

human attitudes, the Independence Principle fails. The Error Principle fails because if we collectively accept that "some X counts as Y in C," it is impossible that C is not a necessary and sufficient condition for X to count as Y. Further, because we are the ones who have established that C is necessary and sufficient for some X to count as Y, it could not be the case that *all of us* are wrong about X's counting as Y in C since "the principles accepted play a stipulative role in constituting the nature of the kind" (Thomasson 2003, 590). To use Searlian language, social and institutional kinds exhibit self-referentiality: in order for X to count as Y in C, the necessary and sufficient condition for Y's existence is for there to be some agreement or recognition that X counts as Y in C.

Yet, contra Searle, Thomasson rightly points out that we are not entirely protected from error or ignorance about institutional entities. For example, we may be unaware of certain institutional facts: perhaps someone is ignorant of the conditions of a certain law or knows only some of the necessary, but not the sufficient conditions for X's qualifying as Y. On Thomasson's account, when it comes to both concrete and abstract cases (freestanding Y terms), we are protected only from universal ignorance (i.e. *someone* knows the bona fide conditions under which Y legitimately exists). "[T]he very existence of a kind K ensures only that there is some true principle that is collectively accepted, not that all true principles are accepted" (Thomasson 2003, 590). Importantly, Thomasson emphasizes that the possibility of universal protection from error and ignorance is community-dependent. That is, "universal" in the expression "guaranteed from universal ignorance" refers only to the set of all persons within some community rather than to all persons from all communities. Stated slightly differently, the above noted protection from universal ignorance applies "collectively to (and only to) the group whose collective

acceptance is referenced to in the… principle for the kind in question" (Thomasson 2003, 591). Hence, it is possible for other communities to be either in complete error or ignorance of another community's social and institutional kinds. Further, Thomasson argues that despite the fact that social and institutional entities lack natural boundaries, an outsider's (an individual outsider's or an entire outside community's) epistemic relation to the social and institutional kinds of another community is sometimes akin to the epistemic relation that each of us has, and all of us taken together (i.e. all individuals from all communities) have, to kinds with natural boundaries, if there are any (Thomasson 2003, 591).

As I have mentioned, it is Thomasson who seems to be the first to highlight in writing the possibility that some entities and kinds may be mind-dependent without requiring that anyone have any belief about them directly.[28] To illustrate the existence of such kinds, she offers racism, economic recessions, and superstition as examples, noting that these social kinds depend on human attitudes and behaviour for their existence, but can exist without any human attitudes about racism, economic recessions, or superstition themselves (Thomasson 2003, 605). To flesh out the nature of this type of kind, it is useful to look closely at Muhammad Ali Khalidi's treatment of racism in "Three Kinds of Social Kinds" (2015). Khalidi writes:

> There can only be racism in a society if some members of that society are prejudiced against others or harbor attitudes of superiority or contempt towards them insofar as they are members of a different group. But members of that society need not have any propositional attitudes that involve the category *racism* itself. They may never have consciously formulated such a category or concept; indeed the racists may be in denial that they have such attitudes and the victims of racism may never have articulated the concept. (2015, 99-100)

[28] Thomasson (2003) attributes the objection to Mark Lance, who raised it in an APA discussion, but has not himself written on the topic.

To expand further on Khalidi's remark, one might be aware that one sorts individuals according to some perceived difference or feature that one takes to be indicative of further features or which causes them to harbor attitudes of superiority or contempt against others. Yet, this need not be the case. Unbeknownst to me, I may, for instance, harbor feelings of superiority or contempt towards others based on their possession of some perceived difference or feature. Similarly, in practice, I may sort individuals according to such and such categories, but I may not be aware of the relevant difference(s) or feature(s) that cause me to hold any particular feelings towards others. I may also sort individuals according to categories without having conscious awareness that I do so. In these cases, I am perhaps engaging in racist practices (or perhaps sexist practices and so on) without knowing that I am and perhaps without even possessing the concepts *racism* and *sexism*. Even if you are aware of the relevant feature(s) you use to sort kinds of people, perhaps you even use the sortal category of racial difference and thus possess the concept *race*, you may be racist without possessing the concept *racism*.

Thomasson also underscores the idea that social facts might also involve generalizations over other social facts - to use her examples, "the fact that we are in a recession, or that 70% of Americans support the death penalty" (Thomasson 2003, 605). Such facts do not necessarily require for their existence any human attitudes specifically about recessions or statistical generalizations (i.e. no one need have ever entertained the thought "70% of Americans support the death penalty" in order for the statistical generalization that 70% of Americans support the death penalty be a true statistical generalization). In these cases, the Independence Principle succeeds since the existence and nature of such entities and kinds may be unknown to some or all members of a given

community or to all members of all communities (Thomasson 2003, 606). Thomasson also attends to the existence of those kinds with latent facts, where the latent facts are capable of being exposed or demystified (Thomasson 2003, 606). "There is room for critique of a society's metaphysical understanding of its own institutions" (Thomasson 2003, 606). Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche are paradigmatic demystifiers. Consider their revealing of the "real" systemic or systematic function of religion. Recall, for example, Nietzsche's aphorism: "Two great European narcotics, alcohol and Christianity." Marx is more explicit in his *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right"*:

> *Religious* suffering is, at one and the same time, the *expression* of real suffering and a *protest* against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. ([1844]/1977), 131)

To gloss Marx on this point, religion really serves to preserve the political and economic status quo, which just *is* to preserve political and economic inequality.

The important lessons to be drawn from Thomasson's account are that many social kinds do not conform to Searle's analysis and are not in line with realist claims. Another way to state her conclusion is to say that social kinds are real according to her account of general realism, even though they do not conform to realism's criterion of mind-independence.

1.8 Ásta: Hyper-Contextual Property Conferral

In "The Social Construction of Human Kinds" (2013), Ásta provides another account of the projection of new features, or in her terms, the projection of new properties onto extant material Xs. Her account is intended to provide a metaphysics for constraining and

enabling non-institutional kinds. Though I use "constraining and enabling kinds" to name kinds that place constraints or enablements upon the conferee or upon others in their dealings with the person upon whom kind-membership is conferred, Ásta's "communal" kinds are constraining and enabling with one important qualification. She commits herself only to the position that communal kinds place constraints and enablements upon the conferee. On Ásta's account, the conferral of a property or properties (*being a woman*, *being an intellectual*, and so on) by another subject's or subjects' attitudes is what limits and permits the individual upon whom the property or properties is conferred to *do* certain things. One occupies a social role or has a social property just in case he or she is subject to the constraints and enablements that come from being taken to belong to a social category or being taken to have some socially salient property or properties. Unlike Searle's account, non-authorized coercive power, rather than official authority confers upon a person some social property and backs the corollary constraints and enablements that the conferee suffers or enjoys. Moreover, unlike Searle's account, individuals or groups without deontic power that is backed by institutional authority can nevertheless sometimes be the enforcers of social properties. Moreover, according to Ásta's account, in some cases, one can be endowed with the property of *being some social kind X* by an *individual* conferrer. Collective conferral is not always required.

Ásta emphasizes that when it comes to certain social properties, the physical facts (nonconferred properties) do not determine, or are not sufficient to explain the existence of the social property. To use her example, *being popular* is a property that is entirely dependent on attitudes. Nonconferred properties alone cannot determine whether or not someone is popular (a social, but not a physical fact). Ásta writes:

> We cannot be popular in isolation; in fact, our popularity is entirely dependent on other people's harboring certain feelings toward us. Or, as I would put it: other people's harboring certain feelings toward us confers the property of being popular on us. (2013, 4)

She notes that other features are plausibly conferred, but "bear a close relationship to some nonconferred properties [that is, grounding properties] with which they can become easily confused" (Ásta 2013, 5). To make such cases clearer, Ásta considers, as Searle does, some properties of baseball. She pays special attention to the property of a pitch counting as a strike. In the case of a strike, there exists a physical, that is, a nonconferred property, namely a ball "having travelled some trajectory T from the fingers of the pitcher to the glove of the catcher" (Ásta 2013, 5). This trajectory is the nonconferred property that the umpire is attempting to track. According to Ásta, it is the veridical or non-veridical judgment of the umpire, not the actual trajectory of the ball (the grounding property) that determines whether a pitch is a strike or a ball. It is the judgment of the umpire that a pitch counts as a strike or a ball that makes the properties *being a strike* and *being a ball* conferred properties. Her account stands in contrast with what she refers to as the "constitution account." According to the constitution account, it is the actual trajectory of the ball that determines whether or not the ball is a strike. In other words, "X counts as a strike in C (a baseball game) if the trajectory of the ball is K." Thus, on the constitution account, even if the umpire misinterprets X's trajectory to be a strike when, in fact, the trajectory is not consistent with the conditions for being a strike, X is not a strike. On Ásta's account, without the judgment of the umpire that X is a strike, no strike exists regardless of X's trajectory. She writes:

> We may think that whether a pitch is a strike or a ball is not a matter of what that trajectory T is, but rather of what the umpire judges that trajectory to be. If we do that, then we say that the umpire is attempting to track what the physical

> property T is, but that it is his judgment as to what T is that makes something a ball or a strike. We then hold that the properties of being a ball or a strike are conferred by his judgment. (2013, 5)

Ásta's conferralist account of social kinds (or more specifically, her conferralist account of social properties) involves five aspects: (i) the conferred property (what is being conferred?), (ii) who (which subject(s) is doing the conferral?), (iii) what (what is the relevant mental attitude of the subject(s)?), (iv) when (under what conditions does the conferral occur?), and (v) the grounding property (what nonconferred property is being tracked, consciously or unconsciously, by some subject(s)?) (Ásta 2013, 5). Her analogy with baseball is not intended to capture all cases of the conferral of social properties, but is nonetheless useful as it underscores cases where a physical property (or grounding property) is attempting to be tracked by conferrers and where the supposed physical property grounds the conferral of the social property. According to Ásta, there is no fact of the matter about whether something does or does not count as a strike (or has the property of being a strike) independent of a human being's judgment (in this case, the umpire's judgment). On her view, it is the umpire's judgment about the ball's trajectory that confers *being a strike* onto the pitch. To state it differently, though there is of course the physical fact of the ball's trajectory, "the physical fact does not determine the baseball fact" (Ásta 2013, 6). There is no fact of the matter as to whether or not the pitch is a strike independent of the umpire's judgment. To complicate matters, as in the case of being popular, there may be no property T (that is, there may be no grounding property), but only a conferred property. In some cases, some people may believe that that they are tracking some property T (where there is none), which is independent of their judgments and which determines or justifies the social fact.

On the constitution account, a pitch is a strike even if the umpire does not recognize it as such. The umpire's task is to attempt to detect baseball properties and facts that are generated by the players on the field and which come into being independent of his judgment. What Ásta finds "unhappy" about the constitution account is that it fails to recognize that it is the judgment of the umpire that plays a fundamental role in a baseball game (Ásta 2013, 6). The umpire's judgment affects how the game progresses. His judgment also affects the explanations that people will offer for what is happening and what will happen during the course of the game. In short, her problem with the constitution account is that it is committed to the existence of baseball facts that play no role in a game (i.e. to those baseball facts constituted by the rule that some "X counts as a Y in C" that are overlooked by the umpire). On the constitution account, though Y (a strike) was instantiated, because the umpire overlooked Y, although Y exists, it plays no role in the game and may go unnoticed by the umpire or even all viewers and players. Hence, Ásta writes:

> Better, I think, is to say that there are physical properties and facts about the placement and trajectories of balls, but the judgment as to what those physical properties and facts are confer baseball properties and help to create new and interesting baseball facts. For the game of baseball, what counts is the judgment of the umpire as to what the physical facts are, not the actual physical facts. (2013, 6)

In this case, the grounding property (the actual trajectory of the ball) does ground the conferral, but this relation is, to use Ásta's language, "merely epistemic" (Ásta 2013, 7).

Ásta introduces what she calls "communal properties," to be distinguished from institutional properties. Many social properties are Searlian institutional properties, but some social properties (e.g. *being popular*) cannot be accounted for by mere reference to one's place in an institutional structure. Even if one's location in a social structure plays a

role in whether he or she possesses some social property, it may be that the entirety of the constraints and enablements that a person suffers or enjoys cannot be accounted for solely in terms of his or her place in an institutional structure. The key idea behind communal properties is that some constraints are grounded in coercive power rather than by official authority. With communal properties in mind, Ásta considers the application of her conferralist account to the sex/gender distinction. She contends that most would likely agree that gender is in some way conferred. However, she maintains that many will disagree on who is or who should be doing the conferring, the conditions under which the conferral occurs, and also, what, if anything at all the conferral is supposedly tracking - we might be tracking "sex assignment, role in biological reproduction, sexual roles, self-presentation, to name a few candidates" (Ásta 2013, 8).

Consider the view that gender is the social meaning of sex. On the conferralist program, this view can be summarized as such: sex is the nonconferred or grounding property and gender (along with gender's privileges and burdens) is conferred by society on people taken to be of a given biological sex (Ásta 2013, 8). Ásta reminds us that this is not the only way that conferralism about sex and gender can be cashed out. Much feminist and queer theory and activism has been aimed at challenging the assumption that these categories are co-extensive; that is, "tracking one of these properties need not help us track the others" (Ásta 2013, 8). Because of this fact, Ásta suggests that the conferral of gender is highly context-dependent. On her account, gender is context-dependent (i.e. dependent on one's place in history, one's geographical location, and so on) and moreover, "when it comes to historical periods and geographical locations, [the same locations] can allow for radically different contexts, so that a person may count as a

certain gender in some contexts and not others" (Ásta 2013, 9). This is possible since different properties may be tracked in different contexts in order to attribute property P or because judgments about the same grounding property differ across contexts, possibilities overlooked by both Searle (1995, 2008, 2010) and Thomasson (2003).

Ásta considers the conferred property of gender to explicate, once more, her five-part conferralist schema:

> *Conferred property*: being of gender G, for example, a woman, man, trans
> *Who*: the subject S in the particular context C
> *What*: the perception of the subject S that the person have the grounding property P
> *When*: in some particular context C
> *Grounding property*: the grounding property P (Ásta 2013, 9)

Echoing Searle's and Thomasson's distinctions between "one-time" and token cases of the creation of institutional kinds, Ásta notes that the conferral of gender is not done as a one-time act; rather, gender conferral involves what she calls a "standing attitude," namely

> the perception by the subjects in the context that the person have the relevant grounding property. This perception can be in error and the person may not in fact have the property. What matters is simply the perception. (Ásta 2013, 9)

On her account, it is only when a property gets conferred that some status function (or social property) comes into existence.

Ásta spends some time contrasting the baseball with the gender case. In the baseball example, a certain person, namely the umpire, is granted authority to make the call as to whether or not some pitch counts as a strike. If, she claims, the gender case functions analogously, then upon entering any new context or situation, it follows that a gender is conferred upon us by some subject who is authorized to do the conferral in the particular context (say, in the context of a house party). Ásta agrees that others in the

party have power to confer a gender upon us.[29] However, they do not have institutional authority (as when a doctor declares the sex of a baby to be female, male, or intersex) and moreover, in the case of the party, "the conferral of gender involves a complicated negotiation over what rules apply in the context and who should play what role" (Ásta 2013, 9). The complicated negotiation may sometimes involve a matrix wherein individuals in some context (say, the house party) disagree on some property conferral. However complicated or simple the negotiation, as Ásta notes, partygoers confer a gender upon me by merely citing authority (e.g. since Paul is the most popular, what he says is what is accepted)[30] and others by appeal to structures of power that may or may not lack normative support - some of these structures may be maintained and constituted by habit or by threat (Ásta 2013, 9). She suggests that partygoers confer gender by citing maps (maps of social relations - i.e. How ought a single or married woman to act at a party? How ought a married man act towards a single or a married woman?). These maps originate from outside the context of the party, or in other words, they are derived from structures that have been operative in other contexts and then taken on by the partygoers and utilized consciously or unconsciously at the party.

Though Ásta focuses on gender maps, I assume that gender maps are a subclass of a larger set of maps for the conferral of any given social property (e.g. maps conferring sexual orientation, class, and so on - maps which may not match between any two individuals, but are likely similar if derived from the same community). These maps are sets of conventions, customs, and so on, taken up and internalized as mental maps from

[29] Plausibly, a question to ask Ásta (2013) is where this coercive power originates, as well as what sustains its force.

[30] Obviously, in the case of a party, deferral to an authority on sex is very much an unlikely scenario. How often, for example, could an individual have access to a medical specialist's interpretation of some individual's chromosomal makeup?

the everyday world (and its many contexts) that place constraints and enablements on social roles and decide which individuals fall under which social roles and why. The constraints and enablements that the maps provide therefore function in somewhat the same manner as Searle's deontic powers. Deontic powers attach to status functions and social institutions, projecting new obligations, rights, and duties, or more minimally perhaps, expectations upon some X in virtue of X's being taken to have social role Y or property P in some context.

According to Ásta's account, it is possible for an individual to possess unofficial, non-authoritative power[31] to confer a property upon another person. As an individual, call her Jane, moves through a party and encounters new people, in turn, other individuals (or groups) possess the power to confer properties upon Jane. In familiar day to day contexts (parties, chitchat, paying for one's coffee), as one moves from context to context, property conferral upon a conferee is relative to the individuals and groups with whom the conferee interacts. The possibility of multiple and context-dependent enforcers may already be implicit in Searle's account, though not explicit in his formula "X counts as Y in C." Perhaps Searle can accommodate Ásta's concerns easily by modifying the original "X counts as Y in C" rule as follows: X counts as Y in C for S (or by S's authority) or S makes it such that X counts as Y in C.[32] Although Searle never explicitly endorses the constitution account, his account and basic formula (X counts as Y in C) does not clearly distinguish a constitution account from a conferralist account.

When it comes to the attribution of social properties, unlike Searle's account, for Ásta, the conferee can be more or less involved in the negotiation of the property

[31] Note that one can possess the power, but not the explicit and institutionally sanctioned authority (e.g. a medical doctor) to confer properties upon X.
[32] Thanks to Muhammad Ali Khalidi for this suggestion.

conferral to which they are being subject; thus, though she does not engage with the issue in her 2013 paper, the negotiation cannot be purely third-personal.[33] It is also important to stress that unlike the Searlian account, Ásta's program reveals that the enforcers of structures (or maps) and therefore, the conferral of properties, can sometimes be individual agents and moreover, can be individual agents without collectively recognized official or authoritative backing. Individuals are capable of attributing non-institutional social properties (or social roles) upon others and these properties and social roles impose constraints and enablements upon the conferee. The enforcers of social properties or the attribution of kind-membership upon a conferee in a given situation (say, a dinner party) can be accomplished by a given individual, the majority, the most popular or powerful in some crowd and in some context, and so are often only temporary labellers. Of course, there are cases where the enforcers are endowed with some institutional or otherwise "special" authority - for instance, when one thinks of gender as a legal rather than a social category. Such latter cases are the paradigmatic examples of Searle's institutional facts. However, in the context of day to day encounters at the supermarket, the local gym, or a nightclub, and not, say, when a conferee is lying on a couch in her psychologist's office, official conferral is not the typical mode of property or social kind-membership conferral.

Ásta's account is able to accommodate instances of "fake" versus "real" Ys (fake women, fake money, and so on) by saying that in cases of fakes, people *take* X to have the relevant grounding property/properties that determine when X is to count as a Y, but in fact X has no such property or properties. Whether we have a Searlian or a conferralist case matters in instances of "passing as a Y." On Ásta's program, the identification or presence of a social property is dependent on Y's being constrained and enabled in

[33] Ásta, personal correspondence, 2013.

certain ways, whereas on Searle's account, there is to have the property and there is to have the deontic powers and these can come apart. On Searle's account, meeting conditions K in some context makes X a Y. One is a Y in virtue of meeting K in C, but on Searle's account, without being recognized as meeting K in C and thus being recognized as Y, one does not substantially possess the deontic powers associated with Y, though X is entitled to them. Being Y and suffering or enjoying the deontic powers attached to Y can come apart. For elucidation, consider the case of human rights. On Searle's account, in virtue of meeting K in C, X counts as a Y, where being Y entitles one to human rights. Even if one is a Y, one may not be recognized as such and thus, one is entitled to, but is not recognized as possessing, the deontic powers of Y. Ásta's account addresses this possibility explicitly and provides a careful metaphysics and epistemology to explain such a possibility.

1.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I have elucidated and problematized aspects of Searle's program from *CSR* to *MSW*. I have also presented and analyzed objections against, as well as amendments and responses to Searle's 1995, 2008, and 2010 accounts. Some issues briefly touched upon in this chapter, which arise in light of the Searlian program as well as those of Thomasson (2003), Khalidi (2010, 2015), and Ásta (2013) will receive more careful analysis in further chapters. This chapter has mainly attempted to sketch an account of what social ontology amounts to and has explored the different varieties of social categories and kinds that exist, as well as in what ways their metaphysics and epistemologies differ. In the following chapter, I will attempt to show how issues raised in this chapter affect social constructionist projects. I will attend more carefully to the

relation between social kinds and deontic powers. Drawing from Thomasson's concerns in "Realism and Human Kinds," I will consider how the Independence and Ignorance/Error Principles relate to issues of contested or disputed cases with respect to the meaning of social kind-concepts and their application. Further, Haslanger's analyses from *Resisting Reality* and Ásta's hyper-contextual conferralist account will be argued to reveal the real complexity, and thus, the real difficulties in attending to disagreements about the meanings of social category- and kind-concepts, as well as the extension and boundaries of social kinds.

CHAPTER TWO: Social Construction and the Debunking Project

2.0 Introduction

In expounding upon what social constructionism amounts to and in putting forward a particular understanding of what it is for something to be a social construction, in this chapter, I compare and contrast the views of Hacking and Haslanger. I focus especially on their divergent views on the issue of justification with respect to idea- and object-construction. I also attempt to incorporate Haslanger's insights from *Resisting Reality* into Hacking's account of the "looping effect" in an effort to underscore the effect's complexity, a complexity that Hacking himself does not articulate.

The idea of social construction is important in social theory and especially in social critique because its theses challenge commonly held assumptions and beliefs about what is natural, given, or inevitable. As I suggested in the previous chapter, a difference between social ontology and social constructionism is a difference in emphasis. While both projects are concerned to spell out the metaphysics of the social world, the latter

position, or at least a significant portion of it, is also, and usually explicitly, motivated by ethical or political concerns. Though there exists some agreement within the social sciences and humanities that attention should be paid to the theses of social constructionism, there nonetheless exists considerable divergence in what the theses of social constructionism are meant to entail, as well as what exactly is meant by claims that "X is socially constructed." Haslanger writes, "[t]he multiplicity of uses across contexts and disciplines has... reduced the value of the term... But the points that social constructionists have been trying to make remain important" (2012, 4). As Ian Hacking claimed even earlier in *The Social Construction of What?*:

> Social construction has in many contexts been a truly liberating idea, but that which on first hearing has liberated some has made all too many others smug, comfortable, and trendy in ways that have become merely orthodox. The phrase has become code. If you use it favorably, you deem yourself rather radical. If you trash the phrase, you declare that you are rational, reasonable, and respectable. (1999, vii)

But by now, at least within Western academia, contra Hacking, one might suggest that as social constructionism has become more popular in the social sciences and humanities, its rejection is more radical and controversial than its acceptance. A pessimistic view is that as the shock value of claiming that this or that is "really" just a social construct has decreased, so too has social constructionism lost some of its potential for concrete, meaningful impact - that is, for social reform or revolution. Further, as with other philosophical weasel words like 'culture,' 'experience,' and 'power,' 'social constructionism' and the predicate 'socially constructed' have taken on not only different, but sometimes contradictory meanings. Hence, it is occasionally difficult to tell when those making use of the terms agree, disagree, or, in unknowingly employing different meanings of the terms, are simply talking past one another. Hacking's (1999) and

Haslanger's (2012) works, in particular, help to clarify and delineate some of the various usages of 'social construction' and 'socially constructed.'

Present day social constructionism emphasizes the realism of socially constructed categories and kinds and encourages suspicion towards claims about a category's or kind's naturalness or inevitability. Yet even if social constructionism should succeed in revealing, or more weakly, in convincing[34] an individual or group of the non-inevitability or malleability of some category or kind, the reformatory or ameliorative effects of social constructionism should not be overemphasized. As Richard Rorty reminds us, it is not a particularly interesting critique of culture to say that it is a social construct. Rhetorically, he asks: What else could it be?

> Neither philosophy in general, nor deconstruction in particular, should be thought of as a pioneering, path-breaking, tool... Recent philosophy, including Derrida's, helps us see practices and ideas… as neither natural nor inevitable - but that is all it does. When philosophy has finished showing that everything is a social construct, it does not help us decide which social constructs to retain and which to replace. (Rorty 1993, 96)

For now, I leave aside the question of the possibility and kind of emancipation that social constructionism might be able to proffer and focus instead on developing the metaphysical and epistemological issues raised in Chapter One, but now with an eye to determining how they lend themselves to social constructionist, rather than to social ontological, concerns.

In this chapter, I first provide a general overview of what descriptive and ameliorative social constructionist programs amount to. Following Hacking (1999) and Haslanger (2012), I agree that it is not particularly useful to try to spell out what social constructionism "really" is since its rhetoric functions differently across situations. In any

[34] Note that "revealing" implies the revelation of truth whereas "convincing" need not.

case, in order to provide a working account of social constructionism, as well as of its various programs and goals, I begin by outlining Hacking's (1999) delineation of various kinds of social constructionist projects and his distinction between idea- and object-constructionism. I then elucidate aspects of Haslanger's (2012) analyses in order to expand upon issues raised in Chapter One. I make use of her analyses for several purposes. One major purpose is to expound further upon the relation between social institutions, status functions, and deontic powers. In this chapter, I drop the Searlian language of "deontic powers" and employ Haslanger's vernacular tools instead. Haslanger (2012) provides a useful way to construe, as well as a clear account of the relation between social roles, categories, and the prescriptions and expectations that they place on an individual qua Y and on other people in their dealings with an individual qua Y in some context. She proffers, in other words, a detailed and comprehensive rearticulation of Searle's account of social functions' "powers." Instead of relying on a vague notion of a social function's or role's powers à la Searle, Haslanger provides a more precise analysis as an alternative, drawing a distinction between "thick" and "thin" social roles (see "Social Constructionism and the Debunking Project" in *Resisting Reality*).[35] By "thick," Haslanger means that a social role entails a broad and substantial range of expectations, obligations, entitlements, norms, and so forth that affect not only the individual upon whom the social role is conferred, but also upon others in their dealings with the individual qua Y. By "thin," she means that a social role carries less heavy expectations, obligations, and norms.

In this chapter, I also expand upon the connections between Haslanger's account

[35] The thick versus thin description articulated by Haslanger has a different meaning in anthropology as a result of Clifford Geertz's work. The meaning I employ is not that of Geertz, but the one Haslanger employs in *Resisting Reality* (2012).

of thick and thin social roles, "positionality" (the idea that a social role must be understood in relation to other social roles, or to put it differently, that a social role's identity is not determined solely by its intrinsic properties), "intersectionality" (by which Haslanger means that a social role is not neatly separable from the other social roles that a person occupies), and Ásta's conferralism, which was expounded in Chapter One. Taken together, Haslanger's (2012) and Ásta's (2013) works, as well as the ideas of positionality and intersectionality reveal, in a more careful and nuanced manner than Searle's account, the complexity and difficulties involved in attending to disagreements about the meanings of social kind-concepts and the problem of demarcating extensions of social kind-concepts.

The latter part of this chapter will focus more carefully on a particular kind of social constructionist project, which Haslanger and Hacking both call the "debunking project." Using the analytic tools expounded in the first sections of this chapter, the purpose of the later sections is to more carefully assess the complexities and problems involved in light of disagreements about the meanings, extensions, and boundaries of social kind-concepts. To draw out these issues, I attend to Haslanger's examination of the concept *widow* in "Social Construction: The Debunking Project" from *Resisting Reality.* I connect Haslanger's analysis of *widow* to Thomasson's (2003) account of the Independence and Ignorance/Error Principles, addressed in Chapter One. Though Haslanger outlines many problems involved in debunking projects writ large and in concept critique more generally, with respect to contested meanings of social kind-concepts and their application, I demonstrate how the Independence and Ignorance/Error Principles further problematize social constructionist debunking projects in ways that

Haslanger does not address. More specifically, I examine and take issue with Haslanger's claim in "Social Constructionism and the Debunking Project" that social constructionists are typically concerned to show that some concept, categorization, or practice rests on "a false metaphysics." I ask whether such a claim can be made consistently by a social constructionist and if so, how? What sense can be made of a "false metaphysics" if one accepts a socially constructed social world?

2.1 Hacking's Delineation of Social Constructionist Projects

Before proceeding further, it is worth clarifying the various kinds of social constructionist programs that exist, their specific goals, and the distinction between two kinds of social construction: idea- and object-construction. According to Hacking, despite diversity in the claims, motivations, methods, and goals of social constructionist projects, if we ask "What is the point of claiming that X is socially constructed?" rather than "What is the meaning of X?", then some unity and lucidity concerning the question of "What is social constructionism?" is possible (1999, 5). Hacking depicts all versions of social constructionist programs as tending to be constituted by the following schema. Being critical of the status quo, social constructionists about X (some concept, practice, institution) usually hold that:

> (0) In the present state of affairs, *X* is taken for granted, *X* appears to be inevitable (Hacking 1999, 12).
> (1) *X* need not have existed, or need not be at all as it is. *X*, or *X* as it is at present, is not determined by the nature of things; it is not inevitable (Hacking 1999, 6).
> They often go further and argue that:
> (2) *X* is quite bad as it is (Hacking 1999, 6).
> (3) We should be much better off if *X* were done away with, or at least radically transformed (Hacking 1999, 6).

Hacking (1999) classifies six kinds of social constructionist views. All accept

Theses (0) and (1), but have different views concerning Theses (2) and (3):

> *Historical constructionists* hold that, contrary to what is usually believed, *X* is a contingent result of historical events and thus, (1) *X* need not have existed.
> *Ironic constructionists* uphold Thesis (1) and also believe that, though *X* is contingent, we cannot help but treat it as "part of the universe" about which we cannot do much right now. If our way of thinking changes, then *X* need no longer be treated as such.
> *Reforming constructionists* uphold (1) and believe that (2) "*X* is quite bad as it is" and although at this point in time we cannot see how to fully avoid *X*, we should nonetheless try to improve *X*.
> *Unmasking constructionists* uphold (1) and believe that if we come to see the real social function of *X*, then we will understand that it should have no authority over us.
> *Rebellious constructionists* uphold (1) and believe that since (2) "*X* is quite bad as it is," (3) we would be far better off if *X* were abolished or radically changed.
> *Revolutionary constructionists* uphold (1), think (2) "*X* is quite bad as it is," that (3) we would be much better off if *X* were abolished or radically changed, and moreover, such a constructionist acts to do away or radically transform *X*. (Hacking 1999, 19-20)

Hacking's construal of reforming, unmasking, rebellious, and revolutionary social constructionists correspond to versions of ameliorative social constructionist programs and his historical and ironic constructionists correspond to descriptive projects. For him, since all constructionists claim that X need not have been as it is or that it is the product of contingent events and need not have existed at all or be "at all as it is," all "construction stories are histories" (Hacking 1999, 37 & 48).

Hacking points out that social constructionist claims are not always precise about what is inevitable or what should be done away with. If, for example, someone claims that quarks are socially constructed, they might mean that quarks (the things themselves) were neither inevitable nor determined by the nature of things. They might also mean that our idea, understanding, or concept of quarks was not inevitable or determined by the inherent nature of the mind-independent world. Since Hacking is more sympathetic to the second reading, at least when it comes to non-interactive kinds (kinds unaware of how

they are classified), it is possible to claim without contradiction that X is both socially constructed and real (Hacking 1999, 9-10). On Hacking's account, in the case of interactive kinds (people aware of how they are classified or people aware of how their classifications of others might alter those whom they classify), it is also possible to claim that a way of being a person is both socially constructed and real. This is because being characterized as a certain kind of person has effects in the world, both for the person classified and for others in their dealings with the person qua classification X. By contrast, when it comes to non-interactive kinds - say, quarks - being classified as a quark does not affect what quarks are (if there are any) and moreover, a quark cannot know of its being characterized as a quark, and so be affected by its being characterized as a quark. Being characterized as a certain kind of person, on the other hand, affects one's social interactions and self-understanding. Here, "self-understanding" is a psychological notion that refers to the intentional and sometimes reflexive framework that one employs in making sense of oneself. The category/classification/kind, *woman refugee*, for instance,

> can be called an *interactive kind* because it interacts with the things of that kind, namely people, including individual women refugees, who can become aware of how they are classified and modify their behaviour accordingly. (Hacking 1999, 32)

2.2 Hacking and Non-Inevitability

Since, according to Hacking, all six versions of social constructionist programs uphold Thesis (1), namely that "X is not inevitable," it is worth attending more carefully to the notion of non-inevitability. What exactly does it mean to say that X need not have been as it is, need not have existed, or is not necessary? As Ron Mallon (2007) writes,

> [i]t is possible to say that both natural objects like stars and artifacts like garters need not have existed, or might have been different than they are had some facts been different. Similarly for alphabets, aquifers, cotton candy, cumulonimbus clouds, flint rock, glam rock, the PTA, RNA, video tapes, and the visual system - they might all have had different properties or not have existed given, for example, different physical laws or a different physical history of the universe. (94)

The issue of inevitability and non-inevitability is akin to the difference between Whig and Tory historiography, which are epitomized by their differing attitudes towards the past. According to the former, the same outcome is assured regardless of the historical starting point. On the latter, the current trajectory of history is the product of historically specific, and potentially reversible (non-inevitable) decisions. Whig historiography is therefore overdeterminist. It claims that even if X had not happened, Y would still have happened. Tory historiography is underdeterminist. It claims that if X had not happened, Y would not have happened either.

As Hacking (1999) presents it, the employment of "non-inevitability" by various social constructionists is vague. Thesis (1) might mean that X is non-inevitable in the trivial sense that everything might be said to be non-inevitable (e.g. perhaps there need not have been something rather than nothing), but if this is what is meant, then saying that X is inevitable does not have much bite. If Thesis (1) means that X is non-inevitable in the sense that X was not a necessary outcome of history or that it is non-natural (that it is socially constituted or founded), then Thesis (1), without further argumentation, seems merely to *presuppose* the truth of social constructionism. What determines whether X is inevitable or not and whether X is natural or social is precisely what is at issue among social constructionists and their adversaries. This is to say that Thesis (1), on its own, gives us no tools or criteria to delimit the inevitable from the non-inevitable. It is, in

effect, the criterion that decides these issues that is itself in question, as well as the very subject of debate, among social constructionist advocates and their opponents.

As Mallon writes: "The denial of inevitability Hacking points to only makes sense against a background view about what it is that might have made the difference" (2007, 94). Without epistemic clarity concerning what might have made the difference, why emphasize contingency? Some theorists defend contingency because they take it that contingency more accurately explains the phenomena than any competing view, while other theorists have more explicitly ethical or political aims (Mallon 2007, 94). For the latter camp, revealing the contingency of some X upon our culture and decisions suggests that it is within our power to alter X through future choices, and moreover, it may emphasize our responsibility to do so if X, in its current state, is (taken to be) unjust. Notice, however, that "emphasizing contingency" need not be understood as making a metaphysical claim about whether X is actually a product of non-inevitable forces. Whether or not one has the epistemic resources to determine X's non-inevitability, "emphasizing contingency" can also be understood as meaning that it is perhaps more ethical, efficient, or veridical to the facts to believe that X is non-inevitable.

2.3 Hacking and Haslanger on Idea- and Object-Constructionism

Given the taxonomy of varieties of social constructionists that Hacking (1999) outlines, it is unclear whether he thinks that for each of these categories, one can be either an idea- or an object-constructionist. My sense is that for each kind of constructionist, it is possible, or at least not inconsistent with Hacking's view, that one can be either an idea- or object-constructionist, or both. Hacking depicts idea-constructionism not simply as the trivial view that our ideas have a history or that our concepts are influenced by social factors,

but as the substantive view that we have the ideas and concepts we do for reasons that challenge standard accounts or explanations of our ideas' or concepts' origins, as well as the usual accounts of why we retain them. Although Hacking does not touch upon what I call a "weak idea-constructionism," introducing the notion of weak idea-constructionism is useful to better clarify his view of idea-constructionism. A weak idea-constructionism says that our ideas are non-inevitable because they are influenced by social factors. This sort of idea-constructionism is quite banal. Who would seriously deny that the possession of ideas, concepts, ways of classifying, and so forth depends to some extent on one's social and historical situation? Even in highly theoretical contexts, after perhaps a bit of coaxing, a hardcore realist who takes her kind-concepts to cut nature at the joints will likely agree that she possesses her concepts either entirely because of, or at least partly or to a great extent in consequence of, social and historical processes. Here, she will agree that the context of discovery of these concepts involves social factors, though she might nonetheless maintain that the justification of her continued possession of her concepts ultimately (and perhaps only) has to do with whether the concepts map onto mind-independent reality.

Hacking's (1999) depiction of what a robust idea-constructionism entails is controversial. Robust idea-constructionism is itself controversial and Hacking's depiction of what it entails is a particularly controversial construal. In his view, a robust idea-constructionist denies that the scientific concepts and theories we possess have anything to do with reality's inherent structure (if it has one). Instead, Hacking's robust idea-constructionist claims that the best way to account for stable practices and elements in science is actually, counter-intuitively perhaps, to look to factors external to science

proper. For example, instead of appealing to "the way the world really is," the robust idea-constructionist might point to educational systems that instill background assumptions and dominant theories in the minds of future scientists (Hacking 1999, 84-5). On this view, if you want to know why we classify X in such and such a manner or why we have concept X at all, the answer will not involve a justificatory account provided by a normative epistemology. Instead, it will be a causal story filled with sociological and historical details. This is because Hacking's nominalism says that the world does not come pre-packaged with facts, but is known via our idea- and object-constructions (Hacking 1999, 60). Again, since according to Hacking, all constructionists claim that at least some Xs, where X is either an idea or an object, need not have been as it is because it is the product of non-inevitable events and need not have existed at all or be "at all as it is," on his picture of robust idea- and object-construction, all "construction stories are histories" (Hacking 1999, 37 & 48). The strong version of idea-constructionism replaces normative epistemology with history or sociology. It treats the context of discovery and the context of justification as more or less one and the same thing. Stated slightly differently, on Hacking's account, "reasons for belief are replaced by causes, justifications with explanations, semantics with dynamics" (Haslanger 2012, 118).

Haslanger opposes Hacking's robust constructionism as a way of accurately representing the majority of social constructionist projects' assumptions, noting that a pertinent issue in social constructionist rhetoric is that of what justifies our ongoing commitment to a theory and its classification scheme (Haslanger 2012, 121). In her view, the answer either is not, or is not obviously, a causal issue. She worries that Hacking's

emphasis on causal stories ignores or underplays the importance that social constructionists see in examining theories' constitutive values of inquiry - values that "contribute to the justification of a theory, including coherence, supporting evidence, simplicity, fruitfulness, and so on" (Haslanger 2012, 121). As an example, Haslanger points out that many feminists are concerned to show that in addition to causal issues, contextual values are also relevant to the justification of a theory or classification. For instance, one might ask whether the motivating question in the inquiry is legitimate. One might also ask whether the methods allow all evidence to emerge and whether the research community exhibits sufficient diversity (Haslanger 2012, 121).

To sum up, Hacking's construal of idea-constructionism says that nothing justifies our possession of the idea, concept, or theory X. All we can do is say why we uphold X by means of a sociological or genealogical explanation. The other opposing extremist view says that it is the inherent structure of the world that justifies our upholding of the idea, concept, or theory X. Haslanger's view is that more philosophically interesting options are intermediate between these extremist opposing positions or are projects that ask what norms, whether constitutive or contextual, are the basis for justification (Haslanger 2012, 121). In Haslanger's lights, social constructionists are not only interested in the causes of X, but also in how best to explicate the nature of an extant category or kind and particularly, whether X is a natural or social category or kind. Because Hacking's social constructionisms (whether idea- or object-constructionisms) are causal histories, Haslanger argues that they fail to capture an important component of social constructionist critique. Causal stories fail to take issue with what is usually taken to be a concept's justification and continued application.

Hacking's (1999) characterization of object-construction says that some objects, including those we would typically not expect and especially kinds of people, are products of social-historical forces. For terminological clarity, as I did in Chapter One, it is once again worth noting that Hacking's usage of "kind" is sometimes ambiguous between an instance of a kind and the kind itself. Hacking treats both individual people and kinds of people as social constructions. To state the point differently, he sees kinds of people qua some kind and the objects qua the people falling under that kind as social constructions.

2.4 Interactive Kinds and the Looping Effect

Hacking (1999) sees child viewers of television, child abusers, schizophrenics, and women refugees, to name only a few examples, as constructed kinds of people or "interactive kinds." Here again, "kinds" refers to both the individual instances of some kind (e.g. particular women) and to the kinds themselves (e.g. *women*). Such kinds are subject to "the looping effect": the kinds, qua the people classified as some X, "become aware of how they are classified and modify their behavior accordingly" (Hacking 1999, 32). According to Hacking, the interaction between a person and a category happens through a person's awareness of being classified and is mediated "by the larger matrix of institutions and practices surrounding the classification" (Hacking 1999, 31-2). Object-construction of this sort happens when social situations provide concepts and socially available classifications that people take up to frame their self-understandings and which inform their intentions. For example, if a woman is classified as a woman refugee,

> she may be deported, or go into hiding, or marry to gain citizenship... She needs to become a woman refugee in order to stay in Canada; she learns what characteristics to establish, knows how to live her life. By living that life, she evolves, becomes a certain kind of person [a woman refugee]. And so it may

> make sense to say that the very individuals and their experiences are constructed within the matrix surrounding the classification "woman refugees." (Hacking 1999, 11)

Following Michel Foucault, Hacking is interested in what he refers to as "historical ontology" or what he calls "dynamic nominalism" (see Hacking's *Historical Ontology* (2004)). That is, Hacking is interested in "how our practices of naming interact with the things that we name" and in the relation between "what there is (and what comes into being) and our conception of it" (Hacking 2004, 2). On Hacking's account, as people's self-understanding evolves by their being classified as X, the meaning of the classification evolves along with them. This process, in turn, forms a "feedback loop." Hacking's notion of the looping effect underscores human beings' capacity for reflexivity and accommodates the ways in which a human being is both a knowing subject and an object of knowledge. The looping effect therefore refers not to the simple thought that human beings have the capacity for reflection or self-reflection, but to the idea that the very act of self-reflection alters the identity of the reflecting subject. "Indifferent kinds" are those kinds incapable of awareness as to how they are classified. "Quarks are not aware that they are quarks and are not altered by being classified as quarks" (Hacking 1999, 32).

Hacking's construal of object-construction points out that social classificatory schemes sometimes do more than merely describe or map already existing groups. They can both create and reinforce groupings and, as a result, individuals and groups can come to fit or alter the classifications by means of the looping effect. For Haslanger, causal stories about object-construction fail to pay sufficient attention to an object's or practice's constitution, as well as to the typical justification for its continued existence. In these senses, both purely causal idea- and object/practice-constructionist stories fail to

highlight "what's interesting in claiming that something[36] is, perhaps surprisingly, a social kind" (Haslanger 2012, 131). Haslanger suggests that the point

> is to shift our understanding of a category so we recognize the real basis for the unity of its members. As we shall see, there are importantly different sorts of cases. But because the difference between a natural and a social category has significance both for what's possible and for what we're responsible, the constructionist's general project, when successful, has important normative implications. (2012, 382)

To summarize, the differences between Hacking's and Haslanger's views of idea-constructionism of the categories and kinds of the social world are not best described in terms of disagreement. Rather, they differ in their understandings of the point of social constructionist analyses of idea-construction. Hacking's (1999) characterization of idea-constructionism emphasizes the causal aspects of the introduction, as well as the continued use and application of concepts and theories. Further, his depiction of idea-constructionism stresses the general non-inevitability of our ideas, concepts, and theories. Haslanger (2012) offers a more careful exposition of the various factors that influence the contingency of our ideas, concepts, and theories. Her point is that investigation into the various constitutive and situational factors that explain or characterize the non-inevitability of our ideas, concepts, and theories is important. Revealing the non-inevitability of the value-ladenness, of some idea, concept, or theory is, in her view, especially important. It represents a crucial step in the critique of an idea, concept, or theory. When it comes to the object-construction of the social world - that is, when it comes to the social construction of people qua kind of person - the social construction of kinds of people (i.e. the kind itself), or to the construction of social practices, Hacking and Haslanger seem more or less equally concerned to emphasize the non-inevitable

[36] Haslanger's (2012) account is ambiguous with respect to whether "something" refers merely to ideas or to objects/practices.

constitutive and situational factors that construct possible ways to take up and live out ways of being a person.

2.5 Haslanger's *Resisting Reality*: Approaches to the Question "What is X?"

Like Hacking, Haslanger (2012) attempts to articulate how social constructionist projects get off the ground. In some of her works, she goes beyond Hacking's largely descriptive account by providing prescriptive accounts. Her accounts attempt to show us how to go about revealing that properties, kinds, and practices usually considered to be necessary or essential to the being or the identity of a person or thing are really constituted by, or are the products of, social attitudes (see especially "Ideology, Generics, and Common Ground" in *Resisting Reality*). Unlike Haslanger, Hacking never presents himself as an activist. He does not proffer a normative account telling us whether or when to use social constructionism as a tool. Instead, he offers a *description* of how social constructionism is used by others for various purposes.

Haslanger (2012) introduces novel analytic tools and demarcates the concerns of various social constructionist programs in a way different from, though not incompatible with, Hacking's program. She delineates three approaches that may be taken when asking questions of the form "What is X?" A conceptual or internalist approach looks to a priori methods and to introspection, asks "What is our concept of X?", and aims to achieve reflective equilibrium by taking "into account intuitions about cases and principles" (Haslanger 2012, 386). Correspondingly, a conceptual genealogy, being backward looking, attempts to illustrate understandings, uses, and justifications of X (some concept) across time and among individuals who are differently positioned with respect to practices that employ the concept X (Haslanger 2012, 376). A descriptive approach

tries to identify whether our concepts track objective types, and its goal is to develop "more accurate concepts through… consideration of the phenomena, usually relying on empirical or quasi-empirical methods" (Haslanger 2012, 386). Descriptive projects attempt to elucidate and capture paradigmatic natural kinds (i.e. chemical, biological, neurological, and other purported natural kinds) and social kinds as well (institutions, practices, and other social kinds). Descriptive genealogies analyze the social matrices (history, practices, power relations) within which we discriminate and have discriminated in the past between Xs and non-Xs (Haslanger 2012, 376). Descriptive approaches may also attempt to track individuals' and groups' operative conceptions - that is, the way they apply a concept or delineate Xs from non-Xs (this may be accomplished through experimental philosophy, social psychology, or other empirical or quasi-empirical means). Finally, according to Haslanger, an ameliorative project asks "What is the point of having concept X?" and then asks "What conception of X would do the work we want it to do, best" (2012, 386)? In her view, the latter question requires normative input and its goal is to provide the concept we seek in light of our critically examined purposes - purposes that may be epistemic, ethical, or both (Haslanger 2012, 386). We may, of course, decide not to reform our concept of X, but rather to throw it out entirely. Further, although Haslanger does not say so herself, it is also possible that upon reflection, we may decide to keep our concept of X as it is.

If the three approaches (conceptual/internalist, descriptive, and ameliorative) produce different accounts of X, it is perhaps not immediately obvious why this is a problem. Depending on interests, theoretical commitments, and other considerations, it is both typical and expected that disagreements should arise among taxonomists across the

sciences. Of course, if we are realists in the sense that we take there to be one way the world is independent of our descriptions, then the existence of differences in taxonomies within the same domain does prima facie present a problem. However, I bracket this issue and focus instead on the problem as it concerns social constructionists. Once one considers why Haslanger elaborates on these approaches in the first place, it becomes clearer why a divergence between the results of the three approaches does constitute a problem for the social constructionist. She elucidates these three approaches in order to (i) emphasize the importance of debunking and ameliorative projects and (ii) draw attention to a common situation wherein people take themselves and others to be asking the same question and talking about the same thing, but are, in fact, talking past one another. To bring out more clearly why a mismatch among the three approaches can sometimes constitute a problem, she puts forth a three-fold distinction between manifest, operative, and target concepts, which corresponds, respectively, to the distinction between conceptual, descriptive, and ameliorative approaches. She notes that, in practice, the approaches are not usually neatly disentangled and the results of one approach may alter one's conception of the result arrived at by means of another approach (Haslanger 2012, 343). For example, I may believe that animals can be only female- or male-sexed and moreover, that save surgical or other medical interventions, sex remains fixed across an individual's lifetime. After watching a documentary about intersex people and naturally occurring sex changes, say, in clownfish, I may alter my conception of sex (i.e. I may no longer have a strict binary conception of sex and may no longer see sex as naturally fixed and permanently binary).

For Haslanger, a manifest concept is the concept with which one takes oneself to think (consciously or unconsciously) and the concept that one takes oneself to apply in sorting instances of Xs from non-Xs (this is the concept arrived at by what Haslanger refers to as the conceptual or internalist approach) (Haslanger 2012, 388). An operative concept is the concept that best captures the distinction that one actually makes in practice, which may or may not align with one's manifest concept (Haslanger 2012, 389). Lastly, a target concept is "that concept that, all things considered (my purposes, the facts, etc.), I should be employing" (this concept is sought by ameliorative projects) (Haslanger 2012, 389). According to Haslanger, it is possible that disparate manifest and operative concepts can operate together in some social matrix, whether or not the content between a society's concept and the individual's conception coincide. One task of debunking projects is to reveal to individuals and groups that, unbeknownst to them, their manifest and operative concepts may not align. A reason why Haslanger sees this exercise as having political or moral relevance is because, in some cases, underscoring the fact that our manifest concepts do not match our operative concepts makes it possible to expose how official and unofficial political and social concepts, for example, are masking how concepts actually operate. For Haslanger, the ultimate goal of an ameliorative project is to arrive at a situation where our manifest, operative, and target concepts align.

To flesh out Haslanger's distinctions, consider the following scenario. My manifest concepts of sex and gender (where gender is understood as the social meaning of sex) might not be binary. I may take myself to be a gender abolitionist or I may think that there exist more than two genders. I might also know that there exist ambiguously or

intersex individuals. Upon reflection, I might think that sex and gender fall along a spectrum. However, it is possible that in practice (that is, operatively) and unbeknownst to me, I sort individuals as *either* male or female. Similarly, in reflective moods, I may be committed to gender abolition or to gender equality and I may be aware that it is wrong to harbour feelings of superiority or contempt toward others based on their sex or gender alone. Nonetheless, unknowingly, I may harbour feelings of inferiority toward myself because I am female and see my female friends as, "by nature," inferior to males. In these cases, I possess manifest concepts of sex and gender that are not sexist, but I do not, perhaps, realize that I also have sexist attitudes or sometimes engage in sexist practices (or, to put it more strongly, I do not realize that I am sexist). In this example, my manifest concept differs from my operative concept, though it is not immediately clear that my manifest concept is identical with my target concept or with others' target concepts (depending on the situation, there may be better target concepts available, unbeknownst to me and to others). Thus, the ameliorative approach does not only aim to arrive at an ideal or appropriate target concept, but also, to enlighten people with respect to the divergence between their manifest and operative concepts. These are important aspects and goals of any unmasking or debunking project.

2.6 Haslanger on Discursive Construction and Thick and Thin Social Roles

To repeat: according to Hacking's (1999) understanding of object-construction, social classificatory schemes can do more than describe or map extant groups. They can both create and reinforce groupings and, in turn, individuals and groups can come to fit or alter the classifications by means of the looping effect. Haslanger refers to this phenomenon as "discursive" construction: "something is discursively constructed just in case it is the way

it is, to some substantial extent, because of what is attributed (and/or self-attributed) to it" (Haslanger 2012, 88). Agreeing with Hacking (1999, 2004) then, what Haslanger's thesis of discursive construction proposes is that, to a large degree, each of us is who we are because of what has been attributed to us and because of what we have attributed to ourselves.

Connecting Haslanger's thesis of discursive construction to her three-fold distinction between manifest, operative, and target concepts, it is possible to conclude that there exists a mismatch between someone's self-understanding of their manifest, operative, and target concepts. It is possible, for example, that Kate believes that, in practice, she performs or operates in alignment with her beliefs about how she should operate in the social world as a female-gendered person, but that she actually fails to perform or operate according to her own understanding of how she is or should be operating as female-gendered. Another possibility is that her manifest concept of what *being female-gendered* entails fails to align with the dominant or socially sanctioned concept of what *being female-gendered* entails. Discursive construction coupled with Haslanger's three-fold distinction between manifest, operative, and target concepts underscores the thought that while we act under intentional descriptions, our beliefs about what we are doing may fail to align with what we are really doing and further, that our beliefs about what others take us to be or to be doing may fail to align with what we take ourselves to be and take ourselves to be doing. Revealing these discrepancies is an important component of debunking and emancipatory projects.

For Haslanger (2012), what or who we are may be more or less dependent on our self-attributions, others' attributions, our natural endowments, and it is moreover highly

relative to situation, which is to say that what or who we are is dependent on such factors as time, geographical location, culture, and so on. Attributions and self-attributions are closely connected to Haslanger's views on the realism of social categories and kinds. To say, for example, that sex and gender are real is to say that they carry easily demonstrated

> social meanings to the extent that the interpretation of someone as male or female... has implications for their social position: the roles they are expected to play in the social context, the norms in terms of which they are evaluated, the identities they are expected to have and the like. (Haslanger 2012, 7)

One could therefore think of social identities in the manner of what Paul C. Taylor in "Race Problems, Unknown Publics, Paralysis, and Faith" (2007) calls "counterfactually specifiable information bearing traits": to know that X is a Y is to know that X is likely to engage with the world in such and such a way or be subject to such and such expectations. Quoting Taylor:

> To know that Betty is black is to know that we would have had to ride the Jim Crow car in 1940s Georgia; to know that Tom is Asian is to know that he would have been prevented from achieving naturalized citizenship or even, typically, from entering [the United States] between 1880 or so and the 1960s... The method of radical constructionism, then, involves identifying the patterned differences between individual social locations to a conjunction of probabilistic and statistical social markers. (2007, 138)

Haslanger's distinction between intrinsic or natural properties and social properties is compatible with Ásta's (2013) distinction between grounding and conferred properties. According to Haslanger, some social categories like gender and race are not dependent on the intrinsic features of bodies even though the markers of belonging to some category are (Haslanger 2012, 7). Many, though not all, social roles, categories, or kinds (understood as ways of being a person) are defined by "a set of attitudes and patterns of treatment towards bodies as they are perceived (or imagined) through frameworks of salience implicit in the attitudes" (Haslanger 2012, 7). Connecting this

thought to Taylor's account of counterfactually specifiable information bearing traits, on Haslanger's account, to be an X is to be subject to such and such expectations and to have certain self-understandings that one is such and such or ought to perform in such and such a way.

In "Social Construction: The Debunking Project," a chapter of *Resisting Reality*, Haslanger focuses her attention on another aspect of social role assignment, namely how social roles can be "thick" or "thin." By "thick," Haslanger means that a social role entails a broad and substantial range of expectations, obligations, entitlements, and norms and by "thin," she means that a social role carries less heavy expectations, obligations, and norms. To draw out and explicate the distinction, Haslanger examines the concept *widow*, suggesting that in "developed" parts of the world, *widow* is a thin social role, while in certain "developing" parts of the world, it is thick. Despite Haslanger's claim about the thinness of being a widow in developed parts of the world, it is more likely that the thickness or thinness of being a widow varies along class and ethnicity lines even in "affluent" and developed countries.[37] Haslanger attends to the story of a woman named Christiana, who, having being categorized as a widow in a developing part of the world endured harsh rituals, which caused her to become seriously ill.[38] "Widows in many parts of the developing world are denied basic human rights, for example, they are often stripped of property, subjected to violence, and face systematic discrimination in custom and law" (Haslanger 2012, 124). Widows constitute a social group in situations where widowhood is associated with significant changes in social and material conditions that are imposed after the husband dies. Of course, widows in all parts of the world constitute

[37] I thank Lorraine Code for noting this.
[38] Haslanger (2012) notes that Christiana's story was reported on http://www.womenforwomen.org/ in 2002 and that since then, more recent examples have replaced Christiana's story.

a social group, but presumably the category is less thick in the developed world (i.e. in developed countries, *widow* entails a less broad and substantial range of expectations, obligations, norms and so on than it does in Christiana's situation). Since widows in both the developed and "underdeveloped" world may experience changes in their property rights, on both the thin and the thick understanding of *widow*, *widowhood* constitutes a social and a legal category, but with different implications in the two situations (that is, with different implications in the thick and thin contexts).

Christiana's being a widow is partly a result of her having been classified as such "in a matrix where that categorization carries substantial weight" (Haslanger 2012, 124). While it is not strictly true that the classification alone made Christiana a widow, neither is it true that it was the death of her husband alone that caused her to be a widow (Haslanger 2012, 124). As Haslanger notes, if Christiana's husband did not actually die, but was only thought to have died, Christiana's being classified as a widow might carry exactly the same effects (Haslanger 2012, 124). This possibility, namely that Christiana is treated as a widow independently of whether or not her husband is dead, is compatible with both Hacking's and Ásta's programs. Hacking's and Ásta's accounts only require that people be thought of in certain ways. On Haslanger's, Hacking's, and Ásta's accounts, one can be treated as a widow or some other X - e.g. one can be subject to all that widowhood or X-hood entails in a particular situation - independent of whether or not one really is a widow or whatever else (perhaps a woman's husband is only thought to be dead, perhaps someone is only thought to be queer, and so on). Moreover, Hacking, Haslanger, and Ásta agree that there exist cases where an individual does not accept (they resist or reject) the classification under which they are placed. As Haslanger comments,

> ...one may be profoundly affected by the matrix without accepting the narrative, following the script, or even knowing the rules. A Christian widow in a non-Christian context may refuse to "identify" as a widow or to participate in the local widowhood practices. Nevertheless, the status of widow is, without her acquiescence, imposed upon her. I would propose that she is, as much as the more compliant woman, socially positioned as a widow, that is, a member of the social kind *widow*. (2012, 127)

Further, on Haslanger's, Hacking's, and Ásta's accounts, one can be categorized as an X independently of whether or not one is aware of being classified as such. The possibility of someone's being categorized as an X and being unaware of their classification is captured by Ásta's elucidation of how property conferral is accomplished by others (official or unofficial authorities), and accordingly, how belonging to one category rather than another can change with context. Khalidi (2010) is most explicit in arguing that in order for interactivity between an individual and a category or kind X, as well as the looping effect to take place, awareness on the part of those classified is not a necessary condition. Thus, Haslanger, Hacking, Ásta, and Khalidi (2010) each allow, in the same spirit if not the same letter, that in at least some cases, in order for an individual to count as or be an X, it is not necessary that they be aware of the classification under which they are placed. As Haslanger writes commenting on Hacking's (1999) analysis of women refugees, a woman refugee may come to conform to the conditions that define refugee status without ever coming to think of herself as a *woman refugee* (Haslanger 2012, 129).

2.7 Positionality, a Return to Ásta's Conferralism, and Intersectionality

Haslanger's analysis of widowhood draws attention to the fact that the meaning of *widow* and the practices in which one is "supposed to" engage after being widowed, as well as others' behaviour and attitudes towards widows, vary across space and time. Thus, social

constructionists concerned with the effects of categorization for individuals are usually interested not only in the meaning of nominal classifications, or to state it differently, in the meaning of concepts independent of context (i.e. *widow*, *woman refugee*, and so on), but also in the larger social matrix that determines whether social categorizations will be thick or thin (Haslanger 2012, 126). Like Hacking's account of the looping effect, social constructionists and social scientists are also interested in the ways in which

> [m]embers of... subordinate groups typically internalize and eventually come to resemble and even reinforce the dominant image because of the coercive power behind it. Thus the dominants' view appears to be confirmed, when in fact they have the power to enforce it. (Haslanger 2012, 6)

Social constructionists see the goal of debunking projects to be that of undermining the sense of necessity in what are really conventional categories or practices, and moreover, exposing to individuals their complicity in these conventions, including the ways in which their beliefs and other practices contribute to the perpetuation of other beliefs and practices.

According to Haslanger, the thicker a social role, the broader the expectations and norms one is expected to fulfill or is subjected to. Correspondingly, the thicker a social role, the more intelligible and applicable the idea becomes that one can perform one's role to better or worse degrees. Though Searle has little to say on the idea, the notion of being remiss, to use Rust's (2006) language, in performing one's status function or social role is also addressed by Haslanger (2012). Further, more fully than does Searle, Haslanger attempts to provide an account of where the coercive, but invisible power of social roles originates and how it is perpetuated. Haslanger proffers an account by means of the following example:

> The interpretation of human bodies as "fit" for some activities (and not others) motivates and "justifies" divisions of labor and the separation of domains and

> forms of activity, that is, social roles. For these roles, then, there are norms... what it takes to do that labor or activity *well*. For example, those interpreted as having a female body are regarded as fit or suited for mothering, which is taken to entail a different relation to small children than fathering: even if the norms for mothering and fathering differ across time and culture, what makes a good mother is not thought to be the same as what makes a good father. But if females are expected to perform the role of mothering and to perform it well, then rather than coerce them to fulfill this role, it is much better for females to be motivated to perform it. So the norms must be internalized, that is, they must be understood as part of one's identity and defining what would count as one's success as an individual... Ideally, one will develop unconscious patterns of behavior that reinforce the role in oneself and others and enable one to judge others by its associated norms. (2012, 9-10)

As Kevin Dunn suggests in "Interrogating White Male Privilege" (2008), having a dominant social role, or to use Haslanger's language, a social position with thick enablements (rather than thick disadvantages) can sometimes work to permit greater tolerance for being remiss (or indifference as to whether one is remiss) with respect to one's social role. Reflecting on his position as a white Western male academic, Dunn writes:

> Even though the image I presented/performed was often a slightly warped reflection, with my piercings, tattoos, and kooky hair, it was an advantage in the racist and patriarchal world in which we live. In fact, it was the result of white male privilege that I could have an "alternative" self-presentation, as the comfort zone was wide enough that earrings and tattoos did not fundamentally challenge the fact that I am white, heterosexual and male. Of course, the comfort zone has its limits, as I have frequently discovered when I have deviated too far from the expected norm of dominant discourses of masculinity. (2008, 48-9)

Haslanger rightly points out that there are many ways one can be remiss with respect to performing her or his social role.

> Individuals bear complex relations to the dominant schemas of their cultural context; they may be ignorant of or insensitive to a schema, may reject a schema, or may modify a schema for their own purposes. One may be deliberately out of sync with one's milieu, or just "out of it." (Haslanger 2012, 465)

Haslanger's notion of positionality complements Ásta's conferralist account. Haslanger's account is also implicitly conferralist, though she does not use the language of conferralism, but rather of "assignment." While Ásta focuses on the synchronic aspects of conferralism - that is, on the complicated dynamics of the conferral of properties upon persons at a given time and in a given situation, Haslanger's account is broader insofar as she focuses on structural injustices and the systemic injustices to which they give rise. But like Ásta, Haslanger sees the assignment of social roles and their accompanying scripts (i.e. a role's associated conventions or prescriptions on someone's behaviour qua X) as closely related to the issue of thick and thin social roles, as well as being highly context-dependent (dependent on one's place in history, one's geographical location, and so on). Ásta and Haslanger agree that even when it comes to the same historical period and geographical location, the same person can count as an X in some situations, while not in others.

> [P]atterns of thought and action take different forms depending on time, place, context, culture, and they generate divisions of labor, roles, norms, identities, and so on that are specific to the location (Haslanger 2012, 8).

Using race as an example, Michael Root (2000) claims similarly that "[r]ace does not travel" (631). By this, he means quite literally (and some might think, radically) that

> [s]ome men who are black in New Orleans now would have been octoroons there some years ago or would be white in Brazil today. Socrates had no race in ancient Athens, though he would be a white man in Minnesota. (Root 2000, 631–632)

Mallon suggests that Root's claim is "dramatic" for two reasons: first, because common sense "takes it that a person can fall under concepts like black, white, or Asian even if they exist in a distant time or place" and second, because "common sense takes it that a person's race does not change as the person travels through space and time" (2004, 657).

One might distinguish between two versions of Root's thesis, one more radical than the other: (i) race is relative (there is never any fact of the matter) and (ii) race is contextual, but not relative (there is a fact of the matter, but it is relative or indexed to time, place, and various other factors). Haslanger's and Ásta's accounts are consistent with the second reading of Mallon's construal of Root's thesis. Thus, given the phenomenon of positionality, Root's thesis, radical as it may seem (that is, as contrary to commonsense as it may seem), aptly characterizes the complexity, instability, and in some cases, the very short half life of social roles.

The thickness of being X (occupying some social position or being characterized as a certain kind of person) can also vary depending on context. For Ásta, this is possible because the conferral of a property involves a five-part conferralist schema:

> *Conferred property*: being of gender G, for example, a woman, man, trans
> *Who*: the subject S in the particular context C
> *What*: the perception of the subject S that the person have the grounding property P
> *When*: in some particular context C
> *Grounding property*: the grounding property P (Ásta 2013, 9)

Where any one item of the five-part schema differs, so too perhaps can the script that follows from the conferral of a property and so too can one fail or succeed in meeting the conditions for counting as an X (or, to use Ásta's language, being taken to possess some property X). Though not explicitly noted by Ásta, it seems that a conferred property can be thicker or thinner depending on others' beliefs about the expectations that follow from having (or, to use Ásta's language once more, being perceived to have) property X. Though Haslanger's (2012) account of positionality is not as specific or rigorous in laying out the specific conditions which synchronically determine a person's social role, it is nonetheless consistent with the view that Ásta proffers.

I return to Ásta's example of gender conferral addressed in the previous chapter in order to compare her account to that of Haslanger. According to Ásta, in a given situation, others have the power to confer a gender upon us, even though they might not have explicit authority, and moreover, "the conferral of gender involves a complicated negotiation over what rules apply in the context and who should play what role" (Ásta 2013, 9). Like Hacking and Haslanger, Ásta suggests that the complicated negotiation involves a matrix wherein official or unofficial authorities confer some properties, some by citing official authority, and some by appeal to structures of power that may or may not lack normative support. As Ásta suggests, some of these structures may be maintained and constituted by habit or by threat. In other words, the conferral of gender can involve citing structures that have been manifest or operative in other situations and taken up by the individual conferralist and then utilized consciously or unconsciously across situations. These maps place constraints and enablements on individuals in virtue of what constitutes or qualifies someone as being some kind of person, as well as what that social position is thought to entail in terms of constraints and enablements. Again, Searle can perhaps accommodate Haslanger's (2012) attribution account and Ásta's conferralist account by easily modifying the original "X counts as Y in C" rule as follows: X counts as Y in C for S (or by S's authority) or S makes it such that X counts as Y in C. What is particularly interesting about Haslanger's account is that it highlights the idea that being (or merely being believed to be) an X can carry with it expectations and guidelines for behaviour (which are more or less explicit) *for others* in their dealings with a person qua X. This phenomenon is not inconsistent with Searle's account, but the

phenomenon itself, as well as its operation and complexity, is more carefully examined by Haslanger (2012).

The prototypical categories, concepts, and kinds that have been most apt for social constructionist analysis in Canada and the United States are gender and race. Though research has tended to focus on each of these categories as relatively unified "as if we can isolate what it means to be a woman, or to be Black, by giving an analysis that applies to each and every case," human beings are complex, belonging, not necessarily, to only a single racial category or to a single "nameable" gender (Haslanger 2012, 5). Moreover, we are not only gendered or raced, we also have "a class, a nationality, an age, a collection of abilities and disabilities, and more" and thus, "many feminists have argued that the social forces that form us, and their effects, cannot be decomposed into discrete elements…" (Haslanger 2012, 5). The sheer complexity or "the interdependence and the experiential blending of an individual's lived social positions" of human identity thus raises the question of whether or not it is even possible to give a unified account of social categories and kinds (Haslanger 2012, 5).

Recognition of this complexity raises methodological concerns insofar as it highlights a practical difficulty in applying the constitutive rule "X counts as Y in C" to the boundaries of our actual institutions and social kinds. However, insofar as Searle sees himself as a philosopher of social ontology and as an underlabourer for social science, rather than a social scientist,

> it is not clear that Searle would be impressed with its [the spirit of this argument's] force. It may be the case, in fact, that our institutions must be rendered in terms of a variety of overlapping characterizations, but Searle might point out that what is important is that each of these characterizations has the form "X counts as Y in C," and it is this form that is unavoidable. (Rust 2006, 54)

Yet, given the multifarious social categories and kinds which individuals live out, and given the possible impossibility of their disentanglement, Haslanger asks whether we can even assume or proceed with research under the assumption that terms like 'woman' or 'White' even have determinate meanings (Haslanger 2012, 5). If the answer is negative, then she aptly asks the following questions: (i) How should social constructionists, both as theoreticians and as politically engaged individuals or groups, proceed in analysis? (ii) By what methodology should we proceed in analysis? and (iii) What determines the meaning(s) of contested social category- and kind-terms (Haslanger 2012, 5)? These issues also raise the matter of ideological and constitutive intellectual allegiances, or to put it less politically, the matter of disciplinary differences within philosophy. To oversimplify, these issues raise interesting points of contention between analytic and non-analytic philosophers in terms of their respective methodologies and goals.

Haslanger suggests that we can understand the phenomenon of intersectionality as referring to the multiple positions that inform and determine (i) an individual's identity as well as (ii) the meaning and the powers or disablements that flow from a given social role based on that role's position relative to others and the multiple roles within a social matrix, which an individual lives out. Haslanger writes:

> [W]e can gain insight into the phenomenon of intersectionality by (roughly) superimposing... race, gender, and other social positions... like gels on a stage light: the light shines blue and a red gel is added, and the light shines purple; if a yellow gel is added instead of the red, the light shines green. Similarly, gender is lived differently depending on the racial (and other) positions in which one is situated. Just as a light may appear different colors depending on which combination of gels it is filtered through, the gender norms for Black women, Latinas, and White women differ tremendously, and even among women of the same race, they differ depending on class, nationality, sexuality, religion, historical period, and so on. Just as we can gain understanding of the green light on the stage by learning it is created by a combination of blue and yellow gels, and can adjust the light by manipulating the gels, the hope is that we can gain

> understanding of the lived experience of those who are gendered and raced by having the analytic tools to distinguish them. (2012, 9)

Here, Haslanger seems to imply that in order to understand some of the experiences of those who are "gendered and raced," one must (always?) first disentangle gender from race. Plausibly, there may be certain generalizations that apply and experiences typical to women qua women. What she emphasizes is that there may be other generalizations that apply and experiences typical, for example, to women qua Latina women that are not applicable to women qua White women or Asian women. According to Linda Martín Alcoff, it is therefore perhaps more appropriate to say that gender marks

> a reliable pattern of difference in experience within a culturally specific social group, because the substantive features that characterize any given gender identity will be dependent on cultural practices. (2006, 43)

Certain groups may take themselves to have little in common - for instance, those who constitute the group "pan-Asian" may take themselves to have little in common with one another, despite outsiders' prejudicial beliefs that there is a unified Asian experience. However, context can be a force to bring otherwise disparate groupings together. Indeed, in some cases, it is sufficient for a community that treats all those it perceives as "Asian" as being of a kind, in order for a unified experience of "being Asian" to manifest. Although few would contest a relation between power structures and identity construction, the issue of whether identities are reducible to an oppressive genealogy is controversial.

> Korean, Chinese, and Japanese immigrants to the United States may experience similar kinds of anti-Asian racism but decline to think of themselves as sharing anything - for quite good reasons, mind you - until an enterprising pan-Asian activist brings them all together to respond to the murder of Vincent Chan. (Taylor 2007, 139)

This phenomenon raises another point, namely that identities can also be created in response to local contexts, which is something that neither Haslanger nor Ásta touch upon explicitly, but which is not inconsistent with either of their accounts.

Intersectionality, coupled with the phenomenon of positionality, raises other interesting issues. Consider, as Haslanger does, the notion that physical weakness is a norm for women of certain classes, races, periods, but not for others. In the spirit of Ásta (2013), a norm can apply and not apply to the same woman depending on her situation. If, for example, women are generally considered the weaker sex, this generalization may nonetheless fail to apply across all situations. For instance, perhaps weakness is not thought to be a norm for women in childbirth or for butch lesbians. Haslanger suggests that in some cases, we can disentangle the social factors that position weakness as a sign of the feminine (Haslanger 2012, 10).

> It might have been a norm for "Southern belles" to be weak, but not for their maids, because it is a crucial indicator of race and class privilege that females are relieved of the burdens of physical work and are to be cared for by males and non-privileged females. (Haslanger 2012, 11)

In this example, Haslanger takes it that weakness is a social mechanism, which coerces White women into their proper place in a given racial and gendered hierarchy, and brings with it both privilege and disadvantage, depending on the woman's position. Indeed,

> the dominant norms dictating that women should be weak but Blacks should be strong puts Black women in an impossible bind: they cannot possibly excel in the terms set by the dominant culture. (Haslanger 2012, 11)

Here, the very construal of femininity in a culture may be the norm for only a certain population of particularly situated women "making women in subordinated groups either invisible or apparently inferior qua women" (Haslanger 2012, 11). In a similar spirit, in *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir writes of this phenomenon: "...in

speaking of certain women, connoisseurs declare that they are not women, although they are equipped with a uterus like the rest" ([1949]/1989, ix-x). The context-dependence of social roles, properties, and so on follows from Searle's, Hacking's, Haslanger's, and Ásta's accounts. However, what the phenomena of positionality and intersectionality most clearly demonstrate is that since a person's identity or their belonging to a category or kind is defined by her or his place in a system of social relations, many aspects of identity (including some surprising aspects) turn out to be relational or extrinsic rather than intrinsic. Another point to emphasize is that in order to properly capture the complexity of social roles, Hacking's (1999) account of the looping effect is indeed more complicated than he himself explicitly portrays it.

Renaming the looping effect "the relational and cumulative loop" might better capture the implicit aspects of Hacking's looping effect. On his account, the loop is relational because being characterized as X is at least partly dependent on other people's attitudes and it is cumulative because the characterization of belonging to category X (and what expectations follow from the characterization) can be iterated indefinitely. On the picture developed in this chapter, the meaning and existence of a social category or kind is determined by its place in a space and time. Further, what decides the criteria that determine who counts as a member of some category or kind, as well as whether that category or kind carries thick or thin enablements or disadvantages, is possibly dependent on a person's intrinsic properties and by extrinsic properties as well. The individuals' and properties' relations to other categories, kinds, institutions, and so on in the larger social matrix, in turn, determine the meaning of what *being some X* and what constraints and enablements flow *being some X* entails. Hence, what constitutes the criteria for belonging

to a given category or kind X and what category- or kind-membership entails both for the person classified as X, as well as for others in their dealings with an individual qua X is dependent on, or culminates in, a complicated relation of interrelated categories and kinds whose positions are each (possible) moving targets. As one element of the matrix evolves, it can affect other categories or kinds to varying degrees. Put most dramatically, and at its most extreme, one might say that the looping effect shows that what *is*, is always on the move. What Hacking's looping effect does highlight, even in its original form, is that to be labeled X requires more than, or may not actually require, falling within the extension of X. One must also see oneself or be seen by others as an X (whether or not one really is an X) in order for self-attributions of X-hood or being labeled an X to have causal effects in the world.

2.8 Haslanger on Ideology and Debunking Widowhood: Ideology/Hegemony

So far, Haslanger's analysis of social categories and kinds and its relation to the accounts of Searle, Hacking, and Ásta have been examined. I now turn to what Haslanger means by debunking and how debunking relates to the analytic tools expounded within this chapter: i.e. manifest, operative, and target concepts, intersectionality, positionality, and thick and thin social roles. To begin, an account of what I mean by "ideology" is in order. I do not use "ideology" in a Marxian sense. The Marxian usage is critical, negative, and is sometimes thought to presuppose an ideology-free truth. Instead, I follow Haslanger's (2012) usage. By "ideology," Haslanger means to refer to habits of thought, unconscious patterns of response, and background assumptions that make up a particular social structure; her use is therefore not pejorative (Haslanger 2012, 18). Ideology understood in this descriptive sense is both pervasive, as well as unavoidable. Ideology can, of course,

also be understood in the narrower, pejorative sense to refer to representations, ideas, or beliefs that are somehow misguided (e.g. being contrary to the "real" interests of an individual or a group and so on), but unless stated otherwise, I do not intend this latter meaning.

According to Haslanger, ideologies are maintained by social structures, which are

> a set of interdependent practices. Practices, in turn, are shared dispositions (schemas) to respond to certain parts of the world (resources); some of the dispositions are encoded as beliefs and other attitudes, but some are merely habitual responses. (2012, 20)

In Haslanger's lights, the more hegemonic the ideology or social structure, the more natural or inevitable it seems and the more it constrains one's imagination to conceive of alternatives. Haslanger follows Susan Silbey's "Ideology, Power and Justice" (1998) in suggesting that the least hegemonic usage of "ideology" refers to contests to establish understandings of X and also is used to make justice claims by appeal to alternative ideologies. Haslanger also follows Silbey in seeing the most hegemonic ideologies, or more simply, "hegemony," as referring to situations where meanings are so well-entrenched that ideology qua ideology is invisible. Ideologies, then, can be "more or less contested, more or less hegemonic. The more hegemonic, the less conscious and less articulate they are" (Haslanger 2012, 448). Hegemony, just or unjust, therefore appears inevitable, natural, or given.

> [This phenomenon] is easily generated due to the "loopiness" of social structure: we respond to the world that has been shaped to trigger those very responses without being conscious of the shaping, so our responses seem to be called for by the way the world is. (Haslanger 2012, 468)

Similarly, in considering woman's subordinate and oppressed position, Catherine MacKinnon writes in *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (1989):

> Once power constructs reality... the subordination... is made invisible. Dissent becomes impossible as well as rare. What a woman is, is defined in pornographic terms… this is what pornography does. If [we] look neutrally on the reality of gender so produced, the harm that has been done will not be perceived as harm. It becomes just the way things are. (59)

One task of ideology critique is to reveal or make more explicit an operative ideology. This process might require the production of genealogies and ideology critiques, which involves exposing or more clearly elucidating the framework that a social group employs, the possible history of that framework, and its history's relations to the practices and institutions that a social group currently upholds. In cases where ideology is more or less invisible - that is, where the climate is hegemonic, a goal of ideology critique is to "reveal" (or make explicit) operative ideologies to make them available for critical analysis.

> Questions of aptness or justice don't arise for what is taken for granted. However, once articulated, ideology can (in principle) be debated and reformed. So one goal of ideology critique is to elucidate the conceptual and narrative frameworks that undergird our social interaction, thus making them available for critical examination. (Haslanger 2012, 19)

With a better understanding of ideology, ideology critique, and specifically, Haslanger's use of these notions, I now turn to Haslanger's analysis of the complexity involved in debunking projects.

Again, Haslanger's distinction between thick and thin social positions refers to the idea that some social positions carry with them more or less privileging entitlements and opportunities or disabling treatment and prospects than others. Thin positions carry little social weight and thick positions significantly empower or disempower (Haslanger 2012, 126). "Being a widow in the contemporary United States is a much thinner social position than being a widow in, say, the region where Christiana lives," namely a part of the

developing world (Haslanger 2012, 126). As in most cases where a group is systematically mistreated, explanations and rationalizations exist. As Haslanger glosses Chima Korieh's *Widowhood Among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria* (1996),

> ...in some traditions, because a widow has special connection to the deceased she is considered unclean and must go into ritual seclusion. She may not touch herself, even to bathe or feed herself. She relies on older widows to care for her. Initially, she may be given no clothes or only "rags"; eventually she must wear special clothes of mourning. (Korieh 1996, chs. 2, 3 as paraphrased in Haslanger 2012, 126)

However, as Haslanger points out, someone dressed in rags and denied the opportunity to bathe or feed herself will likely appear "unclean" (Haslanger 2012, 126). Given the situation in which Christiana (a widow subject to think and disabling treatment) finds herself, it is her "metaphysical uncleanliness" that justifies the rituals that, in turn, cause her physical uncleanliness and social alienation. "[S]he may not touch herself, even to bathe, *because* she is unclean" (Haslanger 2012, 127). Christiana's actual physical uncleanliness serves as evidence for the correctness of her treatment, when it is simply evidence that her treatment is effective (Haslanger 2012, 127). As Charles W. Mills (2007) argues, this sort of self-fulfilling prophecy is similarly apparent in what has come to be known as "white normativity," which refers to "the centering of the Euro and later Euro-American reference group as the constitutive norm" (Mills 2007, 25). Mills writes:

> [W]ith Europe's gradual rise to global dominance, the European variant becomes entrenched as an overarching, virtually unassailable framework, a conviction of exceptionalism and superiority that seems vindicated by the facts, and thenceforth, circularly, shaping perception of the facts. We rule the world because we are superior; we are superior because we rule the world. (2007, 25)

For Haslanger, when it comes to debunking the thick and disabling conception of widowhood that women like Christiana endure, the debunking social constructionist will

be concerned to expose the self-fulfilling prophecy of widows' metaphysical uncleanliness. In particular, the social constructionist will be concerned to show that the thickness of widowhood

> …is not naturally or metaphysically justified, that her appearance is not evidence of the rightness of the rituals, that practices structured apparently as a response to the condition of "widowhood" actually create the condition. (Haslanger 2012, 127)

Further, the debunker will usually also try to show that the rituals and practices involved are unjust and therefore should not be maintained in their current form (Haslanger 2012, 127).

But what exactly is metaphysically wrong with the thick conception of widowhood? Haslanger is well aware that there are serious methodological issues involved in ideology critique.

> If ideology partly constitutes the social world, then it seems that a description of the ideological formations will be true, and it is unclear what is, epistemically speaking, wrong with them. (Haslanger 2012, 467)

"[O]nce we constitute our social world, descriptions of it not only appear true, but are true" (Haslanger 2012, 448-9). How, then, is ideology critique even possible? To begin to answer this question, it is worth repeating one of Searle's claims once more: one need not assent or approve of the practices or the expectations involved with some social role in order to see X as a Y (e.g. one can understand that others see persons qua X as morally lacking without also considering persons qua X to be morally lacking).

Given that Haslanger sees the justness of rituals and practices as parasitic on the metaphysics that underpin them (which, once entrenched "are true"), it is unclear why, or in virtue of what - save from the perspective of "we" (the presumed readers who are outsiders with respect to Christiana's society) - the practices involved in this

understanding of widowhood are unjust. In this sense, Haslanger's response is unsatisfying. However, she reminds us that ideology critique *assumes* values and that it is not part of its task to provide either a foundation for normative evaluation or answers to metaethical questions (Haslanger 2012, 20). In other words, rather than attempting to provide transcendental or transcultural (universal) moral principles, ideology critique deals with the immanent. To use a spatial metaphor, ideology critique toils down here on Earth rather than surveying from up above. But bracketing the issue of whether "we" (Haslanger and the presumed reader) take the practices involved in the thick conception of widowhood at hand to be unjust, how can a social constructionist consistently maintain that a thick and disempowering conception of widowhood rests on a metaphysically false picture? The social constructionist may be able to "reveal" or persuade others that the thick conception rests on or is justified by social factors and is therefore non-inevitable. But even if this is shown, it does not explain why the actors in Christiana's situation are not justified in nonetheless believing that Christiana is metaphysically unclean (they may cite religious factors, convention, appeal to authorities, and so on). Showing that X is socially founded does not, in and of itself, show that we or others should amend or throw out X.

What resources does the debunker have at her disposal? To appeal to the way the world is, independent of us, misses the point. Once we have granted that being a widow involves occupying a social role, there is no point in appealing to the way the world is independent of human beings and their ideas as an argument for why X should be done away with or amended. If one counters by providing a metaphysics that says a husband's death makes no difference to a woman's "cleanliness" or "uncleanliness" or argues that

the very category of metaphysical cleanliness/uncleanliness is metaphysically suspect, in virtue of what does one decide "the correct" metaphysics, "the correct" social categories? The wording of the question, it seems, provides the answer and is consistent with the causal and constitutive construction of social categories and kinds that has been elaborated in this and the preceding chapters: in short, the answer is that *we decide*. The next questions, then, are: "Who is *we*?" or "*Whose* metaphysics?"

The question "Are there widows?" admits of an easy affirmative answer. The question of who counts as a widow in such and such a situation also admits of true or false answers. But the question of whether *widow* should be a thin or thick category or the question of whether some concept should continue to be perpetuated in any form, like the question of whether such and such burdens and privileges should attach to being categorized as some X, remains in need of analysis. Is it simply subjective? In the end, the answer may be affirmative. But this is too quick. Let us first attempt to unpack the complicated metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical issues that are involved.

To begin, remember that Haslanger characterizes the debunker as arguing that the thick conception of widow rests on a false metaphysical picture. But contra Haslanger, it would seem that there is some difficulty in making sense of the very idea that a metaphysics of the social world can carry false assumptions. Harvey Cormier puts the issue succinctly in "Ever Not Quite: Unfinished Theories, Unfinished Societies, and Pragmatism" (2007): "If I and someone else can be confronted with the same reality but come up with two different theories of what is going on right in front of us, then how can I be sure that mine is the theory free of ideology" (64)? Like any conspiracy theorist, the debunker must explain why she has managed to avoid the conspiracy. The worry might

be cashed out in several ways. Perhaps it is problematic to claim that metaphysical accounts concerning some domain of subjects/objects other than one's own (or one that most people accept within a given milieu) carry false assumptions. Surely a solipsistic metaphysical system - one that belongs to me alone - has no social traction by definition. But one might think that the former construal - that the metaphysical system to which most adhere in my milieu is the least full of error - is no more problematic than saying that all previous scientific theories were false except the one that is currently held by most experts, which is a position many scientists uphold. However, as the argument sketched from Searle through Haslanger in the current and the preceding chapter has suggested, there exists an ineliminable role for persons' intentional attitudes in creating, sustaining, and changing aspects of the social world. Hence, the analogy with natural science does not quite carry through. There is, or at least I have argued along with Searle, Haslanger, and Ásta, a tight connection between ideology and metaphysics.

We make and change what *is* by thinking something is the case. In other words, some of what there is and what some of what there will be is, in some sense, up to us. Hence, Cormier, like Rorty, thinks that we should dispense with talk of ideology altogether. If we have decided that some category or some portion of the social world is socially constructed, on at least some versions of social constructionism, there *is* nothing outside ideology. On this picture, the grounds for criticism in the case of debunking thick and "unjust" conceptions of widowhood cannot be based on true versus false metaphysical descriptions or on some sort of appeal to moral realism. Rather, we should turn to "more (small r) realistic grounds, grounds that have more to do with what human beings want out of life..." (Cormier 2007, 65). Thus, it would seem that the real

substantive question is not whether being a widow means that one is "unclean" in some situation (a metaphysical question), but rather, whether it is good to believe this, or to put it in Haslanger's language, the real issue is what we should take to be the target concept of *widow*.

If one takes it as uncontroversial that the answer to the question "Is Christiana's treatment just?" is "no," there nonetheless remain serious impediments to altering practices associated with widowhood and conceptions of what widows "are" since, in the usual course of things, it seems the ethics of the practice or concept rides on the metaphysical picture (and not the other way around), at least on the picture that Haslanger paints throughout *Resisting Reality*. Haslanger herself is sensitive to this problem. To gloss Haslanger, if social structures constitute our social world and also serve as the frames of meaning within which we act, then our value-judgments will be (at least partly) constituted by the schemas we have internalized, and which, in turn, partly constitute the social structure. If moral evaluations rely (or are informed by) these social structures, how is it possible to critique individuals' value judgments as they are conditioned by that very (possibly problematic) structure? What, in other words, is the ground of critique? (Haslanger 2012, 21)

Taking into account Haslanger's notions of positionality and intersectionality, as well as her use of the notion of ideology, it becomes even more difficult to understand how to alter the views of those in Christiana's "social milieu," to use Haslanger's (2012) language. Given that social roles occur in social matrices, presumably thick (unjust) notions of widowhood cannot be divorced from other factors: religious or spiritual commitments, most notably. Further, if social roles occur in social matrices and acquire

their content (their meaning and constraints and enablements) from their positions in those matrices, it is perhaps not enough to engage in critique by attending to a particular institution or practice (say, the critique of *widowhood*, whether understood as an institutional or a communal category, in context C), though it may be. With respect to the critique of a concept or practice, Haslanger approvingly quotes Elizabeth S. Anderson's "Unstrapping the Straitjacket of 'Preference': A Comment on Amartya Sen's Contributions to Philosophy and Economics" (2001) directly:

> A critique of a concept is not a rejection of that concept, but an exploration of its various meanings and limitations. One way to expose the limitations of a concept is by introducing new concepts that have different meanings but can plausibly contend for some of the same uses to which the criticized concept is typically put. The introduction of such new concepts gives us choices about how to think that we did not clearly envision before. Before envisioning these alternatives, our use of the concept under question is *dogmatic*. We employ it automatically, un-questioningly, because it seems as if it is the inevitable conceptual framework within which inquiry must proceed. But envisioning alternatives, we convert dogmas into *tools*; ideas we can *choose* or not, depending on how well the use of these ideas suits our investigations and purposes. (Anderson 2001, 22 as quoted in Haslanger 2012, 17)

In some situations, one may have to challenge an entire matrix of ideologies in order to undermine a particular practice.[39] It is also possible that the individual practices that make up an unjust structure are themselves harmless; it may, in other words, be "the systematic interdependence of multiple practices that creates... injustice" (Haslanger 2012, 21). However, since social structures are complex, it may be difficult to identify the sources of particular effects (Haslanger 2012, 21). But, as Haslanger asks, unless we know the source, and in some cases it may be practically intractable to isolate the source, how can we proceed (Haslanger 2012, 21)?

[39] My supposition is that one cannot know in advance whether it is possible to simply engage in the critique of some individual institution, concept, or practice in order to change some particular practice or set of practices or whether wholesale ideology critique is necessary. The answer, in other words, is probably to be determined immanently (through practice) rather than a priori.

It is worth paying attention to the fact that Haslanger conducts her analysis of the concept of *widow* in certain developing countries from the perspective of an outsider. Thus, she approaches the analysis of such social milieus' concept of widowhood as one might approach natural kinds. Again, according to Thomasson, despite the fact that social and institutional entities, social positions, or practices lack natural boundaries, an outsider's (an individual outsider's or an entire outside community's) epistemic relation to the social and institutional kinds of another community is akin to the epistemic relation that each of us has, and all of us taken together (i.e. all individuals from all communities) have, to kinds with natural boundaries, if there are any (2003, 591). Interestingly, however, Haslanger's "outsider approach" highlights the virtues of an external perspective on traditions or cultures, something not addressed by Thomasson (2003).

As Marshall Sahlins argues in his *Apologies to Thucydides* (2004), there is

> a certain paradox in the notion that Herodotus, who never lost his identity while describing the customs and myths of the Persians or Egyptians should be reckoned more of an anthropologist than Thucydides, whose *History of the Peloponnesian War* was written from the vantage of a native participant… (4).

External perspectives on first- and second-person practices turn out to be powerful tools in ideology critique. Social structures and ideologies are constituted intersubjectively and their members have different lived experiences and stances. Cultural life, in its complexity and totality, involves reasons, relationships, and structures that no one who lives it can be expected to notice, let alone express. All of this, therefore, runs contrary to postmodern arguments against all aspects of ethnographic authority or the so-called construction of the other. Though there are perhaps epistemic and ethical issues involved in the outsider's construction or the anthropologist's "panoptic gaze," so too are there epistemic blind spots in natives' narratives. Of course, the outsider too has blind spots.

Just as there is a failure of understanding that comes with being an outsider, so too there is a failure of understanding that comes with being an insider. As Haslanger writes of the lack of understanding that affects insiders, this lack comes "with being an ordinary agent living in a culture whose practices we engage in, often 'unthinkingly,' just as we speak our native language" (Haslanger 2012, 16). The idea is that an outsider's or a broader epistemic and ethical reflection on concepts and practices may reveal to (or, more weakly, convince) insiders that their concepts and practices are caused and constituted in a different way than they might have thought. Note that "reveal" implies the uncovering of truth, whereas "convince" only implies swaying, whether towards the truth or otherwise.

2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a general overview of what descriptive and ameliorative social constructionist programs amount to. I have also expanded upon the connections between Haslanger's account of thick and thin social roles, positionality, intersectionality, and Ásta's conferralism. I have shown that Haslanger's and Ásta's works, as well as the ideas of positionality and intersectionality reveal the complexity and difficulties involved in attending to disagreements about the meanings of social kind-concepts and the problem of demarcating extensions of social kind-concepts. I have connected Haslanger's analysis of *widow* to Thomasson's account of the Independence and Ignorance/Error Principles. I have also attended to the question of what sense can be made of the notion of a "false metaphysics" if one accepts a socially constructed social world.

Haslanger is more attentive to methodological problems involved in ideology

critique in her chapter "But Mom, Crop-Tops *Are* Cute!" (herein, "But Mom!"). I turn to "But Mom!" in the following chapter. "But Mom!" offers a particularly careful and rigorous analysis of what is involved and what is at stake in debunking projects, social and ideology critique, and critical theory. In Chapter Three, I examine metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical issues involved in ideology critique and in social constructionist debunking projects, as well as possible vitiating factors that may work to impede both ideology critique and ameliorative social constructionist projects in terms of both their methods and goals.

CHAPTER THREE: On the Complexities of Ideological Analysis and Dispute

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I expound further on what social constructionism amounts to. This chapter integrates the contributions of critical social theorists and empirical researchers in attending to the complex relation between ideology and social construction. In examining Haslanger's (2012) thick and thin conceptions of *widow*, a brief analysis of her construal of the method and goals of social constructionist debunking was introduced in the previous chapter. This chapter builds on that analysis by fleshing out what Haslanger (2012) and Ásta (2013) each take as conditions of possibility for ameliorative social constructionist projects, namely ideological analysis and ideology critique.

In this chapter, I analyze Haslanger's discussion of an ideological impasse between a daughter and her parents, a hypothetical scenario that features in "But Mom!" from *Resisting Reality*. A goal of this chapter is also that of Haslanger in "But Mom!": to examine the epistemological and metaphysical difficulties involved in elucidating and

critiquing ideology.[40] Analyzing "But Mom!" requires a thorough study of Haslanger's claim, a claim that I accept, which is that a condition of success of social constructionist debunking, with its ameliorative aims, requires a successful analysis and critique of ideology. A second goal of my chapter is to sketch out some of the epistemological and metaphysical difficulties raised by "But Mom!," but which pertain generally to ideological analysis and critique more generally - problems and limitations either underdeveloped or simply passed over by Haslanger. Haslanger does not insinuate that ideological analysis or critique is sufficient to remedy "inter-milieu disagreements," to use her language, but neither does she adequately delimit problems that might arise in the context of settling the question of which redescription of X should be put forward and for what reason(s) in some situation. Thus, in this chapter, I set up some of the ways in which "But Mom!" fails to address the limits of ideological analysis and critique in settling the question of which redescription of X should be put forward (and why) in a given situation. This difficulty and others affect ideological critique and, in turn, ameliorative social constructionist programs in particular.

3.1 Descriptive versus Critical Theories and Ideology in the Descriptive Sense

To propound a descriptive social constructionist account of X (a person, a practice, a category) is to provide a descriptive or neutral (i.e. a purportedly non-value-laden)

[40] "Ideology" has many meanings. The history of the concept is long and scattered. Not all accounts of ideology permit the possibility of our grasping or being aware of so-called manifest ideologies, or to put it more explicitly, the ideology we take ourselves, society at large, the state, or others to uphold. In this chapter, I follow Haslanger's (2012) usage. A manifest ideology of mine is the ideology I take myself to uphold upon introspection. A manifest ideology of ours (this business, this community, this society) is the one we (or most of us?) take ourselves to be upholding. A manifest state ideology is best understood in terms of agendas or slogans. Consider, for instance, George Bush's infamous claim that "Those that are not with us are against us," Barack Obama's use of "Yes we can," or the time-old expression that "boys will be boys." On some accounts, though it may be operative, ideology is never articulable until after the fact (after it is revealed), as it were.

account of the ideologies that sustain X. These ideologies are argued to be constituted and reinforced by social factors - that is, by the beliefs, attitudes, concepts, desires, and behaviours of individuals and groups. To provide a social constructionist analysis of the debunking variety is to emphasize or unveil purportedly covert social or non-inevitable aspects of the social world that work to constitute and sustain X, where X is usually taken to be constituted and sustained by non-social factors or to hold naturally or inevitably.

Scientific and otherwise descriptive theories and critical theories differ in their relation to their subject. The former are allegedly objective: in prototypical cases, it is possible, at least in principle, to distinguish between the theory and the objects to which it refers. This is to say that the theory itself is not presented as part of the object-domain that it describes. In addition to being metaphysical programs, social constructionist debunking and other ameliorative programs are species of critical theory or ideology critique. In Raymond Geuss's words, they aim at "emancipation and enlightenment, at making agents aware of hidden coercion, thereby freeing them from that coercion and putting them in a position to determine where their true interests lie" (1981, 55). A critical theory is a reflective or self-referential program; stated differently, "a critical theory is itself always a part of the object-domain which it describes; critical theories are always in part about themselves" (Geuss 1981, 55).

Geuss takes the Frankfurt School's[41] understanding of *Ideologiekritik* as consisting of three broad theses, which together work to disclose "the truth" about or reveal the "real" agenda behind some ideology.

1. Critical theories have special standing as guides for human action in that: (a) they are aimed at producing enlightenment in the agents who hold them,

[41] For Geuss (1981), the Frankfurt School comprises such thinkers as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Jürgen Habermas.

i.e. at enabling those agents to determine what their true interests are;
(b) they are inherently emancipatory, i.e. they free agents from a kind of coercion which is at least partly self-imposed, from self-frustration of conscious human action.

2. Critical theories have cognitive content, i.e. they are forms of knowledge.
3. Critical theories differ epistemologically in essential ways from theories in the natural sciences. Theories in natural science are 'objectifying'; critical theories are 'reflective.' (Geuss 1981, 1-2)

The Frankfurt School's focus on *Ideologiekritik*, a specific branch of ideology critique, is summarized by Geuss thus:

1. Radical criticism of society and criticism of its dominant ideology (*Ideologiekritik*) are inseparable; the ultimate goal of all social research should be the elaboration of a critical theory of society of which *Ideologiekritik* would be an integral part.
2. *Ideologiekritik* is not just a form of 'moralizing criticism,' i.e. an ideological form of consciousness is not criticised for being nasty, immoral, unpleasant, etc. but for being false, for being a form of delusion. *Ideologiekritik* is itself a cognitive enterprise, a form of knowledge.
3. *Ideologiekritik* (and hence also the social theory of which it is a part) differs significantly in cognitive structure from natural science, and requires for its proper analysis basic changes in the epistemological views we have inherited from traditional empiricism (modelled as it is on the study of natural science). (1981, 26)

Unlike many members of the Frankfurt School, Haslanger does not name *one* totalizing logic (e.g. capitalism) as the cause of "false consciousness," but is concerned to underscore the *various* logics that operate to conceal, obscure, and more generally, to generate, maintain, and alter aspects of the social world. I take Haslanger to construe "false consciousness" as referring to cases wherein there exists a discrepancy between individuals' and groups' manifest and operative concepts, policies, practices, attitudes, or ideologies. For Haslanger, there exist diverse manifest and operative cognitive and non-cognitive logics within a social milieu that require ideological critique. So far, I have identified and delineated two kinds of theory, namely scientific and otherwise descriptive theories and critical theories. I have thus far suggested that Haslanger's understanding of

ideology critique is comparable to that of many members of the Frankfurt School, albeit different in so far as she focuses on the dynamism of *multiple co-existing* ideologies.

Both Haslanger (2012) and Ásta (2013) employ a descriptive sense of ideology,[42] which stands in contrast to the usual Marxian (pejorative or value-laden) sense. Haslanger also employs a non-descriptive, i.e. "pejorative" sense of ideology - a notion to be elucidated later in this chapter. Although Haslanger's descriptive sense of ideology and Ásta's descriptive sense of social role or property maps are not identical, in the descriptive context, the notions that they employ are ones that encompass any implicit or explicit cognitive or non-cognitive aspect of existence (habits, manifest beliefs, dispositions to believe, physical dispositions) that works to affect consciousness and action. On both Haslanger's and Ásta's accounts, *multiple co-existing ideologies* function as a background force that makes possible the social construction, constitution, regulation, and shifting of the denotations and connotations (i.e. the specific content) of social categories and roles, as well as their associated constraints, enablements, and interrelations. Marx's notion of ideology is what Haslanger calls ideology in the pejorative or value-laden sense. Throughout "But Mom!," she attempts to clarify which use she intends - whether ideology in the descriptive sense or ideology in the pejorative sense - though her usage is at times ambiguous.

---

[42] Though Ásta (2013) does not use the language of ideology explicitly, I see her notion of social role or property maps as consistent with Haslanger's (2012) understanding of "ideology" and "schema." Perhaps Ásta explicitly and intentionally avoids the term 'ideology' precisely for the baggage it carries. Bicchieri (2006) writes the following, echoing Ásta's idea of social maps:

> A script for a lecture [for instance] thus describes a stylized, stereotyped sequence of actions that are appropriate in this context, and it defines actors and roles. Note that a script also involves beliefs and expectations related to the actors' roles, and that both the expectations and the stereotyped details are culturally consensual. Scripts are the basis of understanding and making sense of events, as they embed knowledge relevant to the present situation. (94)

Bicchieri's notion of a script is, to my mind, consistent with Ásta's notions of social role or property maps and with Haslanger's understanding of ideology/ideologies and schemas.

Ideologiekritik and Haslanger's (2012) construal of ideology critique are at once (purportedly) descriptive and value-laden: they proffer analyses of the workings of some social phenomenon, but also take as their critical task to expose the effects of false consciousness. In propounding an account of the social constitution of some social phenomenon, when Haslanger's analysis serves to debunk or expose false consciousness at play, she is at once engaged in providing a descriptive account and, in turn, revealing the "real" working or operation of a phenomenon - a working that is typically obscured or misunderstood. Insofar as the "real" working or function of a phenomenon is obscured or perhaps works against the "real" interests of those who participate in upholding it, the phenomenon represents an instance of ideology in the pejorative sense, but since the phenomenon also serves to guide or influence behaviour, at the same time, the phenomenon is descriptive. Depending on our interests in analyzing the phenomenon, we may focus on its operation in either or both senses. To clarify, it is useful to turn to a familiar Marxian example: the idea that wage works to oppress workers whose daily activities ensure the existence of wage labour and the idea of wage itself.

I read Haslanger's uses of "ideology" as best understood as an amalgam of the programs of Pierre Bourdieu, Antonio Gramsci, Marx and Friedrich Engels, and William Sewell. Though neither Haslanger nor Ásta mentions all six of the following features explicitly, I see these features as consistent with Haslanger's conception of ideology (both neutral and value-laden) and with Ásta's notion of social maps. As a working account, and in keeping with Haslanger's particular use of "ideology" especially, I define ideology, whether descriptive or pejorative, thus: as a set of conscious or unconscious ideas

1) with descriptive or normative content that
2) plays a role in social interaction,
3) exerts some power over cognition,
4) are capable of guiding action,
5) influence judgments about one's own or others' practices, and categories, and
6) may be embodied non-cognitively in gestures, architecture, and so on.[43]

This definition may seem unpalatable to some as it arguably applies to any set of beliefs whatsoever. However, insofar as Haslanger's program aims to describe and analyze the real complexity of the social world, this use is defensible. Given my definition, I anticipate that one might ask the following sort of questions disapprovingly: So, you're committed to the view that classical mechanics is an ideology? Is the germ theory of disease an ideology? Is folk psychology an ideology? First and foremost, classical mechanics, the germ theory of disease, and folk psychology are theories of their subject - that is, of the movement of physical objects, germs, and folk psychological attitudes respectively. Nonetheless, insofar as these theories can influence and guide individual and group behaviour, dispose individuals or groups to see X under some description, and so on, these theories qualify as ideological in Haslanger's sense.

Understood in both the descriptive and the value-laden senses, ideologies function at once as the undergirding of, and the explanation for, the particularities of the *actual* institutions, practices, categories, and kinds that make up "the social milieus," to use Haslanger's language, or to use Ásta's language, the "social contexts" of the social world. Haslanger and Ásta thus extend the scope of what Searle is willing to countenance as a social fact - Searle effectively restricts the social to the institutional. This expansion permits Haslanger and Ásta to concentrate on examining and clarifying what buttresses non-institutional, or to adopt Ásta's (2013) language, constraining and enabling social

[43] It is to this sense of ideology that I refer unless I note that I am referring to particular theorists' senses.

categories and their coercive power. Unlike Searle, Haslanger and Ásta are moreover interested in exposing the descriptive and pejorative ideologies, as well as their workings, that undergird particular social practices, institutions, categories, or kinds.

3.2 A Closer Examination of Haslanger's "Ideology," Ásta's Social Maps, Ideology/Ideologies, and Schemas/Structures

a) Ideology and Social Maps

To clarify Haslanger's understanding of ideology, it is helpful to recall Ásta's notion of social property or social role maps (outlined in Chapters One and Two). Social maps are conceptual maps of social relations. Appropriated from across social contexts, these maps include rules for applying social identity roles upon conferees. Though Ásta focuses specifically on gender maps, her view is compatible with the existence of a vast number of social role maps, e.g. sexual orientation maps, parental role maps, and so on. Adopted from various contexts within the social world, Ásta's social role maps underlie and explain discrepancies between different conferrers' conferrals of social properties, categories, or roles, onto conferees, i.e. onto different individuals or groups in some situation. These maps are presumably comprised of articulated or unarticulated prescriptions and habits. As these maps guide or influence behaviour and intentional action within the social world, they are consistent with what Haslanger names "ideologies" or "schemas" (and "structures", adopting Sewell's language from "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation" (1992)).[44]

[44] Sometimes Haslanger (2012) writes of structures as constituting aspects of an ideology. Other times, she seems to use 'structure' and 'ideology' interchangeably.

b) Ideology and Schemas

Although Haslanger neither explicitly claims nor denies this, her use of "ideology" and "schema" (and in some places, her use of "structure") are interchangeable. She explicitly espouses Sewell's understanding of schemas to explain what she means by ideology, both descriptive and pejorative (Haslanger 2012, 415). Like Sewell, Haslanger understands ideologies (or to use Sewell's language, "schemas") to include

> …not only the array of binary oppositions that make up a given society's fundamental tools of thought, but also the various conventions, recipes, scenarios, principles of action, and habits of speech and gesture built up with these fundamental tools. (Sewell 1992, 7-8)

Haslanger further glosses Sewell's account of schemas as

> intersubjective patterns of perception, thought, and behavior. They are embodied in individuals as a shared cluster of open-ended dispositions to see things in a certain way or to respond habitually in particular circumstances. Schemas encode knowledge and also provide scripts for interaction with others and our environment… Deep schemas are pervasive and relatively unconscious. Surface schemas are more narrow and are easier to identify and change; but their change may leave the deeper schema intact. (Haslanger 2012, 415)

Cristina Bicchieri's account of schemas from *The Grammar of Society: The Nature and Dynamics of Social Norms* (2006) is, I believe, complementary:

> Interpreting and understanding a social situation involves comparing it to similar ones we have encountered in the past. What we view as similar will determine which category will be retrieved and which script or schema will be applied. (98)

c) Social Structures and Norms

Haslanger employs the notion of "social structure" to explain what she means by a social milieu.[45] Much of the time, in a given context within the social world (a university's lecture hall, a doctor's waiting room, a grocery store line up), individuals adopt the

[45] For Haslanger, a social milieu is comprised of social structures.

dominant schema - e.g. in Canada, many people try not to speak loudly, if at all, on their cell phones in a doctor's waiting room, people do not generally cut in line at the register at a supermarket, and so forth. There are, however, many relations that one can have to schemas. A person might be ignorant of, insensitive to, reject, or modify given schemas (Haslanger 2012, 417). Further, a person might be intentionally out of sync with a schema or just "out of it" (Haslanger 2012, 417). Moreover, within a given situation, different schemas can vie for dominance or stand idly side by side in the sense of "to each his or her own." Haslanger defines a social structure as a general category of social phenomena that includes social institutions, social practices and conventions, social roles, social hierarchies, social locations or geographies, and the like (Haslanger 2012, 413). To use her distinctions and examples, where social structures are formal, schemas/structures will be precise and explicit (e.g. faculty governance in a university) (Haslanger 2012, 414). Others are complex, but not fully explicit (e.g. informal traffic norms), and many others will be informal, imprecise, and poorly coordinated (e.g. holiday gift-giving) (Haslanger 2012, 414).

Haslanger sees social structures as examples of social facts. A social fact is an interpersonal fact or any fact that supervenes on an interpersonal fact (Haslanger 2012, 414 fn. 8). For example, the fact that there are three women in the next room constitutes a social fact, which is, in turn, parasitic on a social fact that determines the use of the extension of *woman*. Her account does not require that social facts involve Searlian We-intentions, assignment of function, or constitutive rules. Though she remarks that these elements are plausibly required in creating institutional facts, she considers Searle's 1995 program to be too demanding to capture the everyday informality of social life. "We can

have coordinated intentions without them being 'we-intentions'; things can have a social function even if they aren't assigned it; and social kind-membership isn't always governed by rules" (Haslanger 2012, 414 fn. 8). Since individuals and groups stand in complicated relations to the collectively constituted and managed structures and ideologies in which they participate and which shape their lives, social institutions, categories, and practices are highly space- and time-dependent, taking on particular forms in virtue of the individuals who sustain them and who, in turn, are shaped by them and by those who actively oppose them. Prevailing social structures may often be tacit rather than explicit. The upshot of a social world composed of such a network of relations is that an adequate epistemological and metaphysical account of the social world must pay attention both to social structures and to the individuals or groups who sustain them.

Structures influence individual and group practices. In turn, people's practices constitute, reproduce, and alter structures. Ideology is not always self-consciously enacted and nor does it, in its entirety, reside in individual minds. I leave open the possibility that there exist collective cognitive states or that the mind is extended, enactive, or distributed. Ideology has a particular relationship to structure and agency. On the one hand, an ideology represents a feedback loop of individual and group beliefs, habits, and performances and on the other, the structures are parasitic upon and work simultaneously to reinforce individual and group attitudes and practices. These are structures that may not be, and in the ordinary course of things typically are not identical to any given individual's or group's conscious, cognitive, or non-cognitive attitudes or practices. It is not just that ideology may be unconscious, but that sometimes an operative ideology may not be identical with any individuals' or groups' manifest ideology.

Ideology may at times not be localizable in any given individual or group, but yet somehow manages to be pervasive. On this theme, through a consideration of the fallacies of composition and division, in both *Social Epistemology* (1988) and *The Knowledge Book: Key Concepts in Philosophy, Science and Culture* (2007), Steve Fuller draws attention to a conceptual confusion obscured by the careless or overextended usage of the verb "to know" and the noun "knowledge." "Composition" and "division" name the bottom-up and top-down versions of this tendency. On the one hand, in both the social sciences and the lived world, there is a propensity to simply aggregate the beliefs of a society's members and to call that "social knowledge" and on the other, there is a propensity to take socially sanctioned statements of knowledge as representative of what each individual in that society believes (Fuller 2007, 2). The problem with both inferences is their failure to account for the effects of social interaction on what individuals often passively accept as counting for knowledge in their society. Without accounting for this failure, the very notion of hegemony becomes unintelligible and the following situation, which *does* exist, could not: "How is it possible that our lives are dominated by a scientific worldview, whose leading theories (e.g. those of Darwin, Einstein, Heisenberg) are neither understood nor perhaps even believed by the vast majority of people" (Fuller 2007, 2)?

d) Ideology, Materialism, and the Non-Cognitive Elements of Ideology

Like Haslanger's concern with the unconscious nature of ideology, it is Searle's view that although the structure of human institutions is a construct of human rules, the people who participate in the institutions are not, or at least not typically, conscious of these rules. They may possess false beliefs about the nature of the institutions in which they partake

and "the very people who created the institution may be unaware of its structure" (Searle 1995, 127). Thus, what causal role can or do constitutive rules play in the behaviour of the individuals who participate in institutions and other practices? His answer is that we follow the rules unconsciously - they form part of what he calls the Background (Searle 1999, 128-129).

> The key to understanding the causal relations between the structure of the Background and the structure of social institutions is to see that the Background can be causally sensitive to the specific forms of the constitutive rules of the institutions without actually containing any beliefs or desires or representations of those rules. (Searle 1995, 141)

In addition to focusing on the non-volitional, non-conscious character of some beliefs and "know-how," Haslanger incorporates the materialism of Marxian thought, focusing on such resources as the materiality of social structures/ideologies.[46] A social structure exists when "there is a causal, and mutually sustaining, interdependence between a shared or collective schema and an organization of resources" (Haslanger 2012, 416). There is, in other words, a constitutive relation between schemas and resources. For example,

> …the pile of bricks, wood, and metal *is* a punching-in-station because the schemas that direct employers to pay employees by the hour and employees to keep track of their hours are enacted with this tool. The schema for keeping track of hours *is* a punching-in schema because there is a punch-clock that the employer will use as a basis for calculating wages. Without the invention of the punch-clock, there could be no punching-in schema. (Haslanger 2012, 416)

As Searle writes in a more general vein: "we develop skills that are responsive to that particular institutional structure" (1995, 143). Further, a person does not always behave in the manner that he or she does because he or she is consciously following the rules of some institution (Searle 1995, 144). In some cases, at the causal level, a person

[46] For Marx, Sewell, and Haslanger alike, human beings, or more specifically human bodies and their labouring capacities (birthing, creating ideas) qualify as material resources.

behaves the way he or she does because he or she has developed a disposition to behave that way and at the functional level, he or she has come to be disposed to behave that way because the disposition conforms to the rules of the institution (Searle 1995, 144). It is perhaps better to say, as Searle does, that a person behaves according to the rules of the institution *as if* he or she were following rules: he or she has developed a "mechanism" that, in turn, has developed in order to be sensitive to or meet the rules (Searle 1995, 146). Searle's introduction of a "mechanism" is intended to avoid regress problems generated by the rule-following paradox: a person needs not to be said to be following rules even unconsciously (Searle 1995, 146).

Both Searle and Haslanger propound accounts of rule-structure-practice (and sometimes belief) matrices that emphasize the non-conscious and non-volitional nature of some social phenomena. Searle's apolitical (i.e. purportedly non-value-laden) account is reconcilable with Haslanger's program. Though Searle remains silent on the political or ethical motivations or justifiability of given rule-structure-practice (and sometimes belief) matrices, Haslanger attends to issues involving the social benefit or detriment of given rule-structure-practice-belief matrices. She also extends her analysis to include non-institutional matrices - i.e. those backed by coercive social pressure rather than by official authority.

e) Summary of Haslanger's Construal of Ideology

Haslanger's construal of ideology accomplishes two important tasks. First, it extends the scope of the concept to include not only the cognitive (including the non-conscious), but

the non-cognitive as well.[47] She takes ideology's extension to include slogans, unconscious habits, architecture, fashion, and other aspects of the social world that work overtly or covertly to organize and regulate individuals' and groups' behaviours and attitudes. Moreover, she stresses that some ideologies do not require subjects' conscious awareness. For example, while I have a habit of holding open a door for someone behind me, I need not consciously entertain something like the thought "I should hold open the door for the person behind me" every time I do this. Rather, I *just do* hold open the door for a person behind me. Widening the scope of ideology is necessary to account for the complexity of the epistemology and metaphysics of *actual* cultures, situations, sub-cultures, categories, practices, and other social phenomena of the social world.

Second, Haslanger's understanding of ideology stresses the coexistence of multiple ideologies within or across social milieus. Unlike many other theorists who name and focus on what they see as one totalizing ideology, she rightly accounts for the multiplicity of existent ideologies and their interactions. Without accounting for the multiplicity of coexistent ideologies, an explanation is lacking as to why and how discrepancies and disagreements concerning categories' extensions or associated constraints and enablements can come to exist and compete for dominance - a state of affairs that does, as a matter of fact, occur in the social world. On this theme, Haslanger writes the following:

> Structures [ideologies or schemas] take on specific historical forms because of the individuals within them; individual action is conditioned in multiple and varying ways by social context. Theory, then, must be sensitive to this complexity: focusing simply on agents or simply on structures will not be adequate in an analysis of how societies work and don't work, or in a normative

[47] Haslanger (2012) is explicit in her view that ideology extends to the non-cognitive. While Ásta (2013) is not explicit in endorsing the non-cognitive as part and parcel of social role maps, her account is nonetheless consistent with its inclusion.

> evaluation of them. We must be attentive simultaneously to both agents and structures. (2012, 11)

Similarly, "something about how we represent the world is both a constitutive part of that enactment and keeps it going" (Haslanger 2012, 411). This constitutive relation explains the perniciousness and undetectability of some operative ideologies.

Complementing Haslanger's view, according to Geuss, there is an inherent connection between pernicious ideology and coercive social institutions, since people can be freed of one only by also being freed of the other (1981, 60).

> They can't be freed from their coercive social institutions as long as they retain the ideological world-picture which legitimizes them, nor can they get rid of their ideological world-picture as long as their basic coercive social institutions render it immune to free discussion and criticism. (Geuss 1981, 60)

The relation between agent and structure, agent and norm, or agent and social fact, in turn, explains the relation between individuals' and groups' emancipation, purportedly by means of ideology critique, and structure/ideology.

Thus far, I have clarified various uses of "ideology" and specified how the notion will be used in this chapter, unless otherwise noted. I have delineated two kinds of ideology - descriptive and value-laden - and shown that they are not always mutually exclusive. I have also highlighted the sometimes non-conscious and non-volitional nature of ideology and touched upon ideology's relation to false consciousness and the purported remedy for false consciousness, namely ideology critique.

The subjective/objective distinction has been shown to be a controversial distinction, especially in the case of social ontology. To analyze or debunk an ideology is not to uncover an ideology-free (in the descriptive sense) reality. It is rather to expose the epistemology and metaphysics *underlying* that ideology. This negative goal is not

tantamount to arriving at the "thing itself"[48] - it is not synonymous with disclosing the "really real" thing that ideology "conceals" (if there is such a "really real" thing). On Haslanger's and Ásta's views, where there is no ideology, there is no social world, and without the possibility of a social world, there is no ideology: a condition of possibility of existence of either is the existence of the other. The social world just *is* the existence of manifest and operative ideologies. On the accounts of Haslanger, Ásta, and Sewell, ideology in the descriptive sense does not necessarily mask reality. Rather, ideology *creates* and *constitutes* social reality.

"But Mom!" emphasizes that mind-dependent features of the world such as knowledge, beliefs, and concepts are inextricably connected to the aspects of reality - a social reality of social categories, practices, and other features - that they represent or are directed towards. This epistemic and ontological situation arises because social categories, kinds, roles, institutions, and practices are dependent upon or are constituted by mind- or concept-dependent attitudes. As Haslanger (2012) reminds us, Hacking's looping effect demonstrates that even misguided beliefs about a social phenomenon can result in a false belief's becoming true. Similarly, a change in the meaning of a concept can change the social world, the introduction of a new concept may create a new referent in the world, and the collective forgetting of or refusal to use a concept can eradicate a referent in the world.[49] Likewise, Khalidi explicates the looping effect as follows:

> The kinds that exist in the world and their properties seem to depend in part on our classifications. In some cases, merely by conceiving of such kinds and acting on our conceptions, we may bring such kinds into being, which is a type of self-fulfilling prophecy. In other cases, our classifications and associated

[48] Of course, it may be, but this is epistemically underdetermined.
[49] The referent is eradicated only in those locations where the concept has lost its currency. It is possible that the referent of a social category- or kind-term exists in one location, but not in another at the same time.

> actions alter the individuals belonging to the kinds or change some of the properties associated with them, which is more like a self-defeating prophecy. (2010, 339)

Social theories destabilize, buttress, or shape the practices upon which they bear. This is so because they are theories about practices, which are, in part, constituted by self-understanding. Insofar as theories transform self-understanding, they undermine, support, or alter the constitutive elements of practices and phenomena. In maintaining the non-existence of an accessible epistemic stance outside of ideology/ideologies (that is, in denying that there is an Archimedean point to which *we* have epistemological access)[50] and in denying the possibility of an ideology-free social reality, analyzing or debunking ideology, a negative program, cannot, in and of itself, provide sufficient guidance with respect to which X (some social concept/practice/category) "we" or "they" should treat as the target concept X. That is, ideology critique and ameliorative social constructionist programs cannot reveal with certainty *the* social concept, practice, or category that would be, in some objective, mind-independent (i.e. non-ideological sense), the most just or apt in some situation. Of course, ideological analysis and critique do work in illuminating which social concepts, practices, or categories are candidates for retention, amelioration, or eradication *according to us* (according *to an ideology to which some social group or community assents*) in some particular situation. In non-truth-conditional terms, ideology critique and ameliorative social constructionist analyses may persuade us into *believing* that we have revealed which social concepts, practices, or categories are fit for retention, amelioration, or eradication.

[50] This view, I believe, is consistent with Haslanger's view in "Ontology and Social Construction" (1995) *Philosophical Topics*, Vol. 23, No. 2.

Like Haslanger, Rorty also underscores the idea of an intimate relation between social constructionism and ideological analysis and critique. In "Feminism, Ideology, and Deconstruction: A Pragmatist View" (1993), Rorty claims the following:

> Neither philosophy in general, nor deconstruction in particular, should be thought of as a pioneering, path-breaking, tool... Recent philosophy, including Derrida's, helps us see practices and ideas… as neither natural nor inevitable - but that is all it does. When philosophy has finished showing that everything is a social construct, it does not help us decide which social constructs to retain and which to replace. (96)

Even should "we" or "they" all agree that some X is apt for retention, amelioration, or eradication, ideological analysis and debunking are not adequate to settle *how* "we" or "they" are to redescribe or effectively eradicate X. Again, while Haslanger does not take as a goal of her program the resolution of this problem once and for all, she fails to drive home the severity of this difficulty in the context of any ameliorative social constructionist program's success.

The issue Rorty raises - that "[w]hen philosophy has finished showing that everything is a social construct, it does not help us decide which social constructs to retain and which to replace" (Rorty 1993, 96) - affects the theoretical and practical efficacy of ameliorative social constructionist programs. Once debunking or ideological analysis has done its work, it does not tell us exactly where to look for better constructions and it does not settle the question of why one redescription is better than any other. Nonetheless, perhaps debunking and ideological analysis can make us rethink old lines of approach or develop new ones. This is not insignificant. This thought will be further explored and developed in the following chapter.

3.3 Haslanger and MacKinnon on the Epistemology and Metaphysics of Social Phenomena

In "But Mom!" Haslanger offers two reasons for accepting that the following belief on the part of seventh grade girls[51] constitutes an ideology: seventh grade girls who wear crop-tops are cute. According to Haslanger, this belief counts as a plausible candidate because the belief is a constitutive element of seventh grade girls' fashion norms and because the belief sets up a pattern of understandings and expectations that reinforces the belief and influences behaviour (Haslanger 2012, 412). On her view, cashing out the girls' belief as primarily or entirely cognitive, conscious, or volitional does not best capture the girls' lived experience. On this point, Haslanger cites Trevor Purvis and Alan Hunt from "Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology…" (1993) approvingly. "Ideology is concerned with the realm of the lived, or the experienced, rather than of 'thinking'… We live in common sense [in ideology] - we do not think it" (Purvis and Hunt 1993, 479). In addition to beliefs, Haslanger understands ideology as encompassing practical knowledge, habits, gestures, body language, and slogans. In some cases, beliefs create ideology while in other cases, beliefs are produced by ideology (Haslanger 2012, 413). In yet other cases, beliefs and non-cognitive features may be too individualistic to count as ideology, since ideology names socially caused and constituted dispositions, attitudes, or other phenomena that influence or determine behaviour (Haslanger 2012, 413). To put the point differently, although some social practices are ideological, it does not follow that all those who live in a culture and follow its practices have the beliefs that are typically identified as the ideology underpinning the practices (Haslanger 2012, 413). Though a group or society may be characterized as upholding

[51] Presumably, these are seventh grade girls from affluent Western countries.

some ideology, it need not be the case that each member cognitively or non-cognitively, consciously or unconsciously, or otherwise, upholds that ideology.

Given the strong interrelatedness of social epistemology and social ontology, in "But Mom!," Haslanger stresses that a responsible and effective social epistemology must attend not only to the question of whether a belief is justified or true, but likewise, whether a system of categorization is useful or justified. "When social knowledge goes wrong, it may be because it has constituted a reality - and perhaps accurately represents that reality - that nevertheless falls short in some way" (Haslanger 2012, 407). By "falling short," Haslanger means that social knowledge, beliefs, and other attitudes and mental content including concepts, aesthetic preferences, and so on may contribute to or cause injustice, a lack of transparency, or false consciousness. For Haslanger, it is not that there is no need for standard Anglo-American epistemology in making sense of the social world - indeed, some of our attitudes may be purely epistemically problematic insofar as they fail to be reliable, to correspond to, or to cohere with the social world. Nonetheless, even here, the epistemologist of the social world and the social epistemologist alike will point out that where there is a problem of reliability, correspondence, or coherence, there may also be a social cost. For example, a community that continues to believe that HIV only or mostly affects the gay (male) population - a belief that fails to cohere with fact - will be a community wherein some of its members may place themselves at risk. At the same time, an epistemic situation characterized by correspondence, coherence, and reliability is no guarantee of a responsible or just social epistemology. Thus, truth (understood as empirical adequacy) and justice can come apart.

Haslanger's aim in "But Mom!" is, in part, to show that an epistemology faithful to the metaphysics of social reality must be one that accepts, in MacKinnon's words, "that a relation exists between thought and some reality other than thought [or mind], or between human activity (mental or otherwise) and the products of that activity" (1989, 99). The kind of epistemology required "redefines the epistemological issue from being a scientific one, the relation between knowledge and objective reality, to a problem of the relation of consciousness to social being" (MacKinnon 1989, 99). In Haslanger's view, MacKinnon raises a peculiar kind of epistemological problem about "what 'should' be thought… where what is thought (at least partly) both determines and is determined by its object" (Haslanger 2012, 407). On account of the fused relation between the epistemology of the social world, ideology, and consciousness, it follows that one cannot appeal to truth as a ground for justice. Not only is it that one cannot derive an "ought" from an "is," but that fundamentally, truth itself is fully implicated in relations of power since ideology creates values and vice versa. Examining these relations thus highlights the role of individuals or groups in constituting or upholding various social phenomena and, furthermore, their capacity to amend or even reject and overthrow extant social phenomena. MacKinnon's and Haslanger's emphases on culture and consciousness present a rupture from philosophy conceived as an endeavor to discover what *is* and as a movement towards our role in *deciding* what *is* and in *bringing into existence* what is not yet. This theme will be more thoroughly addressed in the following chapter.

3.4 Are Crop-Tops Cute? A Case Study in Ideological Dispute

By means of an analysis of a hypothetical ideological disagreement between a daughter and her parents in "But Mom!," Haslanger presents her view of the connections between

social metaphysics and ideology and, moreover, of the difficulties involved in attempting to change the social world. Though the example is of a relatively isolated and small-scale situation, in attending to the difficulties involved in describing and changing ideology even in such ordinary micro-situations, Haslanger intends to underscore the complexity of ideology's function (and ideologies' conflict) at the micro or macro level. According to the scenario Haslanger elaborates, a daughter, a seventh grader, thinks that crop-tops are cute and also thinks that a condition of her being cute[52] in her school, is that she (sometimes) wears a crop-top to school. Her parents disagree with both of her beliefs.

On Haslanger's view, that seventh grade girls who wear crop-tops are cute is ideological in a neutral or descriptive sense - a sense that merely describes and in so doing, purportedly makes no ethical or moral judgments. According to Haslanger, that seventh grade girls who wear crop-tops are cute is ideological in a narrower pejorative sense as well - i.e. in a sense that *does* make a negative ethical or moral judgment. The pejorative sense of ideology is closely and historically connected to Marxian theory, referring to a situation wherein a dominant ideology runs counter to the "real" interests of those who, in ignorance,[53] participate in upholding it. The conceptual possibility of this narrower sense depends on the introduction of interpretation or evaluation by an outsider or perhaps even a seventh grade girl who is not duped by the operative and arguably pernicious ideology. The epistemologies available to outsiders and to some non-duped seventh grade girls refer to those epistemologies that see through false consciousness and

[52] Haslanger (2012) equates *being cute* with *being fashionable* or *being popular*. In other words, she treats the terms 'cute,' 'fashionable,' and 'popular' as virtually synonymous. This is peculiar, given that presumably, one can be fashionable without being cute or popular. It is perhaps less likely, however, at least in a seventh grade classroom, that one can be a popular girl without being fashionable. These musings, both on Haslanger's part, as well as my own, could only be confirmed, I imagine, by empirical investigation.

[53] Their ignorance lies in their not knowing that their participation in some ideology sustains and ensures their oppression.

that reveal or expose the "real" (purportedly problematic) function of some epistemology. Outlining a pejorative ideology, then, is not only to engage in an explanatory or descriptive project. The point of outlining a pejorative ideology is to liberate agents from a delusion that has made them bear the oppression of false consciousness. The goal is to recast an ideology that has become entrenched and accepted into terms that emphasize the complicity of agents in upholding that ideology and also, the harm that the ideology causes the very bearers of that ideology.

According to Geuss, there are three ways in which an ideology can be pejorative:

> (a) …[I]n virtue of some *epistemic* properties of the beliefs which are its constituents;
> (b) …in virtue of its *functional* properties;
> (c) in virtue of some of its *genetic* properties. (1981, 13)

In referring to the "epistemic properties" of a form of consciousness, Geuss means

> such things as whether or not the descriptive beliefs contained in the form of consciousness are supported by the available empirical evidence, or whether or not the form of consciousness is one in which beliefs of different epistemic types (e.g. descriptive beliefs and normative beliefs) are confused. (1981, 13)

Perhaps, however, it is not best to describe ideologies as truth-conditional. According to Geuss, people can act in ways that are more or less enlightened and the freedom of their communication and capacity for reflection or self-reflection too is a matter of degree (1981, 94). Geuss thus proposes that the extent to which a critical theory is enlightening or emancipatory is also a matter of degree.

> If rational argumentation can lead to the conclusion that a critical theory represents the most advanced position of consciousness available to us in our given historical situation, why the obsession with whether or not we may call it 'true?' (Geuss 1981, 94)

This comment is important as it moves us away from a conception of ideologies or ways of describing reality as a matter of "objective" truth or falsity. Understanding theories as

more or less accurate and as more or less emancipatory underscores the highly context-dependent, intersubjective, and sometimes fragmented accounts, of any claim to know.

Given Haslanger's comments throughout "But Mom!," it seems likely that by "pejorative ideology," she means something to the effect of "in my (or 'our') view, something is contrary to the 'better' interests of the girl" or is otherwise morally or politically problematic. This reading does not commit her to the epistemological view that human beings can come to know "reality in itself" and nor does it commit her to the existence of a social world that is capable of being ideology-free. That is, it does not commit her to the existence of a world where there exist such things as "the real interests" of individuals. Of course, in trivial ways, it is uncontroversial to claim that, *ceteris paribus*, certain things are against the real interests of individuals - consuming arsenic and waiting longer than two days to drink water come to mind. Many cases are more controversial and culture-specific. Is it really in the best interest of a woman to be veiled? Does the easy access to birth control in many parts of the world serve to empower women or serve men's sexual "needs" with less worry? Since answers to these questions are highly contextual and dependent on a larger web of beliefs, practices, and institutions that, in turn, may be highly localized, answering the question from a perspective that is ideology-free and decontextualized is not a viable epistemic possibility.

Though Haslanger does not consider the possibility, and although I will not engage in the debate, it is worth noting again that some realists might also think that interpretation or evaluation is not required for a situation to be contrary to the real interests of those affected. It may, in other words, be objectively true that some situation is contrary to some group's "real" interests - a possibility Haslanger would endorse given

claims in her "Ontology and Social Construction" (1995).[54] Yet, while ontological considerations are one thing, the epistemic availability of knowing one's own or another's "real" interests is either difficult or impossible to establish with epistemic certainty - a position Haslanger would also accept given her 1995 view. The position that there exist "real" interests (i.e. non-intersubjectively-decided, "objective" interests) for individuals and groups is compatible with the epistemic impossibility of our knowing those "real" interests. According to traditional ideology critique, attaining knowledge of one's "real" interests is not first and foremost intended to be an ethical endeavor, but rather a cognitive program - a way of ridding oneself of dubious epistemic commitments. On this reading, ridding oneself of "dubious" epistemic commitments entails coming to know one's "real" (i.e. "ideology-free") interests. On another reading, coming to rid oneself of "dubious" epistemic commitments entails replacing one set of ideological commitments with another set of (presumably less pernicious) ideological commitments. Haslanger endorses this latter reading. As I think Haslanger would also agree, to know one's "really real" interests would require "real" or "perfect" understanding or knowledge and to speak of "real" or "perfect" knowledge "is already to enter the realm of science fiction" (Geuss 1981, 53).

> *Ideologiekritik* is supposed to have moral implications, but it isn't a form of moralizing criticism, and doesn't *start* from ethical assumptions. *Ideologiekritik* is supposed to enlighten the agents about their true interests by freeing them from errors and delusions about their real situation in the world. There may be other senses of 'real interests,' but they are irrelevant to *Ideologiekritik*; 'real interests' for *Ideologiekritik* are those the agents would form, if they had perfect knowledge. (Geuss 1981, 52)

When a critical theorist asserts of his or her work that its program is not

[54] Here, "objectivity" is to be understood as a God's eye view rather than as shorthand for "intersubjective consensus."

indifferent to some group of agents - that is, that it does not merely give information about how it would be rational for agents to act *if* they had certain interests, it aims to inform them about what interests it is rational for them to have. But importantly, what interests are taken to be rational is not a matter that can be settled independently of human beings and their attitudes. Central to the practices of groups are the kinds and content of arguments that are acceptable or unacceptable in debate even if there exists no theoretical formulation of why this is. Critical theory does not (and logically cannot) derive ethical conclusions from purportedly neutral analyses. In general, critical theories and ameliorative social constructionist programs begin with ethical-political commitments and proceed to analyze social phenomena according to those commitments. Though Haslanger does not state this claim explicitly, I take it that some of her analyses, especially her debunking analyses, are consistent with this methodology: they begin with a presumption of ethical values and then proceed to offer analyses of some social phenomenon. Haslanger is not, however, being philosophically disingenuous in this method. As she sees it, this is the only way for critical analysis and critique to proceed.

3.5 A More Careful Examination of Seventh Grade Girls' Cute/Dork Ideology

The fashion example in "But Mom!" (i) illuminates the challenges that an epistemology of the social world presents, (ii) highlights the complexities involved in debunking ideology, and (iii) hints at the difficulties involved in contesting and changing aspects of the social world. Haslanger points out that, in part, the fact that certain seventh grade girls wear crop-tops (a social fact) constitutes the truth of the claim that it is fashionable for seventh grade girls to wear crop-tops. Seventh grade girls' believing that seventh grade girls wear crop-tops and that those crop-top-wearing girls are cute, presumably also

constitutes the truth. These facts work to constitute the *common knowledge* (the knowledge of people other than seventh grade girls) that it is fashionable for seventh grade girls to wear crop-tops. A condition of possibility of this common knowledge consists in the fact that each seventh grade girl knows this (or that most do?) and that each girl knows that each girl knows this. This common knowledge also requires that non-seventh grade girls too know that seventh grade girls wear crop tops and that seventh grade girls who wear them are considered fashionable or cute and that each (most?) seventh grade girls know this. This common knowledge prompts some girls to wear crop-tops or at least prompts them to want to wear them.

The statement that the criteria by which we judge true and false are those supplied by the shared understanding of the community is not unique to Haslanger. It is hard to imagine where these criteria could arise from if not from this commonality. The existence of criteria undergirded by shared understanding entails that interpretations are not arbitrary, but does not entail that they are just or robustly objective, i.e. as in the "objectivity" sought by Enlightenment thinkers. To call something robustly objective is to presuppose that the observer can assume an Archimedean point. On the account of commonality put forth by Haslanger, with respect to social phenomena, it is shared or similar situatedness that protects against *complete* arbitrariness. Criteria internal to a community are neither arbitrary nor robustly objective, but are constituted by the self-reflexive analysis of community. While this explanation is circular, the constitutive relation avoids the charge of extreme arbitrariness - that is, it avoids the charge that there is nothing at all to which one can point to justify given social practices.

Bicchieri writes the following concerning norms:

> Much of the discussion about what power norms have to affect behavior arises from a confusion about what is meant by 'norm.' A norm can be formal or informal, personal or collective, descriptive of what most people do, or prescriptive of behavior. (2006, 1)

Moreover, she contends the following:

> Given the right kind of expectations, people will have conditional preferences for obeying a norm, meaning that preferences will be conditional on having expectations about other people's conformity. Such expectations and preferences will result in collective behaviors that further confirm the existence of the norm in the eyes of its followers. (2006, 2)

Bicchieri reminds us that with respect to some common knowledge, some individuals "just need to believe that enough other people expect them to conform [in order for an individual to endeavor to conform], whereas others need to believe that others are also prepared to punish their transgressions" (Bicchieri 2006, xi). In agreement with Haslanger and especially with Ásta, Bicchieri notes that, when they are enforced, many sanctions against transgressions are informal "as when the violation of a group norm brings about responses that range from gossip to open censure, ostracism, or dishonor for the transgressor" (Bicchieri 2006, 8). Other sanctions are formal and backed by official authority (cf. Searle (1995)).

Some outsiders (and some insiders - i.e. non-conforming seventh grade girls) believe that it would be better if girls wore midriff-covering tops instead of crop-tops since crop-tops "sexualize the girls who wear them, contribute to the marginalization of the chubby girls, and so on" (Haslanger 2012, 408).[55] As Haslanger suggests, one can imagine parents advising a girl who wants to fit in and be popular that "she shouldn't care about being fashionable, that she shouldn't let what the other girls are doing determine

[55] I note that Haslanger's (2012) language throughout "But Mom, Crop-Tops Are Cute!" would suggest that she is committed to crop-top fashion being ideological in a pejorative sense. I take no stance on the issue of whether crop-tops are socially detrimental.

her choices…" (2012, 408). If a girl chooses to refrain from bowing to fashion trends, perhaps for reasons that concern outsiders such as her parents, or for other reasons, Haslanger rightly notes that the girl may in turn be perniciously marginalized (2012, 408). Thus, Haslanger emphasizes that while rejecting or rebelling against conventions may be a solution for some, "the problem" of crop-top fashion in junior high schools (presumably in the United States) persists just as long as it is common knowledge that seventh grade girls are wearing crop-tops this summer and just as long as it is common knowledge (either for society at large or some subset(s) of society) that it is fashionable for seventh grade girls to wear crop-tops (Haslanger 2012, 408).

On Haslanger's picture, it is seventh grade girls (their beliefs, dispositions, unconscious attitudes, habits, and so on) who determine who is fashionable and what is fashionable for seventh grade girls. Though Haslanger does not explicitly attend to this issue, factors external to the classroom proper, such as the media, clothing choices at the local malls near their school (choices that, in turn, depend on what corporate marketers make available), the opinions of seventh grade boys, among other factors, presumably also go some way in determining, albeit less directly, the criteria for demarcating the popular from the non-popular girls. For seventh grade girls, wearing a crop-top is a collectively decided and a necessary, though, I would guess, not sufficient, condition of fitting in, being popular, or being cute. This claim can be reformulated as follows. In context C (some seventh grade classroom), it is true for subjects S (the seventh grade girls) that wearing a crop-top is a necessary condition for being fashionable, popular, or cute. Wearing a crop-top is likely a necessary, albeit not a sufficient condition for counting as a *cute girl* since

> [l]ike the Wittgensteinian definition of 'game,' we can almost never identify a set of attributes as necessary and sufficient criteria for category membership. Instead, instances are more or less typical in terms of a range of attributes, with maybe a most typical, or prototypical, instance representing the category. (Bicchieri 2006, 83)

There are presumably many ways to wear a crop-top, yet fail to count as cute. A girl can be a non-chubby, but simply an ugly crop-top wearer, for example. Presumably, a girl can have all the external markings of a cute girl, but lack the *je ne sais quoi* to count as a bona fide cute girl. Doubtless, a girl might not be wearing the *right kind of crop-top* in order to count as a cute girl (perhaps, for instance, the girl's crop-top is from Walmart when it should be from American Apparel or Hot Topic).

Haslanger writes that the outsiders' belief that crop-tops sexualize[56] some girls and further marginalize others is also presumably true. I would guess chubby girls, poor girls who cannot keep up with the latest fashion trends, amongst others, might also be marginalized. Haslanger could also have stated the outsiders' claim thus: it is true that outsiders worry that crop-tops sexualize some girls and marginalize others or it is true for subjects O (the outsiders or non-conforming insiders) that the legitimacy of crop-tops sexualizes young girls. The latter statement does not presume the warrant of outsiders' worries.

As I have noted, Haslanger overlooks the likelihood that the criteria that seventh grade girls use to distinguish the fashionable/popular/cute from the unfashionable/unpopular/not-cute are influenced by non-seventh grade girls as well, e.g. their older sisters, the popular ninth grade girls at their school, the opinions of boys at their school, what corporations make available to retail stores, and representations of girls

[56] I note that Haslanger (2012) presumes that a young girl's being sexualized is a bad thing. I take no stance on the issue.

in music videos, fashion blogs, movies, and TV. Indeed, marketing to children has become all the easier in today's technological society. As Sharon Beder notes in *This Little Kiddy Went to Market: The Corporate Capture of Childhood* (2009) notes, viral marketing by means of Internet websites, and especially by means of social networking sites, is both inexpensive and effective since such marketing is undertaken by users themselves and at no expense to the advertiser qua corporation (43).

> Boundaries are broken down between marketers and kids (as kids market to each other); between content and advertising (as advertising now infuses, rather than interrupts, content); and between kids' lives and entertainment (as their lives now become the content of that entertainment). (Bakan 2011, 30)

These examples serve to underscore the interrelation and entwining of individual and group beliefs with media and other technology, which serve to complicate Haslanger's picture in "But Mom!." "But Mom!" wrongly insinuates that it is possible to easily delineate the loci of multiple convening forces that together operate to create and maintain the momentum of some ideology.

To further explore Haslanger's oversimplification of the possible operative criteria for delimiting cute from non-cute girls, let us flesh out how *being cute, popular,* or *fashionable* may be a property attributed to a seventh grade girl by her female classmates, and perhaps by her male classmates as well. If the boys agree that a girl's being cute is bound up with her wearing a crop-top or bound up with her being considered cute by the other girls, then a seventh grade girl may have all the more reason to want to wear a crop-top. For some girls, *being cute* according to the boys may be more important than *being cute* in the eyes of her female friends. For other girls, *being cute* in the eyes of her female friends may be more important than *being cute* according to the boys. At the same time, parents' and other outsiders' worry that crop-tops sexualize girls

remains live. The wearing of a crop-top arguably sexualizes the wearer, but some (including some seventh grade girls) might argue that is what crop-tops are *for*. This fact (if it is a fact) about crop-tops is perhaps precisely why, or at least a reason why, young girls want to wear them. As a seventh grade girl may see it, *being an object of sexual attraction* in the eyes of her male counterparts is conceivably an important feature for a seventh grade girl to possess. Alternatively, this phenomenon may have more to do with just wanting to be like older girls whom they idolize, without the seventh grade girl fully realizing that wearing a crop-top has that sexualizing effect. If a girl is not sexualized in the manner of her crop-top wearing friends (or short shorts wearing friends, or make-up wearing friends, and so on) or if she does not resemble older girls, other girls might think she is a dork,[57] and some of the boys might think so too, perhaps on account of other girls' opinions or of the boys' own accord. She is a dork according to at least some of the girls and boys. Simultaneously, *being an object of sexual attraction* is likely exactly the kind of property parents hope their young daughter does not possess and a property they hope their daughter wishes not to possess. Parents likely do not believe that *not being an object of sexual attraction* is synonymous with being a dork, whereas, perhaps, at least some of their daughters do. These are just some possibilities representative of further complications that "But Mom!" overlooks.

It is possible that no individual girl actually entertains "girls who wear crop-tops are cute" as a cognitive state (it is possible, to use Haslanger's language, that it is no individual girl's manifest belief), but that nonetheless, *being an object of sexual attraction* is an operative goal of some or all of the individual girls who make up the

[57] I adopt Haslanger's (2012) language of *being a dork* as an extreme contrasting property to *being cute*. I do note, however, that 'dork' is an outdated term. While I'm sufficiently properly situated to know that 'dork' is an outdated term, I am not properly situated to know what the current vernacular is.

seventh grade classroom. A dominant ideology that aims to sexualize young girls in the seventh grade classroom may be operative independently of whether all or any of the girls are aware of the ruling ideology.[58] The following citation lends credence to the reading that girls' seeming to want to be sexualized has more to do with wanting to be like their elders without fully realizing that wearing a crop-top (or what have you) has that sexualizing effect.

> Without a doubt, the trip through childhood takes less time in 2001 than it did a generation ago. Is the road getting shorter or are today's kids moving faster? It's probably a little of both. To some extent, kids have always been in a hurry to grow up, to enjoy freedom and glamour they see as part of the territory. A 1998 survey conducted by Toronto-based polling firm Environics Youth Division (YRD) found that 12- to 14-year-olds want to be 18…. (Sutherland & Thompson 2001, 37).

The issue of who determines what or who is fashionable includes a wider range of subjects within and outside the seventh grade classroom than Haslanger envisages or at least than she discusses. The degree of complexity involved in analyzing the social construction and epistemologies of categories, properties, and practices in day-to-day life points to the difficulties involved in disentangling the epistemic and metaphysical aspects of ideologies. The role of the seventh grade girls in endorsing or enacting ideologies from outside the classroom cannot easily be separated from the ideologies proper, because the ideologies from outside are incorporated (partially or fully) within the classroom. In places, Haslanger's account of the relation between agent/actor and ideology expounded in "But Mom!" hints at a neat separation between agent/actor and ideology (i.e. a tidy division between "inside" and "outside"). But this crispness, which Haslanger (at least

[58] It is worth noting that reference to a dominant ideology does not imply that ideologies are bounded. It is, I take it, difficult in some or most cases to disentangle where one ideology begins and another ends. That being said, for practical purposes, it is useful to name or attempt to delineate ideologies. Though this perhaps cannot be accomplished by outlining necessary and sufficient conditions for something's qualifying as part of ideology A or ideology B and so on, one might attempt to demarcate ideologies using other methods (e.g. typical properties).

sometimes) gestures towards in her chapter is artificial or, at best, an oversimplification. In some places in her discussion of the interaction of a daughter and her parents, Haslanger hints at the interdependence of agent/actor and ideology. Yet, in other places in the same chapter, she seems to lose sight of this interdependence. It is in her general remarks related to her use of "ideology" at the beginning of "But Mom!" that Haslanger is most explicit about this strong interdependence. However, these strong claims are not always clear throughout her chapter. Problematically, this, once again, paints an overly simplistic picture of what's at stake and what's involved in analyzing ideology and ideological discord.

The main goal of this section has been to emphasize that there is no clear division between agent/actor (inside) and ideology (outside). According to Haslanger, mind-dependent features of the world are inextricably connected to the reality that they represent or are directed towards, and features of the world (schemas and ideologies) are internalized by individuals. Haslanger would not, I believe, reject this claim and indeed, in some places in "But Mom!" (e.g. in her discussion of MacKinnon's view of how an epistemology of the social world should proceed) she herself seems to reject any notion of a hard distinction between agent/actor and ideology. Haslanger's account raises interesting issues related to the complexity of ideology's scope and force, but it is in some places difficult to make precise her view of aspects of the relation, especially of the complexity and interconnectedness of the agent/ideology relation.

3.6 Making Sense of Disagreement: Haslanger on the Objectivist, Subjectivist, and Framework Readings

As Haslanger points out, one might take the disagreement between the seventh grade girls and the outsiders to concern the truth-value of the following claims: (i) seventh grade

girls who wear crop-tops to school are fashionable/popular/cute and (ii) seventh grade girls who do not wear crop-tops to school are unfashionable/unpopular/dorks (Haslanger 2012, 409). However, Haslanger considers this objectivist reading inappropriate because it is the seventh grade girls decide who is cute and who is a dork within the context of their classroom. Thus, within Haslanger's hypothetical seventh grade classroom, it is true that girls who wear crop-tops to school are fashionable/popular/cute and that those who do not are unfashionable/unpopular/dorks. To state the claim even more precisely, once the cute/dorky dichotomy is operative within the seventh grade classroom, it is true that there are cute girls and dorky girls and if wearing a crop-top is a necessary condition of being cute, then all things being equal, a girl who wears a crop-top is cute.

According to Haslanger, another way to interpret the truth-value reading is to suggest that *cute* and *dork* are evaluative, but non-objective predicates. This is an account of sartorial taste and what Haslanger calls a "subjectivist account." On this account, a seventh grade girl who thinks crop-tops are cute is really and only claiming that crop-tops are cute *to her* and outsiders are really and only claiming that crop-tops are not cute *to them* (Haslanger 2012, 409). But Haslanger does not see this as a plausible reading either because "the patterns of social interactions at the school are what determine the extensions of 'cute' and 'dork'" (Haslanger 2012, 409). Within the seventh grade classroom, there is a fact of the matter about who is and who is not cute (Haslanger 2012, 409). She also suggests that the subjectivist reading is inappropriate insofar as it does not capture the sense in which outsiders are able to offer a critique of young girls' fashion trends. This is, in Haslanger's view, unlike a situation wherein I claim that apples are not delicious to me and wherein you claim that apples are delicious to you. The apple

example offers no possibility of critique: there are no reasons for me to cite as to why you should find apples not to be delicious, whereas in the case of crop-top wearing, reasons can be offered for why young girls should not wear crop-tops.

On another reading, one Haslanger calls the "framework reading," outsiders might be rejecting, and also urging seventh grade girls to reject the cute/dorky dichotomy. Outsiders may think, for instance, that willingness to wear sexy clothing is a misguided reason to classify oneself or others as fashionable/popular/cute. Haslanger shows that this reading produces epistemological puzzles.

Puzzle 1

Since social reality in some (presumably United States') seventh grade classrooms is organized around a cute/dorky dichotomy, it follows that there really are cute girls and dorky girls. But at the same time, the cute/dorky dichotomy is itself an illusion (Haslanger 2012, 409). By "illusion," Haslanger seems to mean not just that the cute/dorky dichotomy is socially constructed, which it is, but that the cute/dorky dichotomy is problematic in a specific way (it is not socially beneficial, it is unethical, or it is unjust) (Haslanger 2012, 409). To put it differently, the cute/dorky dichotomy represents a pernicious ideology.

Even though she does not put her account in these terms, Bourdieu's notion of "doxa" coupled with Marx's sense of "illusion" is helpful to make more precise what Haslanger is gesturing towards in claiming that a dichotomy is not just socially constructed, but *illusory*. For Bourdieu, "doxa" is inseparable from coercive power and it names our forgetting or ignorance of orthodox and heterodox norms and beliefs that are unstated, based on taken-for-granted assumptions, and called the "common sense" that

underpins our social categorizations. "Doxa" names "an adherence to relations of order which, because they structure inseparably both the real world and the thought world, are accepted as self-evident" (Bourdieu 1984, 471). For Marx, something is an illusion when it operates covertly to ensure the participation of those who uphold it unself-consciously and where the participants' upholding of the illusion ensures their own domination, thereby creating a situation contrary to the "real interests" of the participants.[59] Hence, coupling "doxa" with Marx's notion of illusion, it would seem that by "illusory," Haslanger means something like "a social construct that is viewed as necessary or inevitable and is also socially detrimental." "Illusion" seems to be synonymous with "pernicious, unself-conscious ideology." Haslanger does not attempt to solve the puzzle, but sees the framework reading as the most apt reading to capture what's at stake between a daughter and her parents.

Puzzle 2

Because of what follows from seventh grade girls believing in, upholding, or endorsing the cute/dorky dichotomy, another puzzle emerges: "…it is true that *p* so you should believe *p*; but believing *p* makes it true, and it would be better if *p* weren't true; so you shouldn't believe *p*" (Haslanger 2012, 410). On one hand, a girl should believe that her peers who do not wear crop-tops are dorks, but on the other hand, if the outsiders are right, then she should also not believe it (Haslanger 2012, 410). One way to resolve (or dissolve) the puzzle is to say that the girl should believe what is true. In this case, we

[59] To clarify how illusion or false consciousness works, it is helpful to refer to Marx and Engels' *The German Ideology*:

> The ruling areas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of their dominance. ([1972]/2001, 64)

have an epistemic 'should' (Haslanger 2012, 410). But as the framework reading has shown, it is both true and false that girls who wear crop-tops are cute. If, on the other hand, an outsider argues that the girl should not believe what she believes, then the 'should' is moral (Haslanger 2012, 410). According to Haslanger, the epistemic 'should' is impotent or unsatisfying because of the non-volitional nature of beliefs. Thus, on the epistemic reading, a girl should believe that girls who wear crop-tops are cute because it is true that girls who wear crop-tops are cute. But its being true that girls who wear crop-tops are cute rests on the force of a socially problematic ideology. Undoing the force of the pernicious ideology is no easy enterprise and neither is changing a person's beliefs since one's beliefs are, according to Haslanger, largely non-volitional.

Puzzle 3

Because of the non-volitional nature of beliefs,[60] it does little to say to a girl that she should not believe that girls who wear such and such are cute. Suppose an outsider threatens the following. "If you continue to believe that crop-tops are suitable for seventh grade girls to wear to school, I'll cut your allowance in half" (Haslanger 2012, 410). Here, it seems there is little that the girl can do other than look for reasons that will change her parents' minds or for the girl to simply lie to her parents about what she believes (Haslanger 2012, 410). Puzzle 3 thus leaves us at an impasse, which will be further explored in the following chapter. What is to be done if beliefs are non-volitional? If beliefs are non-volitional, how much change can ameliorative social constructionist projects realistically hope to achieve?

[60] I follow Haslanger (2012) in treating beliefs as non-volitional.

3.7 Empirical Research Supporting Haslanger's Articulation of Puzzle 3

The following research suggests that the situation highlighted by Puzzle 3 is all the more unsurprising because of parents' relative impotence in the face of their children[61] in day-to-day consumer activities. Western children are no longer seen as untainted receivers of gifts purchased by adults, but rather as consumers themselves who tell their parents what to buy. "Think of the old family as an inverted triangle where parents set rules and made decisions and kids follow" (Sutherland & Thompson 17, 2001). One hypothesis for explaining this transformation in power relations is that as some working parents have less and less time in a day to spend with their children, "they replace time with material things" (Sutherland and Thompson 2001, 25). If this inversion of power relations seems too strong, at minimum, one can

> …think of the new family model[62] as a circle. Parents still rule, but decision-making becomes more democratic. Children are no longer expected to blindly follow along, but are encouraged to participate in discussions. (Sutherland & Thompson 2001, 25)

At the same time, in "Not By Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution," Peter J. Richerson and Robert Boyd point out that, problematically, most Americans, or at least most American parents, mistakenly think that parents are the main source of their children's beliefs and values (2008, 156). It is true that children "normally form close bonds to parents, and in some cultures, parents make strenuous efforts to shape their children's beliefs" and it is also "true also that beliefs and attitudes of children and parents are often quite similar" (Richerson and Boyd 2008, 156). However, they

[61] I note that the question of whether *children* or *childhood* represents a natural category is a live question.
[62] While this "new family model" is applicable to some parts of the Western post-industrial capitalist world, its general applicability outside this context is a matter of further empirical investigation.

suggest that evidence shows that parents play a minor role in determining the cultural variants that their children take up.

> Behavior genetic studies indicate that most of the similarity between the personality traits of parents and children is due to genetic inheritance, not vertical cultural transmissions. At the same time… [there exists] a large amount of "environmental" variation that is *not* shared within families. Children learn a lot from one another, and from adults other than their parents... Social learning is about collecting adaptive information from the surrounding environment. Increasing the size of a sample increases your chance of acquiring useful information, because a larger sample makes all kinds of biased transmission more effective. (Richerson and Boyd 2008, 156)

Furthermore, it is plausible that

> [a]s social distance increases, we[63] tend to care less and less for others' preferences and expectations, especially when these preferences and expectations run counter to other interests we have. (Bicchieri 2006, 25)

In some or perhaps even most cases, the social distance between two seventh grade girls within the context of the seventh grade classroom is shorter than the social distance between the girl situated in her seventh grade classroom and her parents' situation outside the classroom. In these cases, seventh grade girls are more influenced and more apt to be influenced by preferences and expectations of other seventh grade girls than by their parents. This suggests that Haslanger's hope that seventh grade girls and their parents can come to a middle ground - a topic barely addressed or elaborated upon at the end of "But Mom!" - is less plausible than she seems to imagine.

3.8 Recapping the Crop-Top Dispute

The cute/dorky dichotomy is a precondition for its being true that girls who wear crop-tops are cute. However, from the standpoint of outsiders, there is something illusory (which for Haslanger, equates to there being something ethically problematic) about the

[63] Bicchieri's (2006) use of "we" seems intended to refer to all people across all contexts.

very existence of the dichotomy. It is not the truth of the claim that 'seventh grade girls who wear crop-tops are cute' that is at issue in the framework debate *per se*. Haslanger's analysis of the metaphysics and epistemology that undergird our practices and categorizations is a device for uncovering or proffering an interpretation of the background ideology (or ideologies) that underpins belief formation. Haslanger is thus not primarily interested in the standard realist question, which in this case is "Are seventh grade girls who wear crop-tops to school *really* cute?" This is to say that, for Haslanger, the question is not primarily one of standard epistemology, i.e. whether instances of taken for granted knowledge or beliefs taken to be justified and true, are indeed true.

Against Haslanger, a realist might counter that, nonetheless, the question of whether or not girls who wear crop-tops really are cute is of primary importance. As the robust realist might state the problem, if it is true (or more strongly, *because* it is true) that young crop-top wearers are cute and because crop-tops sexualize young wearers (and because this is a bad thing), people should work toward ensuring that the wearing of crop-tops by young girls is no longer considered cute in any situation. Accomplishing this task might be undertaken by exposing the pernicious ideology on which the belief that "crop-tops on young girls are cute" rests, thereby eventually (and hopefully) making it the case that young girls who wear crop-tops are not cute. The anti-realist can retort that whether or not it really is true that young crop-top wearers are cute and that crop-tops sexualize the young wearers (and that this is a bad thing), insofar as "we" (wiser adults?) judge these to be true, we can and should work toward ensuring that the wearing of crop-tops by young girls is no longer considered cute.

In “But Mom!,” Haslanger’s championing of “the framework reading” emphasizes the impossibility of a context-free way to decide the standard epistemological question of whether or not a seventh grade crop-top wearing girl is cute. If seventh grade crop-top-wearing girls are cute (to seventh grade girls and perhaps seventh grade boys, but not to the girls’ parents), they are cute because of the operative ideology at play in the situation in which the girls find themselves. If they are not cute according to their parents, this is because the ideologies that their parents uphold arise from their differently situated position - from a different social milieu. If ideology is inescapable, then when it comes to interests, values, and so on, there is nothing a priori or (non-socially) metaphysical to seek out in order to settle the ideological debate: the distinction between “real” and “apparent” blurs. The distinction between real and apparent, however, can nonetheless maintain traction on this picture insofar as it relates to differences between what people think they are doing and what others take them to be doing (the manifest) and what might *really* be occurring (the operative). Ideology critique and debunking analyses help us to understand the contours and makeup of our beliefs and practices. Such analyses can also serve to expose inconsistencies in our thinking or show our beliefs to be founded on evidence that, once made clearer to us, we may no longer find compelling.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to spell out more carefully than does Haslanger herself what is meant by “ideology” throughout *Resisting Reality* and especially in “But Mom!.” This is an important undertaking since Haslanger takes ideology to play a key role in accounting for the epistemology and metaphysics of disagreements about (i) what some social kind *is*, i.e. disagreements about the conditions under which some X counts as a Y or about

what constraints and enablements are connected to Y, and (ii) which categories we do and should use to guide our thinking and to organize the social world. I have expounded and strengthened Haslanger's claim that the existence and mechanisms of operation of ideology or ideologies blur the distinction between "inside" and "outside" - that is, between self and ideology. Hence, in the context of social phenomena, undoing an ideology requires a kind of undoing of the mental attitudes of those who uphold that ideology. I have suggested that Haslanger underemphasizes this important issue. In the following chapter, I ask what is meant by social constructionists' invocation of the notion of "non-inevitability" and ask what constitutes "amelioration" or "emancipation" in the context of social constructionist programs. In so doing, I attend to such issues as the meaning of progress and the distinction between transcendental and immanent ethics.

CHAPTER FOUR: "Non-Inevitability," the Hegemony of the Status Quo, and Relativism

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I put forth my most substantive and original arguments in order to articulate what social constructionism amounts to and specifically, what it means for something to be a social construction. To do so, I attend to three potentially vitiating issues that may affect the cogency, scope, and degree of success of social constructionist programs, and ameliorative versions in particular.

I analyze the extent to which the theoretical cogency and practical efficacy of descriptive and ameliorative social constructionist programs are affected by: (i) vagueness surrounding the meanings of terminology typically utilized by many social constructionists, namely 'non-inevitability,' 'amelioration,' and 'emancipation,' as well

as the threats of (ii) the hegemony of the status quo and (iii) relativism in the context of competing analyses of some purportedly social construction X, a topic I will argue is closely related to (ii). These latter themes are closely connected to worries surrounding relativism and social constructionism, which I introduced in Chapters 2 and 3. My task in this chapter is successful if it can explain, organize, and clarify how issues (i)-(iii) affect social constructionist programs, and ameliorative versions of social constructionism especially. I provide an analysis of what social constructionist projects purport to offer and what they do and might offer. This analysis involves uncovering and assessing the ontology and epistemology that social constructionism presupposes and upon which it draws, as well as addressing the ethical premises and conclusions that are sometimes implicit or explicit elements of its projects. This chapter proposes a tractable and plausible account of what social constructionists might mean in employing the notion of "non-inevitability." I also argue that while worries surrounding the hegemony of the status quo and relativism are live, they do not wholly undermine social constructionists' programs, whether their programs are primarily descriptive or ameliorative in nature.

I begin this chapter by assessing various interpretations of what might be meant by social constructionist claims of X's non-inevitability, highlighting the advantages and shortcomings of each interpretation. My main argument is that, so far, the claim of non-inevitability on the part of social constructionists has not been adequately justified. This is to say that the meaning of non-inevitability has not been made precise or that the claim of non-inevitability relies too heavily on theorists' intuitions about what is social/natural, unnecessary/necessary, or alterable/inalterable. In an attempt to bolster social constructionist programs, I propose two understandings of non-inevitability which,

though somewhat coarse-grained, are not thereby merely half-baked. The understandings that I recommend are both more substantive and more precise than what has thus far been offered in the existing literature.

4.1 Non-Inevitability

According to Hacking (1999), social constructionists about X usually hold that:

> (0) In the present state of affairs, *X* is taken for granted, *X* appears to be inevitable (12).
> (1) *X* need not have existed, or need not be at all as it is. *X*, or *X* as it at present, is not determined by the nature of things; it is not inevitable (6).
> They often go further and argue that:
> (2) *X* is quite bad as it is (6).
> (3) We would be much better off if *X* were done away with, or at least radically transformed (6).

In my second chapter, I proposed that Hacking's presentation of the employment of "non-inevitability" by social constructionists is vague.

André Kukla expounds upon this same theme in *Social Constructivism and the Philosophy of Science* (2000). As Kukla notes, Hacking's Theses (0), (2), and (3) elucidate "the point" of social constructionist claims rather than their meaning (2000, 2). In other words, Hacking's Theses (0) (2), and (3) are not critical prerequisites for descriptive social constructionist claims, though they are necessary, I note, in order for ameliorative or emancipatory versions to carry out their analyses and recommendations. However, whether one's account is primarily descriptive or ameliorative, Thesis (1) *is* a necessary condition for claiming that "X is socially constructed." For most social constructionists, "X is socially constructed" entails that X is not inevitable (Kukla 2000, 2). This is to say that according to Thesis (1), a necessary condition for the plausibility of the social constructionist claim that "X is socially constructed" entails that X is not inevitable. Yet, being socially constructed does not fully define "non-inevitability" and

nor does "non-inevitability" fully define the meaning of "socially constructed," or so I intend to show. While Kukla does not provide, and nor does he take it as his primary goal to provide an amended account of the meaning of non-inevitability in the context of social constructionist programs, I take as one of my main tasks in what follows to clarify and make tractable the meaning of non-inevitability.

Making clearer what inevitability amounts to is important since what establishes X's non-inevitability, and thus, whether X is or is not non-inevitable, is often precisely what is in question between social constructionists and their opponents. It is sometimes what is at issue among social constructionists as well. Stated as it is, Thesis (1) offers no criteria to delimit the inevitable from the non-inevitable or the natural or non-social from the social. It is the criteria that decide these matters that are part of what is at issue between advocates and opponents of social constructionism. The criteria that decide these issues are also a matter of disagreement among some social constructionists. Hence, I attempt to make clearer the various ways in which the claim of X's non-inevitability might be understood. I present what I take to be Thesis (1)'s most promising interpretations, which I name the "Dependence Reading" and the "Alterability Reading" respectively. While they are not entirely precise, I see the two readings I advocate, whether taken individually or together, as offering a substantive account of non-inevitability that is theoretically, politically, and practically useful.

However, I begin by expounding what I call the "Extremist Reading" of Thesis (1), a reading I take to be largely implausible. Yet, underscoring the shortcomings of the Extremist Reading is productive: it serves in my task of buttressing the Dependence and Alterability Readings, insofar as I argue that these latter readings can avoid the

difficulties of the Extremist Reading. On the Extremist Reading, Thesis (1) means that X is not inevitable in the sense that everything might be non-inevitable (in the sense of "not logically necessary") - most extremely, perhaps there need not have been something rather than nothing. The problem with this reading is that everything, including all that is obviously non-social, is possibly non-inevitable (e.g. planets, evergreens, sloths, cancer). According to this reading, it might be that only such things as mathematical or logical truths are inevitable, though I will not discuss this possibility further. The Extremist Reading demonstrates that the distinctive feature of social constructions is that they are not inevitable in this wide sense. It further reveals that "inevitable" need not be understood as necessarily coextensive with "natural" and that "socially-constituted/caused" need not be understood as necessarily coextensive with "non-inevitable."

I now turn to the Dependence Reading, a more plausible understanding of Thesis (1). On this understanding, the claim of inevitability on the part of social constructionists is a claim about what features are central to X's existence. To claim that some X is not inevitable is to think of it in terms of its degree of dependence on social phenomena. Non-inevitability therefore falls on a spectrum: the more dependent X is upon social factors, the more X is not inevitable. There is not, then, a hard and fast distinction between the inevitable and the non-inevitable. Rather, at one end of the spectrum are those phenomena that are more directly results of biological or other physical features, and hence, relatively independent of social phenomena. Moving along the continuum are phenomena that are more dependent on other social factors. For example, non-inevitability increases as one moves from kinship structures (phenomena highly

dependent upon biological features), to marriage (a pervasive cross-cultural phenomenon), to such phenomena as engagement rituals, the wearing of a ring on a given finger, stag and stagette parties, and wedding/bridal showers.

To reiterate, the less X is the result of non-social factors - the less causally or constitutively dependent X is upon social factors - the more X is inevitable and the more X is a feature of, or parasitic upon, social practices or features, the less X is inevitable. Hence, we can know that marriage is more non-inevitable than kinship structures since without the latter, there would not be the former. We also know that engagement parties are more non-inevitable than marriage because without marriage there would not be engagement parties. This is because an engagement party is an optional (but typical) event held prior to, and parasitic upon, an intended future marriage. Again, though this reading cannot offer a foolproof or highly exact manner of assessing grades of social dependence, it goes quite some way in articulating a principled method of settling debates about whether and to what extent X is a social construction.

Closely related to the issue of X's non-inevitability is that of X's alterability. According to the Alterability Reading, X must be a social phenomenon that is alterable (substantively and not solely in the sense of wide theoretical counterfactual possibility) to some extent by human action, intentional or otherwise. Alterability tends to be coextensive with social dependence because the more alterable something is, the more it is typically dependent on other social processes. However, this coextensive relation does not always hold: some biological and other kinds are alterable by human intervention even though they are not normally dependent on social factors or processes. The theses of dependence and alterability, then, are distinct. This is to say that a social constructionist

need not commit to the view that meeting both the Dependence and Alterability Readings' criteria is necessary such that some X counts as a social construction. Rather, some might think it sufficient that some X qualifies as a social construction just in case it meets the criteria of the Dependence Reading or the Alterability Reading. Others might think it necessary that both the Dependence and the Alterability Readings are met in order that X qualify as a social construction. Still others might say that it sufficient that X fulfills either Reading, though if it fulfills both, it is a stronger or clearer example of a social construction.

Emphasizing alterability works to reveal (or more minimally, to propose) the dependence of X upon culture and individual or group decisions. It therefore works to suggest that it is within human beings' collective power to change X through future choices. Highlighting X's dependence upon social factors may also function to stress our responsibility to modify X if X is (thought to be) unjust. Yet, given the particularities of socio-political-material circumstances, some social phenomena may be difficult or even impossible to alter at a given point in space and time due to conceptual or physical limitations. Consider, for instance, the unlikelihood of same-sex marriage being considered a conceptual or substantive legal possibility in Canada in the year 1900. As the Alterability Reading emphasizes, the claim that "X need not have happened or be at all as it is" must be specified to refer to the extent to which it *is* within human beings' control, at some particular time and in some particular place, to determine whether X continues to exist as it is currently or at all. For instance, in Canada, the institution of marriage is no longer restricted solely to heterosexual legally sanctioned unions. Through collective decision and action, including legal reform, the institution of marriage was

altered to include same-sex unions as well. Put more simply, according to the Alterability Reading, X must be substantively alterable and not just theoretically alterable in a wide sense of counterfactual possibility. Though of course, some things are intuitively more substantively alterable than others, whether X really is substantively alterable is likely an issue that can only be settled *ex post*, given that we can know that what is actual is certainly possible.

I have thus far suggested that whether X is within human beings' power to alter is both a theoretical and a practical issue. While X, where X is socially caused or constituted, may be theoretically alterable - that is, while X may be alterable in the widest sense of counterfactual possibility - X may be practically inalterable in some space and time or may simply fail to be altered. To put the point differently, even if the ameliorative social constructionist sees the here and now as a good and timely condition for X's alteration, as a matter of course, X may fail to be altered in the way the social constructionist envisions or may fail to be altered at all. The ameliorative social constructionist's particular program may fail to be taken up and substantively enacted by some or all of its audience. This failure may be due to a variety of factors: perhaps, according to the audience's estimation, the program fails to accurately capture what it intends to capture or perhaps the audience, even accepting the program as persuasive, fails to take up, for a variety of reasons, the ameliorative or transformative aspects that the program specifies. Often, it would seem that independent of whether there exist good reasons for a community to alter X, whether X really is alterable by human effort in a given place and time is an issue that can only be answered after the fact. It is also worth pausing to note at this point that what seems like an ameliorative idea at the time can turn

out to be disastrous in hindsight. In "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man" (1971), Charles Taylor writes on this subject, "[h]uman science is largely *ex post* understanding. Or often one has the sense of impending change, of some big reorganization, but is powerless to make clear what it will consist in…" (50). There is, to put it simply, an issue about whether there are good reasons for people to be moved to alter X and an issue about whether or not they will.

With these difficulties on the table, I nonetheless wish to illustrate how the Alterability Reading might function both theoretically and practically. I do this through a consideration of alterability as it applies to the following case - the baptism of a child as "female-" or "male-" gendered by the child's parents and community in a context where conceptually, only two gender categories exist. Given the social conditions that be - that is, given that the community recognizes only two mutually exclusive gender categories, the child will be declared either female or male. This situation was counterfactually alterable: it was theoretically possible (in a wide sense) that the community recognized more than two gender categories or that the community even rejected the concept of gender altogether. The degree to which the situation (in this case, gender assignment) is counterfactually alterable is, in turn, dependent on the particularities of the social-historical context.

In this sense, gender and sex designation is more likely to be made inclusive of non-binary genders and sexes in the year 2016 in some parts of the world than it was in the year 1900 in Canada. But one does not want to say that in Canada circa 1900, gender assignment was not a social construction *tout court* since categories of gender assignment were and are dependent on social factors. Gender met and meets the Dependence Reading

both in 1900 and today, and by now, at least in some locations in the world, it is commonplace for most people to accept that gender is, at least to a certain degree, a social construct. Today, in some parts of the world, gender also meets the conditions of the Alterability Reading. That gender is alterable, in the present and in select places to varying extents, is made plausible by the proliferation and uptake of new terms and concepts. In some parts of the Western world, such terms and concepts such as 'ze,' "gender fucking," and "pan-genderism," have taken on some currency. Materially, more and more "gender-neutral" bathrooms in public spaces, for instance, have been designated.

While gender assignment in Canada circa 1900 meets the Dependence Reading's conditions, thus constituting gender as an instance of a social construction, it did not meet the criteria stipulated by the Alterability Reading. This is because, in the not so distant past, the concrete capacity for gender assignment's being non-binary in Canada was not within human beings' power to amend because it was, quite simply, not within most people's imaginations. Some might say that gender was therefore *less* socially constructed in Canada in 1900 than in 2016 precisely because it was less alterable. However, one might not want to commit to this claim and rather, may wish to stipulate plainly that gender either was or was not a social construction in 1900. The simplest way to establish that gender was a social construction circa 1900 is to appeal to social dependence: as long as and wherever the concept of gender has been a manifest or operative sortal category, it has been and is socially dependent for its existence.

It is also noteworthy that socially constituted phenomena alterable at a given time and place may be inalterable or vary in their degree of alterability at another time or

location. As the gender assignment example illustrates, gender was relatively unalterable in 1900 in Canada compared to its alterability in various parts of the world in 2016. But social dependence alone seems to capture what many descriptive social constructionists want to capture: that X's being a social construction is a matter of degree, namely the degree to which X's existence is dependent on social factors. In the case of gender, the conditions of the Alterability Reading are also met insofar as gender norms have changed and continue to change substantively and to a significant extent. Fulfilling the criteria of the Alterability Reading is essential for ameliorative social constructionists programs. But to reiterate, the realization of amelioration - that is, X's actual potential for alteration by some group of human beings - is something that can only be determined after the fact. The realization of amelioration, as some social constructionist or group sees it, is dependent on audience uptake and complicated ideological relations.

The Alterability Reading faces other complications. The usual thought, or at least the usual implication on the part of social constructionists and others, is that phenomena more dependent on social factors (i.e. phenomena dependent on the collective representation of some X as a Y or the imposition of function Y on X) are more easily alterable than phenomena that are less dependent for their existence upon social factors. At worst, this thought is simply wrongheaded and at best, it requires much more careful analysis - certainly more than I can provide within this dissertation. But, for the purpose of elucidation, allow me to say at least a few words on the issue. There may exist some natural or empirical (biological, chemical) factors over which we have as much or even more control than social factors. Intervention into the physical differs from intervention into the social for a variety of reasons. Insofar as mechanisms of causation are sometimes

more easily isolatable in the physical domain, the alterability of natural (non-social) phenomena undertaken by human beings may be more straightforwardly or effectively carried out than in the case of people's attempts to alter social phenomena. As Taylor writes of the social domain, "we cannot shield a certain domain of human events, the psychological, economic, political, from external interference; it is impossible to delineate a closed system" (1971, 49).

Taylor's (1971) claim accentuates the difficulties related to altering the social world in light of human beings' frequent inability to isolate the multitude of relevant factors that would have to be recognized and isolated such that some social phenomenon X could be intentionally altered in order to meet a predetermined goal. This difficulty was addressed in my third chapter by means of the example of crop-top fashion in an examination of Haslanger's (2012) "But Mom!." My analysis of her piece showed that a condition of success of social constructionist debunking and the successful alteration of elements of the social world requires, in turn, an effective analysis and critique of ideology. But ideologies, as they are defined in my third chapter, are not typically bounded. Delineating how many ideologies are at work and how to separate and target their force is epistemically challenging. Further, ideology's normalizing and hegemonic effects also work to impede the alterability of some social phenomena. Once an ideology is well-entrenched, it can be invisible to those who participate in upholding it. Consequently, social phenomena may be difficult to alter on account of human beings' tendency towards maintenance of the status quo. Further, there exist interactions between social-scientific, lay classifications, and broad habits or cultural practices, and these interactions typically occur between classifications and individuals who *un*reflectively

conform or react to them. Since it is unclear to what extent ideologies are volitional, it is also unclear how to go about undermining their force. It is also worth remarking that insofar as academic work and conversation can be insular and its language inaccessible, social constructionist programs cannot be effective if their messages never reach those they are supposed to affect.

As I have suggested, another major impediment to amending current concepts or practices relates to the relevance of space and time to the possible contents of thought and imagination. As the gender conferral example in this chapter serves to illustrate, in the ever-present now, human beings are not capable of conferring any random meaning upon a situation and nor are they capable of understanding any individual or group as falling under any social category whatsoever (e.g. those categories unavailable to human beings' current imaginations). Individuals and groups are constrained by their situatedness in their ability to alter or possess concepts. The very possibilities for the content of consciousness or directions of concrete action are limited by one's social-historical-political situation.

These complications, however, do not wholly undermine the Alterability Reading. What they do show is that if one adopts the Alterability Reading, then one is committed to the view that some phenomena that are socially constructed and alterable in the here and now were perhaps not alterable in the past and vice versa and that, moreover, phenomena may be shown to be alterable only after the fact. Unless these are intolerable consequences, which I do not think they are, the existence of the above noted complexities does not present an altogether damning case against the Alterability Reading's understanding of non-inevitability or of what it means to say that some X is

socially constructed. Though course-grained, both readings provide an attempt to spell out more clearly than what has so far been offered in existing social constructionist literature of what might be meant by the claim of "non-inevitability" on the part of social constructionists.

Thus far, I have sought to establish that if we interpret the claim of non-inevitability according to the Dependence or Alterability Readings, social constructionists do indeed have a substantive thesis (namely, a revamped version of Hacking's Thesis (1)) to ground their proposals. The meaning of Thesis (1) can be unpacked so as to be made satisfying, and, as will be shown in the following section (at least sometimes) practically efficacious.

4.2 Putting Social Phenomena's Commitments to Inevitability and Alterability into Practice

Even in contexts where X is widely agreed to be a social construction that fulfills the Dependency and Alterability criteria, that is, where X is a phenomenon moderately to highly dependent upon other social features and which is, at least to some extent, knowingly within human beings' power to alter (given history, past and relatively novel amendments to concepts, institutions, and practices), social constructionist analyses may still have purchase. Such analyses serve to specify or delimit the nature of X and to *remind* and keep open-minded a particular audience of X's nature.

For the purpose of elucidation, let us consider the concept and institution/practice of *marriage* in Canada in the year 2016. The proliferation of social constructionist analyses works to constantly disrupt or reinforce the sense that both the concept of X and the institution/practice of X had to be as it once was and must be as it is now. An analysis of marriage that utilizes the Dependence or Alterability Readings of Thesis (1) serves to

demarcate which features are, arguably, most central to the concept or institution/practice, as well as the extent of the dependence of the features of marriage that are, in turn, dependent on other social factors. To put it differently, a social constructionist analysis of marriage makes clearer which features are more dependent on other social features and, therefore, *perhaps* more amenable to change. It is necessary, for instance, that for a marriage to exist at all, it must involve more than one person. Other features are more or less socially dependent/alterable, including the extent to which marriage has been or is patriarchal, heterosexist, and pro-monogamous.

In order to underscore the non-inevitability of marriage (considered both as a concept and an institution/practice), a social constructionist may pose questions and provide an answer or even a multiplicity of answers in turn. Was it non-inevitable that marriage, at least for most of its history and in most places still, be patriarchal and heterosexist? Was it non-inevitable that some societies came to see marriage as a conceptual possibility? What had to occur in order that same-sex marriage is considered (in at least some places) a conceptual, let alone a political or legal, possibility? The suggestion of the non-inevitability (the social dependence and alterability) of the particularities of marriage may be stressed to an even greater extent by the proliferation of a multitude of alternative genealogies or critiques of some X (a concept, social institution, or practice). Of course, a genealogy, critique, or argument that succeeds in persuading "us" or "them" of its truth (or more weakly, of its plausibility) is not tantamount to the genealogy's, critique's, or argument's being accurate or true. But, the accuracy or truth of an analysis or program is not always the be all and end all in terms of a project's capacity to engender social change. I now turn to social constructionist

programs' alternative mechanisms - those programs that do not take truth as a necessary goal - for engendering social change.

A genealogy, critique, or argument need not definitively prove its claim in order to persuade "us" or "them" of X's dependence upon social factors. These analyses can nonetheless work, at minimum, to induce scepticism[64] in their audience concerning the sometimes taken for granted necessity or naturalness of marriage's (or any other social phenomenon X's) features. They can also work to highlight problematic and beneficial characteristics of X and suggest ways to remedy current injustices and to nurture virtues as "we" see them. Whether an argument or genealogy affords any easy answers of "yes," "no," or "indeterminate" to questions about which features of X are non-inevitable, raising such questions serves to destabilize people's confidence in the way marriage or any X "must be," even when X is agreed to be, to a significant extent, a social construction. Indeed, perhaps exposing the vagueness of the concept of non-inevitability itself can serve social constructionists' goal of disrupting an audience's certainty about the status - the necessity and inalterability - of their concepts and, in turn, some phenomena (e.g. the social categories employed in the social world) themselves. Insofar as the social constructionist's line of argumentation succeeds in this goal, social constructionist programs may indeed have practical force and influence independent of whether the Dependence and Alterability Readings, on their own terms, can prove what social constructionists hope to establish theoretically.

The first part of this chapter put forth three construals of "non-inevitability." The

[64] Herein, I intend by "scepticism" not Academic scepticism (the Socratic or Cartesian variety) or Pyrrhonian scepticism, but rather, following Code (1995) to a "strategic" variety. By this she means "the 'healthy skepticism' that parents teach to their children about media advertising, and that marks cautiously informed attitudes…" (Code 1995, 63 fn. 10).

first, the Extremist Reading, was found to be theoretically wanting. I have argued that the claim of non-inevitability on the part of social constructionists can be fruitfully understood as (i) a claim about what kind of features are central to X's existence (i.e. a claim about the degree of dependence of X on other social features) and (ii) a claim about X's alterability, which refers specifically to whether, in the here and now, it *is* within our ability to substantially change X. Though the distinction between the inevitable and the non-inevitable is not hard and fast, and although the possibility of successful alteration must be relativized to context (space/time/imaginative possibilities), the social constructionist's assertion of Thesis (1), once reformulated according to the Dependence or Alterability Readings, is not therefore rudderless. The social constructionist offers a productive program just in case she can disrupt interlocutors' confidence or faith in the view that some X's existence is independent of social factors or inalterable. That is, minimally, the social constructionist succeeds in her program if she can move her interlocutors to be sceptical rather than dogmatic about X (even where X refers to the notion of non-inevitability itself). Inducing scepticism does not necessarily lead to quietude or to defeatism (Code 1995, 190). Indeed, if one's commitments can be shaken concerning the inevitability of X or the necessity of X's particular features, one may become more willing to alter their commitments, both theoretically and practically. This, in turn, may permit some X to become substantively alterable.

4.3 Getting Clearer on Alteration, Amelioration, Progress, and Debunking

In broad terms, an ameliorative social constructionist program attempts to understand a purportedly oppressive or otherwise problematic aspect of the social world such that this understanding encourages its audience to transform the social world and thereby, to

emancipate or ameliorate themselves by altering some aspect(s) of the audience's situation. In this section, I ask whether alterability goes hand in hand with amelioration or emancipation[65] and examine what is meant and what is involved when a social constructionist takes as her goal the amelioration of X. Earlier in this chapter, alterability was precisified to mean X's substantive potential for alteration or the actualization of its alteration by human action, intentional or otherwise. Still, the notion of alteration can be understood in a variety of ways and hence, requires further clarification. Alteration can refer to mere change or to an improved or worsened state of affairs. With the Alterability Reading in mind, the ameliorative social constructionist intends to improve some state of affairs for some individuals or groups. This task might be undertaken in a variety of ways. It may involve exposing X's dependence upon social factors and individuals' and groups' ability to alter X. In the spirit and letter of Haslanger (2012), it may involve exposing how some audience's manifest conception(s) of X do not align with the operative concept(s) of X or some proposed target concept of X. In some cases, X may already be widely accepted as a social phenomenon, but X's operative function may be masked or otherwise distorted. A constructionist might respond to this situation in a variety of ways. She might argue that "we" should alter our conception of X to match the operative conception of X or vice versa. She may also argue that an altogether new concept of X is preferable or that amendments be made to "our" understanding of X - amendments that measure amelioration in terms of improved empirical or explanatory adequacy, justice to the operative concept, or justice understood in a moral sense.

[65] I treat "emancipation" and "amelioration" as more or less interchangeable notions, though I acknowledge that for some thinkers, the former notion especially has a highly specific meaning (e.g. Marx's account of emancipation versus the colloquial usage).

Closely connected to the idea of amelioration is that of progress - a notion that also requires unpacking. "Progress" can be understood in several ways: (i) as temporally mediated difference (rather than temporally mediated development) or (ii) as coming to know what you didn't previously know (as opposed to not knowing what you don't know).[66] The notion of progress is closely related to the notions of amelioration and emancipation. Sense (i) represents ameliorative or emancipatory progress. Also associated with the notions of amelioration and progress is the issue of what is meant by the terms 'debunking' or 'demystifying.' To debunk or demystify may mean: (i) that one no longer holds inhibitory false beliefs about X (e.g. that X is inevitable when it is actually dependent for its existence on other social features) or (ii) that one now hold certain empowering true beliefs about X (i.e. that X is alterable under specific conditions). If (i) is emancipatory, it is in a weaker sense than (ii). The first sense is emancipatory in the following respect: one is no longer captive to an illusion, but there is no other positive consequence other than this sense of relief. The second sense represents the sort of thing Marx proposed in his "Theses on Feuerbach" (1845), Section XI (i.e. that the way you come to realize that X is not inevitable also enables you also to realize how X might be changed). This is a more robust emancipatory perspective. However, as my second and third chapters have argued, debunking or demystifying requires much more than the simple social constructionist thesis that "X is not inevitable." It also requires complex analyses about historical causation and possibility, something Marx would certainly agree with. In any case, social constructionists may intend to make progress in either sense of the term. Haslanger's 2012 work, especially her focus therein on redefining *woman* and *race* intends progress in the second sense.

[66] This list is non-exhaustive.

Broadly, social constructionist analyses implicitly or explicitly characterize aspects of human lives or the social world as "false." This "falseness" refers to the view that our lives are argued to be sometimes organized around erroneous notions of who we are, what needs we really have, the nature of our practices and institutions, and of what we are capable. Yet ameliorative social constructionists see human beings as capable of altering their situations on the basis of debunking or other social constructionist programs. They assume that human beings can create novel ways of being a person and novel ways of living such that people's interests can be better satisfied. In short, social constructionists take it that humans can ameliorate themselves and their situations. The process by which individual human beings or groups might alter their concepts and habits does not always rely on their being consciously attuned or disposed to change. In some cases, human beings may be poised to change without their conscious awareness. Though change in the social world sometimes happens independently of human willing, people are nonetheless also potential activists. A presupposition or a condition of possibility of ameliorative social constructionist programs' success is that individuals are capable of assuming an engaged role in the social world and of constructing themselves, in part, on the basis of their self-interpretations.

By coming to realize the epistemology and metaphysics that sustain aspects of the social world, human beings can learn to alter the social world to various degrees. Of course, such heavy philosophical work is not always required. One might come to see that marriage, for example, is a sham or mostly based on private property without having a full-fledged epistemology or metaphysics of the social world (perhaps one comes to realize the "truth" about marriage simply by paying attention to statistics on adultery,

divorce, and so on). Amelioration of aspects of the social world might involve bringing into alignment what Haslanger (2012) has defined as manifest, operative, and target concepts or may involve making arrangements more responsive to the needs of some community in some more general sense. Both projects may be deeply disturbing to some members of a community - a point that seems often to be overlooked. Importantly, with respect to ameliorative projects, amelioration must always be understood as amelioration *for* and betterment construed as betterment *as understood* by some individual or group. This subjectivism or relativization (or contextualization, if one prefers) is often implicit rather than explicit in social constructionist accounts and will be further addressed in later sections of this chapter where I attend to the relationship between epistemic and metaphysical relativism and ameliorative social constructionist programs.

It is also noteworthy that ameliorative social constructionist programs, like critical theories, are non-ideal. According to Brian Fay in *Critical Social Science: Liberation and Its Limits* (1987), this non-idealism involves three assumptions: that people's possession of ideas, habits, and dispositions explains their social behaviour (a psychological/sociological claim), that to relieve suffering, people have to alter their ideas about who they are and what they are doing (a therapeutic claim), and that people must be willing to listen and act on the basis of rational analyses of their lives (a psychological claim) (24-25). Haslanger's (2012) and Ásta's (2013) works are non-ideal insofar as they both attempt to steer a middle course between the position that ideas determine social structures and the position that social structures determine ideas. Instead, for both Haslanger and Ásta, social conditions, structures, and concepts are related in complicated matrices.

There are many possible criticisms that ameliorative social constructionist programs raise, which, in turn, raise questions with respect to the meaning, possibility, and extent of amelioration that they are able to offer. Many or most ameliorative social constructionist programs begin with the assumption that their analyses possess "a" correct description or "a" correct diagnosis of some purportedly problematic state of affairs. In such cases, the constructionist presumably acknowledges that they are putting forth subjective or relative claims. If social constructionists assume that they possess "the" correct description or "the" correct diagnosis of some purportedly problematic situation, the extent to which they view their proposals as objective rather than subjective or relative is less clear. In either case, social constructionist projects are sometimes dismissed as merely subjectivist insofar as they contain assumed ethical stances or as problematic in already assuming an objective stance. In either case, a potential problem that follows from social constructionists' subjectivism or purported objectivism is that in choosing which ameliorative program to adopt, intended audiences of the program may be largely biased to choose as most ameliorative that program, which meshes with the values that the intended audiences already assume. In turn, programs may simply tend towards maintenance or minor and inconsequential tweaking of the status quo. I refer to this worry as "The Status Quo Criticism" and attend to it fully in the following section.

A second criticism can be expounded as follows. Since social constructionists often put forth different and sometimes incompatible descriptions and target concepts of some X (*woman*, *queer*), the question of how to tell which program is *really* ameliorative or the *most* ameliorative raises an issue in much need of analysis. I refer to this as "The Relativism Criticism." The Status Quo and Relativism Criticisms are closely linked given

that issues of value and rationality always arise within a particular context (in a given location, time, and involving particular individuals and collectivities). It is only against the background of a matrix of interrelated social practices, phenomena, and categories within a particular context that a practice, phenomenon, or category can be taken as given and meaningful or intelligible. In elaborating upon the interrelation of the two criticisms, I also examine their possible vitiating force by way of examples (specifically, disagreement concerning the meaning and referent of *woman* and disagreement concerning the meaning of *marriage*).

I ultimately suggest that while neither the Status Quo nor the Relativism Criticisms provide wholly damning critiques against the very possibility of ameliorative social constructionist programs' success, they do hold sufficient weight to limit the force and scope of ameliorative social constructionist programs' realization. In defense of ameliorative social constructionist programs in particular and in light of the Status Quo and Relativism Criticisms, while such projects *cannot* offer a recipe or plan for amelioration regarding some human kind-concept that is complete and final for all time and for all persons, what they *can* provide is a proposal for a contextualized amelioration intended for a particular community in a particular place and at a particular time. Though this places limits on such projects' success, it does not present in any way a knockdown argument against the very possibility of amelioration (relativized according to a place and time) by means of social constructionist projects.

With the theme of contextual amelioration in mind, Haslanger (2012) reminds us that it is not part of the task of ideology critique or ameliorative social constructionist programs to provide either a foundation for normative evaluation or answers to

metaethical questions (20). Though perhaps unsatisfying to some (moral realists, for example), this is perhaps the best that can be expected: though theorists may sometimes claim their accounts complete, theorists often offer incomplete accounts, rely on others to complete them, or perhaps assume that others could. While the Rorty-inspired ironist, for instance, thinks that values can only be assumed, given that such ironists hold that there are simply no foundations (or no Archimedean point, to which creatures such as us have access), one might also assume values on the assumption that they could be justified in further discussion or that they have been. Whether these further justifications are realist (as opposed to Thomasson's (2003) account of general realism as elaborated in Chapter One) is another issue. They could also be relativist, response-dependent, and so on. It is perhaps better to say, then, that without a metaethical defense of values, the story an ameliorative social constructionist offers is, at worst, *incomplete*. Reformulated as such, critical theorists and ameliorative social constructionist programs do not fail for lacking metaethical defenses of their values. Indeed, many social constructionists see the condition of success of their programs as dependent on a practical standard - whether the program it proffers helps those affected meet their goals. The goal of a project may not be to provide true theories, but rather, *tactical* theories.

4.4 The Status Quo Objection: A Return to Thick Conceptions of Widowhood

I return to Haslanger's (2012) analysis of thick conceptions of widowhood to illustrate an instance of the Status Quo Criticism at work. To reiterate, the criticism can be understood as follows. Proposals brought forth by ameliorative social constructionists of what X "really is" or what X should be will likely not stick if they are not at least similar to the audience's current values or conceptions of X, and hence these proposals are likely to

entrench already established values. To clarify this worry, consider, for instance, MacKinnon's claim in *Feminism Unmodified* (1987) that "[p]ornography *constructs* women and sex, defines what 'woman' means and what sexuality is, in terms of each other" (161). On MacKinnon's view, women *are* (only or first and foremost?) subordinate sexual objects. The radical nature of her claim may make her view too unpalatable and unrealistic to count (for many or most people) as a feasible understanding of *woman* and thus, may be dismissed by her intended audience. Of course, this is not to say that MacKinnon's (1987) definition is wrong: for example, her intended audience may already be conditioned by pornographic images to see women as (only?) subordinate sex objects, but may not be conscious that they do so.

The Status Quo Criticism also relates to the issue of relativism in descriptive and ameliorative social constructionist analyses, an issue I will address in the following section. In this section, I argue that while in some cases, ameliorative social constructionist analyses may be impotent to alter the status quo, in other instances, its programs can engender change. Given that amendments to the status quo belong to the jurisdiction of the Alterability Reading, whether the status quo is maintained or altered by a particular social constructionist analysis with respect to a particular concept or practice is not an issue that can be determined a priori. Though the Status Quo Criticism is thus a live worry for the realization of ameliorative programs' intended goals, the criticism is not, in principle, an altogether damning obstacle. This is so especially when success is measured not as an all or nothing affair, but as admitting of degree.

Recall from Chapter Two my gloss of Haslanger's (2012) example of Christiana, a widow who finds herself in a context where widowhood is thick - that is, where

widowhood entails substantial social constraints upon widowed women. According to Haslanger (2012), Christiana's physical uncleanliness serves as evidence for her "metaphysical uncleanliness"; the treatment that works to keep her physically dirty serves as "evidence" for her metaphysical dirtiness when really, her physical dirtiness is simply evidence that her treatment is effective. "[S]he may not touch herself, even to bathe, because she is unclean" (Haslanger 2012, 127). To debunk the thick and disabling conception of widowhood that women like Christiana endure, the debunking social constructionist is, in this case, concerned to expose the self-fulfilling prophecy of widows' "metaphysical uncleanliness." In particular, the social constructionist aims to show that the thickness of widowhood is not inevitable (i.e. it could have been "thinner" or not exist at all). The debunker will also usually try to go one step further: not only does the debunker hope to show that the rituals and practices involved are metaphysically suspect and unjust, she hopes to show that they therefore should not be maintained in their current form or that they should be eradicated altogether (Haslanger 2012, 127).

But what exactly is metaphysically wrong with the thick conception of widowhood? Why put scare quotes around the notion of metaphysical uncleanliness? It is especially peculiar given that Haslanger herself writes:

> If ideology partly constitutes the social world, then it seems that a description of the ideological formations will be true, and it is unclear what is, epistemically speaking, wrong with them. (2012, 467)

She continues thus: "once we constitute our social world, descriptions of it not only appear true, but are true" (Haslanger 2012, 448-9). How, then, can one maintain that the thick metaphysical conception of widowhood is false or otherwise wrong or problematic? In virtue of this question, how can it be decided that one metaphysics of widowhood is more correct than another, one less suspect than another, one more veridical to "the facts"

than another, or one more ethical than another? Given social constructionists' commitment to the causal and constitutive construction of social categories and kinds, the answer is that "we" decide. Unsurprisingly, the next questions, then, are: "Who is "we"?" or "Whose metaphysics?" Debates between believers in the thick conception of widowhood and those who aim to debunk the thick conception exhibit what Haslanger (2012) calls "inter-milieu" relativism. Inter-milieu relativism describes situations where social groups who are differently situated disagree about some aspect of X - what X is, the extension of X, or X's constraints and disablements.

One might attempt to exit the inter-milieu relativistic trap by asking the following question: In the case of widows' metaphysical uncleanliness, what came first, the belief or the practice of making widows physically dirty?[67] This chicken and egg scenario may have no available answer, and even if it does, given the non-cognitive nature of many beliefs, changing people's beliefs and practices, even in the face of good evidence, is difficult. One can imagine a good-willed social constructionist attempting to convince a community that widows' physical uncleanliness causes or supports the mistaken belief that widows are inherently metaphysically unclean. One can equally well imagine a community member suggesting that even if the ritualistic practice of not allowing widows to bathe or change their clothing was stopped, a physically clean widow remains a metaphysically unclean widow.

A believer in widows' objective metaphysical uncleanliness (i.e. a person who does not see the social as playing a causal or constitutive role in the existence of widows' metaphysical uncleanliness) might argue that even if the believer did not believe in widows' uncleanliness (perhaps because she was born into some other culture or time),

[67] I thank Sally Haslanger for pointing out this way of construing the problem.

the widow would nonetheless be metaphysically unclean though the non-believer herself would not know it. Perhaps a religious or spiritual book or authority, for instance, provides the grounds for establishing "the fact" of widows' metaphysical uncleanliness. One presumably cannot, without any shadow of a doubt, disprove or confirm the legitimacy or truth of religious, spiritual, or other objective (read: apparently non-socially caused or constituted) decrees concerning X once and for all and similarly, one cannot establish once and for all (i.e. independent of social intersubjectivity or consensus) the truth or legitimacy of some or any social constructionist analysis. Alternatively then, a social constructionist might go the route of redescribing apparently objective claims (as they are understood by some audience) as local, subjective claims *disguised* as objective claims. The devout Christian, for instance, might claim that the word of the Old Testament about the status of women is objectively true.

But to claim that something is objective is to make a subjective claim - it is claimed *from* somewhere and *by* someone. Restated, whether she accepts the redescription or not, the devout Christian thus really means something to the effect of "*I believe* that the Old Testament gives us objective and transcendental truth about the status of women." Stated as such, the claim is relativized to the belief of the speaker. In short, while there may be objective truths (that is, non-socially caused or constituted truths) about the social world, epistemic issues lurk. There is what is "really" or "ultimately" the case, our capacity to know what is "really" or "ultimately" the case, our capacity to comprehend the difference between the notion of what is "really" or "ultimately" the case, and what we can know (or believe) is the case. These three issues are very

different.[68] Understanding a tradition or the view of some social milieu concerning some X is sometimes a situation wherein while we have discovered or come to understand the views of others, the others' ideas become intelligible to us without our necessarily agreeing with them. The idea that one requires foundational or universally valid moral principles for advocating one description over the next is a Sisyphean task. There is no objective (i.e. non-intersubjectively decided or presumed) foundation or principle to which to appeal when it comes to matters of assenting or dissenting to aspects of the social world because our epistemic access to an Archimedean point is blocked, at least to creatures like us.

When it comes to social constructionist theories, to debunk an ideology, where "ideology" is understood in the non-pejorative and pejorative senses alike, is not to uncover an ideology-free reality. It is rather to expose the epistemology and metaphysics *underlying* an ideology. But this negative goal is not tantamount to arriving at the "thing itself" - it is not synonymous with disclosing the "really real" thing that ideology "conceals." When it comes to the social world, where there is no ideology (understood in the non-pernicious sense advocated in Chapter Three and in the pejorative (Marxian) sense as well), there *is* no social world. The social world is dependent for its existence on ideologies – on concept- or mind-dependent concepts. According to both Haslanger (2012) and Ásta (2013), ideology does not necessarily conceal or obscure reality. Rather, ideology is better described as *creating* and *constituting* social reality.

---

[68] On this theme, one can imagine the following worry, namely that an increase in prevalence of antiessentialist or antiobjectivist views amongst societies at large, especially concerning issues of justice, will weaken or even completely dissolve societies' stability. As Rorty writes on this topic:

> It is possible that this prediction is correct, but there is at least one excellent reason for thinking it false. This is the analogy with the decline of religious faith. That decline, and specifically the decline of people's ability to take the idea of postmortem rewards seriously, has not weakened liberal societies, and indeed has strengthened them. (1989, 85)

Sometimes, what is needed to act as a catalyst for change in some situation (though it is not typically a simple task) is a social constructionist analysis that reveals (or convinces) people that they stand in relationships to other people and to practices, institutions, or categories that they didn't even know they stood in and how and why they came to stand in them. This is a matrix that is often intricate and complicated - recall from Chapter Three, for instance, Haslanger's analysis of the complex network that sustains the social fact that seventh grade girls who wear crop-tops are cute. A social constructionist analysis might cause a revelation for some, encouraging people to alter their actions and adjust their beliefs, which have so far worked to create or sustain X. Community members (or at least some of them) might come to realize (or come to be persuaded) that they have wrongly taken widows' physical uncleanliness, for example, as evidence for widows' metaphysical uncleanliness. Other than her physical filthiness, perhaps a community member or members will come to see that there exists little else, apart from the beliefs and practices of the community members themselves, to suggest that widows are in *any way* metaphysically unclean. Indeed, they may come to see the very notion of metaphysical uncleanliness as suspect or even worthy of rejection.

Though social constructionist analyses may prompt community members to alter their beliefs and practices, as I have argued along with Haslanger in my third chapter, this is typically a very difficult task for individuals and groups to undertake given that beliefs are largely non-volitional. There is a question about whether one *will* budge in their beliefs and practices and a question about whether they *should*. The first question is empirical. The second question requires nuancing. The question might be about whether people ought to budge in their beliefs because they have been persuaded (to varying

degrees) that their standards, beliefs, or practices are less just or less accurate on those standards', beliefs', or practices' own terms than they once thought. Alternatively, the question may have to do with whether people ought to change some of their beliefs given the larger set of beliefs that they themselves or their community upholds (perhaps some beliefs are unknowingly inconsistent with others). There surely exist other possibilities as well - perhaps they will come to view another community's or culture's beliefs or practices as more ethical or accurate than their own. Again, the possibility of or degree to which people are capable of changing their beliefs, even in the face of good evidence, is something to be determined after the fact and, depending on the category, practice, or institution at issue, may be a slow process rather than an instant Gestalt-style paradigm switch.

The considerations brought forth in this section have sought to show that social constructionist ameliorative projects do not and cannot necessarily provide audiences with resources to encourage or motivate social changes that are not already incipient within some community's social relations. However, this objection might seem misguided since, for example, specialists' notions have trickled into popular culture (e.g. the sex/gender distinction has caught on quite widely) and grassroots consciousness-raising has managed to be revolutionary (e.g. black consciousness movements in the United States[69]). To these cases, one might respond that the spirit of the community was already in a position to accept these changes. This is to say that whatever changed was what the majority, or perhaps "the right" people, at a particular time and in a particular place could tolerate or support. When change does occur, the success of what seems to be

[69] The degree to which the current "Black Lives Matter" movement manages to make substantive change in terms of black and non-black relations in the United States remains to be seen.

the result of overt consciousness-raising in a given place and time might best be characterized as a tipping point rather than a sort of group epiphany.[70]

I follow Haslanger's (2012) and Rorty's general program in understanding values and ways of making sense of some X as, typically, a matter of inculcation rather than as an intentional, rational process. On this view, small changes in attitudes (intentional or unintentional) and (often unpredictable) events culminate over time into a situation in which revolution - a breaking point - becomes possible. As Rorty writes, it is "[o]ur acculturation… [that] makes certain options live, or momentous, or forced while leaving others dead, or trivial, or optional" (1991, 13). Moreover,

> "climbing out of our own minds"… in the only sense in which it *is* possible, [is] not a process of setting aside our old vocabularies, beliefs, and desires but rather of gradually adding to and modifying them by playing them off of each other. This is a process of reformation and enlargement rather than revolution (Rorty 1991,14).

I appeal to Rorty's account of social change insofar as it is consistent with my defense of the Alterability Reading: human beings are not free to confer any meaning, social role, social category, or social function upon X, but only those within reach in the time and place in which individuals find themselves.

But to claim that ameliorative social constructionist analyses, at best (if at all), leave us with enlargement rather than revolution is *not* to claim that they therefore always leave their audiences in a state wholly unchanged from the status quo. Understanding the metaphysics of some X as understood by some social group or community and being able to reformulate it to its upholders or participants in a novel light is not always enough to promote substantial change in practice. The mere articulation of a lived practice or

[70] This is not to discount the possibility - past, present, or future - of group epiphanies, but only to suggest that their existence is likely atypical.

phenomenon in a light disparate from one's everyday understanding of that practice or phenomenon does not thereby automatically make the alien description into a candidate for adoption. As Rorty emphasizes throughout his works, to utter a claim that does not have a fixed place in a language game is to claim something that is not a truth-value candidate.

> This is because it is a sentence which one cannot confirm or disconfirm, argue for or against. One can only savor it or spit it out. But this is not to say that it may not, in time, *become* a truth-value candidate. If it *is* savored rather than spat out, the sentence may be repeated, caught up, bandied about. Then it will gradually require a habitual use, a familiar place in the language game. (Rorty 1989, 18)

It merits remarking that all of this is made impossible as long as serious and even playful engagement with each other's perspectives is a rarity. As Richard E. Flathman (1989) writes, this is because

> [o]ur agreements in… judgments constitute the language of our politics [the politics of particular social locations]. It is a language arrived at and continuously modified through no less than a history of discourse, a history in which we have thought about, as we became able to think in, that language. (63)

Interplay between social milieus, to use Haslanger's (2012) language, is crucial in promoting novel ways of thinking and so, perhaps, new ways of *judging*. As Rorty argues, a society is plagued if

> it is buttressed with metaphysical or philosophical foundations" since such underpinnings set in place an "order of topics and arguments, which is prior to, and overrides the results of, encounters between old and new vocabularies. (1989, 52)

Although ameliorative social constructionist programs' contributions to theorizing *are* buttressed with metaphysical presuppositions, that is, they do not purport to utilize transcendental, de-historicized, de-politicized reason in proffering descriptive or ameliorative accounts, they are actively concerned with altering and enlarging the field of

theoretical and substantive possibilities.

Social constructionist work (descriptive and ameliorative) makes available new explanatory and prescriptive models - new ways to ask old questions, the creation of scepticism regarding dominant theories, and the shifting of the relations of authority across academic disciplines and compartments of the everyday world. As Lorraine Code writes in *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location* (2006), interplay between differently situated individuals and groups is not

> a matter merely of opposing one imaginary to another for the sake of showing one to be right and the other wrong, but of variously, and through diverse practices, complicating sedimented assumptions and exposing undesirable, unjust, inequitable, less-than-adequate effects, where criteria of adequacy, too, have to be ecologically deliberated, negotiated. It is a matter of opening up other possibilities, marking what has to be questioned, "making strange" what passes for natural in epistemic practice, in the people, events, and phenomena it studies and in the practices it informs. (33)

This too is a process that is never-ending: human beings are constantly in a position wherein the most we can do as individuals or members of social groups is to "embrace the limitations and opportunities of our position and… undertake self-consciously situated inquiry, that is, inquiry that arises from and speaks to social conditions at a particular historical moment" (Haslanger 2012, 24).

I have argued that ameliorative social constructionist analyses typically do not lead to instant revolution. But this is not to claim that they therefore always leave their audience in a state altogether unchanged from the status quo. The success of an ameliorative social constructionist program need not be measured as an all or nothing matter. The introduction of a potential redescription of some X can serve to cast doubt on people's everyday taken-for-granted beliefs about that X. This doubt, mixed with time and repetition of redescriptions, can sometimes lead individuals and communities to alter

practices, concepts, and institutions. The fact that one metaphysical account cannot be conclusively *proven* more correct than another does not mean that it cannot be *judged* as the better for some groups and communities in some context for some purpose. Moreover, the fact that one metaphysical account cannot be conclusively proven does not imply that one cannot give reasons for preferring it to another. Dialogue between groups and communities should be understood as a fallible and immanent movement without a definite end that can hopefully lead to betterment for some group(s) in some particular situation(s). Such dialogue should be encouraged insofar as it can lead to new self-understandings and new understandings of others' beliefs and commitments. Such dialogue can sometimes encourage change by recasting aspects of some social category, institution, or practice formerly opaque to those, who in living in some situation (and not everywhere) can see their situation only through a glass darkly. I now turn to a closely related criticism, namely the Relativism Criticism and attempt to disarm its seemingly vitiating force.

4.5 The Relativism Criticism: Solipsistic and Aporetic Relativism

In *The Social Construction of What?*, Hacking (1999) writes of relativism in the context of social constructionist programs:

> Relativism and decline are real worries, but I am not going to address them directly. It is good to stay away from them, for I cannot expect to successfully dispel or solve problems where so many wise heads have written so many wise words without effect. (5)

Perhaps over-ambitiously then, I take on the issue of epistemological and metaphysical relativism in descriptive and ameliorative social constructionist programs. The separation between epistemology and metaphysics is especially nuanced in the context of social ontology since intersubjectively mind-dependent phenomena or phenomena parasitic on

intersubjective mind-dependent phenomena constitute the objects and categories of the social world. To reiterate, the Relativism Criticism goes as follows. As parties declare their epistemology or metaphysics of some X to be the most accurate, just, and so forth, there may exist no standard by which to judge the better from the worse other than by each party's own lights. Factors that may be of influence include culture, gender, class, and religion. I hope to show, despite Hacking's warning, that my undertaking is not a purely Sisyphean task or a fool's errand. Much can be learned from unpacking and making clearer the kinds of relativism that affect social constructionism, especially ameliorative versions. Theoretically and practically, it is also beneficial to examine the extent to which, as well as the manner in which various forms of relativism pose a threat to social constructionist projects, descriptive or ameliorative.

If relativism in descriptive and ameliorative social constructionist projects is sometimes unavoidable, I ask whether it must be aporetic and solipsistic. Solipsistic relativism is the kind that repudiates the moral right and epistemic credibility of non-members (e.g. men) to participate in redefining human kind-concepts under which they do not fall (e.g. the human-kind concept *woman*) or the kind of relativism that repudiates the moral right or epistemic authority of a member or members belonging to a given kind to redefine or recharacterize that kind for all members. With respect to metaphysics, solipsism sees a particular social group's or community's social categories and identities, as well as the individuals falling under those categories and identities, as isolated and insulated from the social categories and identities of other social groups and communities. Because solipsistic relativism (epistemological and metaphysical) can

sometimes leave debates in a stalemate or a form of competing wills to power, solipsistic relativism is oftentimes aporetic.

Given that the reasons for undertaking a social constructionist analysis need not be purely academic or intellectual (e.g. the aims of Hacking's (1999) historical constructionists), but may be motivated by more explicit political or ethical motivations (consider Hacking's (1999) reforming, rebellious, and revolutionary constructionists), ameliorative constructionist programs assume values and put forth, in light of those values, particular descriptions and proposed redescriptions of some X. This issue was addressed earlier in this chapter. When a social constructive program is intended to be ameliorative, ethical concerns constitute a lens through which a metaphysical or epistemological account is viewed. Descriptive social constructionist projects, in focusing on one purportedly problematic X rather than another or in focusing on one aspect of X rather than another, also assume values, albeit less obviously. Further, though I will not engage with the issue here, it is worth noting that the question of whether a description can ever be wholly value-neutral remains live.

Because ameliorative social constructionists' descriptions and redescriptions are permeated with values, if interlocutors whom an ameliorative program is intended to address do not share the values of the proffered program, the descriptions and redescriptions offered may fall on deaf ears or may be simply unrelatable - that is, they may be too far afield from an audience's set of beliefs to be taken up as serious contenders for acceptance. These worries echo the concerns of the Status Quo Criticism elaborated in the previous section. These worries, as I will show, also apply to the

relation between solipsistic and aporetic relativism, as well as the possibility of ameliorative social constructionist programs' success.

In what follows, I aim to demonstrate, at least in the context of negotiating and renegotiating social kind categories, that solipsistic relativism is indeed avoidable. The question of the possibility of non-pernicious relativisms is particularly apt in light of recent and renewed philosophical interest in the possibility of emancipatory relativisms (cf. Alcoff (2006), Code (1995), Longino (2003)). In eschewing a false dichotomy between "correspondence or construction; knowledge or interpretation; truth or anything goes," Code's (1995) account of a "positive" or enabling relativism offers a constructive rather than a purely negative and immobilizing program that "works with the construction *of*, *out of*, or *from*, interpretation *of*, truths *about*..." (196).

Once some kinds, categories, and phenomena are revealed to be constituted, in part or entirely, by social attitudes, then while social constructionism frees us from "nature" and "objective reality," it does so at the cost of submitting each of us (understood as individuals, groups, communities or cultures) to the force of people's (individuals', groups', communities', or cultures') descriptions and redescriptions, whether specialist or folk. Descriptive social constructionist projects cannot avoid disagreement within and among specialists and the folk, as well as among the folk, about who does or does not count as X or what an X is. These problems cannot be avoided in ameliorative programs either. To settle the questions of what X is or what X should be, social constructionism cannot appeal to veridicality with the world, in part because it might be attempting to challenge dominant manifest or operative concepts and in part

because social constructionism claims that it is not mind-independent reality, but socially constructed reality that constitutes the kinds at issue in the first place.

4.6 Negotiating Disagreement

Before the ameliorative social constructionist can begin the project of attempting to ameliorate X and before we can ask the question of what ameliorating X entails, we need a sense of what X refers to, what X means, and how X purportedly functions to oppress or otherwise harm in some context. But reasonable people disagree about the extension of X and they also disagree about whose judgment matters most with respect to settling the issue. There may also be disagreement about how X (understood as either a manifest or operative concept) functions in the larger social world and what effects - what constraints and enablements - these conceptions bring about or should bring about. Haslanger's (2012) method, which is just one among many, seeks to align manifest concept(s) of X with the operative concept(s) of X or to propose an altogether new target concept of X.

For elucidation, I turn to the controversy of the meaning of *woman*. In *Feminism After Postmodernism* (2000), Marysia Zalewski colourfully illustrates the vast extent of disagreement between feminist theorists when it comes to the question of "What is a woman?"

> Imagine Andrea Dworkin and Judith Butler in a conversation about feminism. Would they, could they, agree on anything? Think… about a conversation between them on male violence towards women… Would Andrea Dworkin speak about a 'war against women'? Or about a continuum of male violence from the cradle to the grave; from the bedroom to the boardroom? And would Judith Butler resist such terms and instead question the authority of those who claim that they can speak on behalf of such a disparate group called 'women'? (Zalewski 2000, 1)

There exists little consensus among feminists (in both the academy and the lived world) regarding the meaning and extension of *woman*, as well as the goals of feminism(s). In

turn, there exists little consensus about whether this lack of agreement constitutes a shortcoming or a virtue of feminism(s).

Individual feminist accounts may be singled out as unserviceable in the task of liberating women - an unsurprising situation, perhaps, given the lack of consensus surrounding the meaning of *woman* in the first place. MacKinnon's analyses (1983, 1987, 1989, 1993, 1997) of the meaning of *woman*, for instance, may be taken to be too radical to resonate with the majority of its audience, and thus, may fail to motivate its audience to engender change (though, of course, there will be those who are motivated by MacKinnon's account and other seemingly radical accounts). MacKinnon argues that there exists an inextricable link between the meaning/referent of *woman* and pornography. According to Mary Kate McGowan in "On Pornography: MacKinnon, Speech Acts, and False Construction" (2005), MacKinnon views pornography as constructing the meaning of *woman* in a way that is harmful and covert; pornography unconsciously conditions men's beliefs and desires as well as women's self-understandings (McGowan 2005, 30). According to MacKinnon, pornography simultaneously constructs what women *are* (which amounts to what they are perceived to be and what they are perceived as *for*), while its authority discredits women's dissent concerning what they have been made to *be*.

McGowan glosses MacKinnon's view thus:

> Like so many other social constructions, [pornography] appears to be doing one thing while it actually does another… [P]ornography's true function is effectively masked. It appears to be merely mirroring an independent and antecedent fact about women's real natures while it actually enacts what women count as being. (2005, 33)

In MacKinnon's lights, women *are* (only?) sexual objects. In order to disarm this social fact, as MacKinnon sees it, pornography's "real" function must be unmasked and its

power over our (women's and men's) imaginations dismantled in order that women are no longer (only?) sexual objects. MacKinnon's definition of woman is not uncontroversial and its radicalism is one of several reasons why it might be rejected as unserviceable in the task of liberating women. This concern falls under the auspices of the Status Quo Criticism as well as the Relativism Criticism.

In 1983, Alison Jaggar comfortably asserted that "all feminists address the same problem: what constitutes the oppression of women and how can that oppression be ended" (Jaggar as found in Zalewski, 124)? In present day feminist debates, this view seems misplaced. Does it matter that there exists no consensus? Is consensus even desirable? But the proliferation of feminisms and answers to the question "What is a woman?" is, for many, frustrating. This frustration may stem from the fact that because understandings of *woman* are time and place bound, the very notion of consensus concerning the meaning of *woman* is complicated or perhaps even inappropriate. Another cause of frustration may stem from the sense that without consensus concerning the meaning of *woman* and without common goals, solidarity and effective political action is rudderless. Internal disputes between feminists may also seem to undermine feminism altogether, leading some to ask "Why even bother?" When an individual's or group's construal of *woman* is taken to be unjust by another individual or group, relativism about the meaning of *woman* can be distressing. We have already seen that the meanings of masculinity, femininity, and even gender itself change depending on social location and historical period. But there is even a further wrinkle to consider in postmodern feminist debates: the attempt to tie down the meaning of *woman* is itself considered an example of the reification that many postmodernists in particular attempt to expose and reject.

I now turn to the example of same-sex marriage in order, once more, to underscore the relation between relativism and social constructionist projects. In some jurisdictions, same-sex marriage is now not only a conceptual possibility, but a legal option. The history of what led to the legality of same-sex marriage in these jurisdictions is not an issue I can seriously engage with here. However, let me reformulate, albeit over-simplistically, some of what was and is at stake between those who support and oppose same-sex marriage in order to demonstrate what a social constructionist might mean by saying that a social constructionist analysis of marriage can be emancipatory.

Marriage is a social institution that confers rights and responsibilities on those who enter into the institution. What are the necessary and sufficient features of marriage? For the sake of simplicity, let us take a camp opposing same-sex marriage (Camp 1) to represent some religious group that includes in their definition of marriage that, as decreed by God, marriage is only possible between one man and one woman. In other words, for Camp 1, a necessary condition of being married is that one is married to (and only to) one member of the opposite sex. Camp 1 may also include other features as necessary for some social arrangement to count as a marriage, e.g., shared financial responsibility, love, commitment, fidelity, state benefits, and so on. Camp 2 disagrees with Camp 1 only insofar as they reject the claim that a necessary condition of being married is that one is married to a member of the opposite sex. Camp 1 and Camp 2 disagree in terms of their manifest concepts of marriage. Even in places where same-sex marriage is legalized and widely socially accepted, some people may still hold as their manifest concept that a necessary condition of marriage is that it is only bona fide if it occurs between one man and one woman.

In places where same-sex marriage is politically and legally permitted and Camp 1 and Camp 2 coexist, what can be said about amelioration? For Camp 1, change has occurred albeit without any ameliorative connotation. There has been no amelioration; rather there has been *regression*. Camp 1 presumably does not see same-sex marriage as emancipatory, but rather as distasteful, or immoral, or sinful. Of course, some members of Camp 1 who subscribe to "to each his or her own" may see progress, amelioration, and emancipation as having occurred *for others* and perhaps for society at large, should accommodation of personal preferences be considered an overriding good for a member of Camp 1. For Camp 2, the legalization of same-sex marriage makes ameliorative progress.

Haslanger's take on inter-milieu disagreement about some social phenomenon X, in this case marriage, is worth quoting in full. She is happy to grant that in abstraction, in order "to critique our social milieu we need a moral/political theory" (Haslanger, personal correspondence, 2014). But, she goes on:

> The debunking project, however, is not undertaken in abstraction. It is undertaken to reveal to an interlocutor that there is something flawed in their understanding of their own practices - and flawed *in their own terms*. For example, the critical charge is not that the traditional understanding of marriage as heterosexual violates some moral principle; rather, it is that insofar as the interlocutor (allowing that the interlocutor can be a group) is committed to a certain value to be found in marriage - the social recognition of love and commitment, say) - then this conflicts with the reality of what they have made marriage into. The interlocutor has a choice, then, to change what counts as marriage (by changing the laws, etc.) or to adopt different practices that recognize love and commitment in inclusive ways. The choice here is political, but it doesn't leave us with relativism. There are different acceptable ways for the interlocutor to go on. The critical theorist is critical - demanding moral/political consistency of their interlocutor. The claim is not that one way of resolving the internal conflict between their values and practices is true and justified but to reveal that there is a conflict and to invite the interlocutor to change the world to accord with their values. (Haslanger, personal correspondence, 2014)

What seems crucial or central to the above quotation relates to Haslanger's concern about the values of love and commitment between two consenting adults. At least in some cases, the idea seems to be that it is not just a clash of values between opponents and proponents of same-sex marriage that is at issue, but also that the anti-same-sex marriage proponent's own values are not served by the social-political institution in question. Further, if love and commitment is what is really essential to marriage, why exclude from marriage couples of the same sex and gender? Haslanger's above-cited quotation thus raises interesting questions. For example, is her line of reasoning equally applicable to other cases? Is there a possibility that Haslanger is glossing over the fact that there is still a clash of values when it comes to those values which, at least most of the time, accompany love and commitment, namely romantic or sexual acts (e.g. that homosexual sex is considered by some to be a sin or otherwise offensive)? Further, can we take for granted that the values of love and commitment are really shared between the two groups or might they have radically different understandings of love and commitment and does it matter? It is noteworthy that these latter two questions are equally applicable when comparing any two heterosexual married couples.

Haslanger's remark also reminds us that questions such as "Is same-sex marriage ameliorative or emancipatory?" or "Is such and such a view of women accurate or emancipatory?" must be reformulated to read "Is same-sex marriage ameliorative or emancipatory for individuals X, Y, Z or groups A, B, C?" She also underscores that social constructionist movements' emancipatory potential must be understood and judged in immanent rather than transcendental terms. This is to say that the goals of an

ameliorative constructionist program will be relative to the problems and goals of some community. With respect to marriage then, in some situations, the goal might be to ensure better rights for women where patriarchal and heterosexist conceptions of marriage reign. In other situations, the goal may be to better solidify the acceptance of same-sex marriage in politics and in the lived world alike. In yet other situations, the goal may even be to eradicate the concept and practice of marriage altogether if the practice is taken to be contrary to the well-being or goals of some group.

From this relativization, however, it follows that the so-called emancipatory potential and strategies of social constructionist critiques can be claimed by, to name just a few social organizations, cults, religious fanatic groups, and xenophobic racist groups. These groups' morally and politically objectionable ideologies (from the perspective of liberal, anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-heterosexist social constructionists) can claim to offer emancipation just as much as more progressively-oriented ideologies can claim to offer it.[71] This worry cannot be dismissed consistently by the well-meaning or progressivist (i.e. liberal, anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-heterosexist social constructionists). If a progressivist social constructionist (as I have defined them) cannot move upholders of morally and politically objectionable ideologies to alter their beliefs, while unfortunate, this does not wholly undermine the goals of progressivist ameliorative social constructionist programs. The inability to move some individuals and groups to alter their beliefs and actions does not entail that progressivist social constructionists projects cannot also reach some individuals and groups with so-called morally and politically objectionable ideologies to alter their beliefs and actions.

[71] Thanks to David Jopling for emphasizing this important limitation of ameliorative social constructionist programs.

The extent to which cults, religious fanatic groups, and xenophobic racist groups' are (in)capable of altering their beliefs is likely a reflection of, at least in part, their isolation from other groups' descriptions and more progressivist ideologies. Put more simply, perhaps, the inability or extent to which the beliefs of those with morally or politically objectionable ideologies can be altered is also related to a theme that has been raised during the course of this dissertation: if the values of so-called morally or politically objectionable ideologies are just as socially constructed as those of progressivist ideologies, then the fullest sense to which either kind of ideology can be said to be rational, reasonable, or more enlightened than another seems capable of being grasped only to those who already uphold the ideology. Thus, perhaps in many cases, the real grounds and mechanisms for altering beliefs, actions, and practices are more a matter of power or persuasion than reason. I attend to the importance of the availability of alternative descriptions and ideologies (mechanisms for altering beliefs and actions) as a minimal condition of success of progressivist ideologies in the following section.

4.7 Relativism/Contextualism and Amelioration

As Code writes in "Must a Feminist be a Relativist After All?" in *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Locations* (1995), one reason to resist relativism is based on the conviction that relativism is politically disarming - a worry that I have touched upon in this chapter already. Code glosses the concern of many anti-relativists thus: relativism seems to generate an "anything goes" attitude according to which there is no way to choose between conflicting claims, sometimes therefore leading to quietude (Code 1995, 190). Following Code, worries surrounding relativism derive from the consequence of "remaining caught in a dichotomous set of discursive patterns for which relativism is

necessarily irrationalist, subjectivist, and anti-realist" (1995, 193). She furthermore argues that a rearticulated relativism can "dispel the quietude it produces…" (Code 1995, 190). According to Code (1995), to accept relativism is actually to accept a position that best captures the phenomenology, epistemology, and ontology of the social world developed in this and the previous three chapters. As Code (1995) points out, since human beings are historical creatures, their reason does not possess the power to understand issues definitively, to carve out ethical principles true for all across all times and spaces, and nor does it necessarily possess the power to determine without disagreement what ought to be done. The very meanings of understanding, reason, and the possible content of imagination crucial for change are relative to specific times and places - the meanings and possibilities are *contextual* or *situational*.

Nothing transcendental (or at least nothing to which we have epistemic access) justifies the absolute (i.e. not socially-constituted) correctness of one metaphysical story over the next. I acknowledge that in stating this claim I involve myself in a performative contradiction by positively asserting that one cannot know what holds transcendentally. However, this is not an objection to my construal of social constructionism, but rather an objection against social constructionism itself. While I acknowledge the force of the objection, I bracket the issue given that my primary task in this dissertation is not to defend to cogency of social constructionism writ large, but rather to attempt to amalgamate the programs of very different social constructionists - different in terms of their methodologies and goals - in order to present an account of social constructionism that is as cogent and tractable as possible to both social constructionists and their opponents alike. This, as it turns out, is a task one is capable of undertaking independent

of one's actual commitment to social constructionism as the most plausible metaphysical account of the social world.

Another similarly themed objection that may be lodged against the social constructionist is that social constructionism often fails to address the question of consistency with regards to its own concepts and categories. To be consistent, one might argue that a social constructionist is forced to admit that the concepts deployed in social constructionist analyses (i.e. "non-inevitability," "alterability") - the main planks of social constructionist theories - are themselves socially constructed. Does this undermine social constructionism, or does this allow social constructionism to theoretically pat itself on the back? To put the worry more succinctly, the worry is that the concepts and categories of the social constructionist are themselves socially constructed - such concepts as "non-inevitable," "contingent," and "alterable." Let us say that the concept of what is inevitable is itself a social construct (i.e. dependent on social processes and/or alterable). Further, one might even describe the historical process by which the concepts of "social constructionism" and "non-inevitability" came to be, as well as these concepts relationships to other socially dependent concepts. The social constructionist could accept these claims and agree that their categorization of X as a social construct is itself socially constructed. But that alone does not mean that we shouldn't take the social constructionist's claims seriously or that they can be easily dismissed. Typically, the social constructionist does not say that what's socially constructed isn't real (though they admit that the "realism" that they employ does not dismiss as "real" those things that are dependent upon or parasitic upon social attitudes) or that their claims do not need to be taken seriously.

With Rorty, social constructionists (i.e. Haslanger, Ásta) would agree that it would be much better if everyone admitted that there "is no way to break... standoffs, no single place to which it is appropriate to step back" (Rorty 1989, 51). As Code writes, "…knowledge is always *relative to* (a perspective *on*, a standpoint *in*) specifiable circumstances" (1995, 54). Although knowledge or other claims in question may be specified "*relative to* other circumstances, prejudgments, and theories, it is never (as with Neurath's raft) necessary to take away all of the pieces… at once" (Code 1995, 55). On Code's view, inquiry both grows out of and is dependent on practice and action. That is, "inquirers are always in *media res*, and the *res* are both identifiable and constitutive of perspectives and possibilities for action" (Code 1995, 55). This is a position that permits both the development of practices and projects and their corrigibility (Code 1995, 55).

Colin Koopman's "transitionalist-pragmatist" understanding of truth in *Pragmatism as Transition: Historicity and Hope in James, Dewey, and Rorty* (2009) is also consistent with the kind of immanent program that ameliorative social constructionist programs are capable of proffering to proponents of a given social movement. Following John Dewey, Koopman emphasizes that a "transitionalist" account of ethics best captures the ethics revealed by lived experience - our experience in the everyday social world. Koopman's transitional account focuses

> on ethical processes whereby we improve our living rather on the supposed correctness of some isolable act extracted from the transitional relations that define its contexts. Such accounts, in short, would emphasize that the true and the good themselves admit of temporal duration. (Koopman 2009, 12)

As Code emphasizes, a relativist or contextualist account contrasts with abstractions and dislocated theory - a theory that attempts to develop an a priori grid or believes there to be an ultimate (non-socially caused or constituted) grid,

> which evaluators could superimpose upon any putative claim to knowledge with the aim of assessing how that claim fits with the spaces the grid makes available…. (Code 1995, xi)

Contra abstract theory, "knowers are always *somewhere* - and at once limited and enabled by the specificities of their locations" (Code 1995, 53). Values, beliefs, conceptions, and habits are always "grounded in experiences and practices, in the efficacy of dialogic negotiation and action" (Code 1995, 53). Dialogic negotiation and action permit the very possibility for amelioration of aspects of persons' and groups' situations. The dialogic nature of much of the social world suggests that the possibility of homing in on a target concept presupposes multiple interpretations and perhaps even conflicts. It is cultural community that provides the stimulus for, as well as the content of human beings' self-understandings and understandings of others. To be a member of a particular group is to learn its values, concepts, and habits of interaction. Put more simply, we are the people we are, at least in part, because of what has been attributed to us, or in Ásta's language, conferred upon us and because of what we self-attribute and self-confer in light of others' attributions and conferrals upon us. By belonging to a particular group, through interpellation, a subject gains a sense of himself or herself. It is in encountering alternative descriptions of one's community or culture by "outsiders" or by "outsiders within" that one can come to appreciate or recognize the inadequacies of one's own value system, concepts, habits, and practices. It is in encountering alternative value systems, concepts, habits, and practices that persons, communities, and entire cultures can be stimulated to alter values, conceptions, and to learn new habits. Hopefully, such encounters prove ameliorative to those who compose a community or culture. This is a process that involves

> intersubjective negotiations among people who are intersubjectively *constituted*,

> produced as epistemic and moral-political subjects in processes that are social, interconnected throughout their lives, and determinant of the quality of those lives in ways too numerous to detail. (Code 1995, xiv)

As I have undertaken to show throughout this dissertation, both Haslanger (2012) and Ásta (2013) present rigorous accounts of how social kind-membership and identity conditions are essentially relational and contextual. The deep relationality of social kind-membership and identity conditions and the social construction and dependence of rationality, progress, and emancipation undermine the threat of aporetic relativism in ameliorative projects. This is because, as Shannon Sullivan argues in "Reconfiguring Gender with John Dewey: Habit, Bodies, and Cultural change" (2000), the social categories to which we belong and the social properties we possess are not merely "external, accidental characteristic[s] overlaying the (allegedly) internal, essential… core of ourselves" (26). As Sullivan writes drawing on a Deweyan analogy, "[l]ike the structure of a house, which is not something the house submits to but is what allows it to effectively be what it is, the cultural constructs that structure us *are* us" (2000, 26). According to Sullivan, relational properties, that is, social properties, are not be construed as (simply and only) negative, but also as "the means by which I take up and engage my world… [and] not merely obstacles to that process" (Sullivan 2000, 29).

Unlike the accounts of Haslanger, Ásta, Code, Koopman, and Sullivan, epistemological and metaphysical accounts consistent with a politically liberal account of the self reveal a picture that does not do justice to how social identities are lived and renegotiated in the everyday world. On the liberal picture, the "real" self "engages in rational deliberation over ends and… achieves autonomy by freely choosing, rather than blindly accepting, its doxastic commitments, including its cultural and religious traditions" (Alcoff 2006, 21-22). On this liberal view, "a person who cannot gain critical

distance from … his or her cultural traditions cannot rationally assess them and thus cannot attain full autonomy" (Alcoff 2006, 22). Here, Judith Butler's notion of performativity too presents a challenge to this liberal framework. The *performativity* of identity - in its serious, rather than its playful mood - or in Deweyan terms "the sedimentation of habit," means that identities cannot, at will, be taken up or discarded altogether. "Such a wilful and instrumental subject, one who decides *on* its gender [for example], is clearly not its gender from the start and fails to realize that its existence is already decided by gender" (Butler 1993, x). Similarly, as Sullivan suggests, while social constructs (categories, properties, and so forth) are indeed constraints and regularizations that produce subjectivity, they are also the very tools by which effective resistance to hegemonic norms is made possible (Sullivan 2000, 32).

Because there is no social self that precedes its memberships into social categories and ideologies, there is no identity or social kind-membership that is not also a form of subjugation. Even those born into privilege are subjugated insofar as their social identities are concerned - the constraints and enablements that follow from that privileged identity are, to a significant degree, *predetermined*. Yet, given that the world is simultaneously upheld, created, and transformed by ideology (whether "ideology" is understood in the descriptive or pernicious sense), socialization and subjugation are the means by which interpellation occurs. Socialization and subjugation are thus conditions of possibility of becoming an agent. In turn, socialization and subjugation are therefore also conditions of possibility for the resistance or renegotiation of social categorizations, as well as for the resistance or renegotiation of those categorizations' associated constraints and enablements to be undertaken.

On this view, "social identities are relational, contextual, *and fundamental*" (Alcoff 2006, 90, emphasis mine). This is because, as Alcoff writes:

> The mediations performed by individuals in processes of self-interpretation, the mediations by which individual experience comes to have specific meanings, are produced through a foreknowledge or historical a priori that is cultural, historical, politically situated, and collective. (2006, 45)

The worry that ameliorative projects may collapse into a war of competing, *isolated*, and *insulated* wills to power (between individuals or collectives) is blocked if one conceives of identity, both epistemologically and metaphysically, not as a "discrete and stable set of interests, but as [an ontologically open] site from which one must engage in the process of meaning-making," the only site from which one can proffer redescriptions (Alcoff 2006, 43). If the meaning of belonging to some social category is always relational - dependent on one's location and time - and potentially alterable in light of interactions with others, then the worry of aporetic relativism in the context of descriptive and ameliorative social constructionist programs is not only disarmed, but, at least in the context of the social world, is impossible.

Again, a standard view of relativism is aporetic and solipsistic in the following sense: there is no universal standard to judge the better from the worse conception of X than by each individual's or social group's own lights. If finding common ground through discourse cannot mitigate such inter-milieu relativism, then there is nothing more a social constructionist can do. However, if social identity and kind-membership are relational at core, that is, if human kind categories are causally or constitutively *relational* or social, then issues surrounding the standard view of relativism, at least in this context, require a more careful and nuanced analysis. I negotiate my identity and come to understand aspects of my identity, in part, in virtue of my movement through social milieus to which

I belong, as well as through alternative social milieus that I must navigate, but to which I do not belong. In turn, I adjust my self-conception and my conception of social categories to which I belong, as well as internalize or reject categorizations and features attributed to me. Hence, relativism is no longer solely or sometimes negatively aporetic; it is sometimes positively productive.

Two phenomena (corresponding to two slogans) much analysed by Hacking also seem to block the possibility of solipsistic epistemological or metaphysical relativism: (i) "making up people" which refers to the ways in which a new classification sometimes brings into being "a new kind of person, conceived of and experienced as a way to be a person," and (ii) the "looping effect," which refers "to the way in which a classification may interact with the people classified" (Hacking 2007, 285). These phenomena reveal that the very classifications under which individuals fall and the very classifications people take up and live out as "ways to be a person" involve social or extrinsic factors. When it comes to social categorization and self- or group- interpretation, the mediations by which categories and ways of being a person come to have specific meanings and associated constraints and enablements always occur "through a foreknowledge or historical a priori that is cultural, historical, politically situated, *and collective*" (Alcoff 2006, 45).

Relativism in the context of social phenomenon has a different import than it might when discussing a non-social domain. In the social domain, the subject matter (the phenomena) at issue is constituted at least partly by human attitudes and practices. In many cases, there exists wide consensus within and perhaps across social milieus about what some X is and what constraints and enablements X does or should carry. However,

disagreement about what constitutes some X (e.g. whether a transgender woman is really a woman) or what constraints and enablements do or should follow from X is not uncommon across social milieus. The social world is characterized by acceptance, assent, disagreement and dissent about the nature of its constituents and what constraints and enablements they do and should produce.

In this section, I have sought to underscore the claim that the separation between epistemology and metaphysics is especially complicated in the context of social ontology. It is intersubjectively mind-dependent phenomena or phenomena parasitic on intersubjective mind-dependent phenomena that constitute the objects and categories of our social world. But intersubjectivity about what X is or should be is not typically universally shared across social milieus. Even when it is, individuals and groups may accept (in the sense of recognize and follow in accordance with) socially sanctioned conceptions of X, but fail to *assent* to the conceptions. I have also attempted to show that, indeed, "positive" relativism[72] (e.g. Code's (1995) construal) is not only pervasive; it just *is* the ordinary state of our social world. It is actually part and parcel, then, of the status quo.

Relativism about whose account of X is the "most accurate" or the "most ameliorative" is not an issue that can be ignored and made non-vitiating to any social constructionist program, whether descriptive or ameliorative. The force of relativism is undeniable. But this section has undertaken the task of showing that relativism need not be seen as solely an obstacle to social change. Relativism can also be productive. Code reminds us that such "urgent questions" as "How can a relativist show that her opponents

[72] I intend here "positive" or "enabling" relativism as described by Code (1995). Nonetheless, it is important to recall that relativism is not a unified concept and that, moreover, it has many applications.

are wrong?" or "Has a relativist not painted herself into a corner?" gloss over the interactions of people in the everyday world (Code 1995, 204). "[P]eople often talk to one another, not just when they can assume a common ground, but also to negotiate across differences" (Code 1995, 204). In Code's view, anti-relativism underemphasizes the dialogic character of the social world (1995, 204). Indeed, social groups, communities, and cultures endure and thrive not by enforcing culture through the isolation of members from other social cultures or milieus, but rather by self-modifying in light of new situations and encounters with outsiders in order to remain relevant to new generations. As in the case of altering the status quo, in addition to attempting to solve intercultural conflict, the promise of cross-milieu dialogue lies in its acknowledgement of the importance of recognizing and in some cases even overcoming the ideological presuppositions and inconsistencies of one's own social location, as well as those of others'. Though, coming to a better self-understanding and coming to better understand the culture and practices of others is probably not sufficient to remedy or defuse disagreements, it is methodologically prior.

A willingness to recognize communities and cultures as perpetually corrigible, alterable, and so, amenable to criticism and improvement is important for ameliorative social constructionists to emphasize since, ultimately, it is people who have the ability to amend - to recontextualize and redescribe - aspects of the social world. The pluralism of descriptions and redescriptions propounded by social constructionists about some purportedly social phenomenon is not necessarily indicative of a pernicious relativist nightmare. As Ernest Gellner writes in *Selected Philosophical Themes: Contemporary Thought and Politics*. Vol. II (2003), a non-pernicious pluralism requires "that no violent

non-logical pressures be used in supporting or defending ideas" (13). Such toleration is conducive to argument, dissent, and persuasion; and, when the issue in question is of a political nature, "it demands the participation of all affected" (Gellner 2003, 13). That is, the "best" answer "is best sought through a natural selection of reasons" and when consensus fails, negotiation or persuasion is the next best option (Gellner 2003, 13). But all of this is only possible if there is, "so to speak, free entry into the market" (Gellner 2003, 13). Far then from being necessarily pernicious in the sense of being aporetic or solipsistic, given the right conditions, relativism between alternative descriptive or ameliorative social constructionist projects can be both enabling and productive. The multiplicity of non-homogenous analyses and genealogies of some X or redescriptions of a given group's, community's, or culture's current conceptions of X allows for individuals and collectivities, who being necessarily situated and therefore limited in perspective, to rethink or reimagine alternative possibilities of X.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focused on the issue of what social constructionists might mean when they invoke the notion of non-inevitability in their projects. I have provided tractable and plausible, if coarse-grained, accounts of what social constructionists might have in mind when they utilize the notion of non-inevitability in their projects. Meeting the conditions of either the Dependence Reading or the Alterability Readings may be sufficient in order that X qualify as a social construction. Perhaps, one might think that a social construction that meets the criteria of both readings presents a stronger and clearer case of a social construction. I have also examined the plausibility of social constructionism's ameliorative or emancipatory potential. To do so, I have asked whether

or how modifying our social categories and concepts can have ethical and political implications, as well as what those implications might be. I have defended social constructionist programs, especially those of the ameliorative variety, from what I named the Status Quo and Relativism Criticisms. While I have not provided a foolproof defense of ameliorative social constructionist programs' capacity to completely overcome the vitiating forces of either the status quo or relativism concerning what or who counts as some social kind X and nor have I settled how to determine, once and for all, which constraints and enablements should correspond to X, I have suggested that worries surrounding the hegemony of the status quo and relativism do not, in principle, wholly undermine the capacity for ameliorative projects' success. Following Code (1995), I have argued that relativism need not be considered as solely negative or immobilizing, but that, indeed, relativism can be a productive tool in social change.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have attempted to accomplish two main objectives. First, I have attempted to clarify what social construction amounts to in contemporary analytic philosophy. In delineating the various methods and goals of projects conducted under the umbrella of social constructionism, social ontology, and social metaphysics, I have drawn distinctions between projects (social constructionism versus social ontology), positions (idea-constructionism versus object- constructionism), and also between concepts/categories, properties, universals/kinds/types, and sets. This task involved examining differences between categories and kinds in the natural and social world. I have paid special attention to "ways of being a person" or to "kinds of people", to use Ian

Hacking's language. Within analytic philosophy, research on the social construction of social categories has done some work to delineate and clarify varieties of social constructionist projects, as well as varieties of social phenomena. Social constructionism and analyses of social constructionist programs or social phenomena typically employ the notions of non-inevitability and amelioration. However, very little research has been done to examine the meanings and tractability of these notions. I have therefore taken on, as my second objective, the task of attempting to make clearer the meanings and implications of non-inevitability and amelioration. Both objectives involved attending to the programs of various social constructionists and attempting to merge their programs into a single coherent account - a task that involved problematizing aspects of each thinker's account and addressing possible objections that face social constructionism as a general theory. In so doing, I have put forth my own construal of what social construction amounts to, as well as what it means to say that something is a social construction.

Straying from Searle's social ontology and its emphasis on institutional social kinds, I have spent much of this dissertation examining non-institutional cases of social phenomena. I have done so mainly by attending to the work of Haslanger (2012) and Ásta (2013). While Searle largely overlooks the real and pervasive correlations between non-institutional social kinds and their associated constraints and enablements, taking Haslanger's and Ásta's works as catalysts for my own thinking, I have tried to make clearer the substantive consequences, for better or worse, of being categorized as belonging to some social kind or category X. Along with Haslanger and Ásta, I have also emphasized the intersectionality of social kinds and the transient nature of social kinds' meanings. This is to say that I have analyzed the scope and range of a given social kind's

extension, as well as its constraints and enablements. Depending on where and when a woman finds herself, for instance, both the meaning of *woman* and the consequences of being labeled as belonging to the category can be very different.

Chapter Three elaborated upon the relationship between ideology critique and ameliorative social constructionism, using Haslanger's "But Mom!" as a framework for outlining what is at stake in inter-milieu disputes. I have problematized Haslanger's sometimes ambiguous remarks concerning the relation between the subject (a given person) and the social world. The main focus of Chapter Three, however, was to explain the nature of the difficulties involved in changing aspects of the social world - a task that, if possible at all, is often not instantaneous. Difficulties related to the possibility of change included the complexity of multiple coexisting ideologies, the problem of how to isolate ideologies and their source(s), as well the non-volitional character of beliefs.

Chapter Four focused on what social constructionists might mean when they invoke the notion of non-inevitability. I have provided tractable and plausible, if coarse-grained, accounts of what social constructionists might have in mind when they cite the notion of non-inevitability in their projects. For some, meeting the conditions of either the Dependence Reading or the Alterability Readings may be sufficient in order that X qualify as a social construction. Others might think that a social construction that meets the criteria of both readings presents a stronger and clearer case of a social construction.

In Chapter Four, I also explored the plausibility of social constructionism's ameliorative or emancipatory potential, asking whether or how modifying our social categories and concepts can have ethical and political implications and asking what those implications might be. I have defended social constructionist programs, especially those

of the ameliorative variety, from what I have called the Status Quo and Relativism Criticisms. I have not provided a foolproof defense of ameliorative social constructionist programs' capacity to completely overcome the vitiating forces of either the status quo or relativism concerning what or who counts as some social kind X and nor have I settled how to determine, once and for all, which constraints and enablements should correspond to X. I do not think such defenses are possible. Further, following Code (1995), I have argued that relativism need not be seen as solely negative or immobilizing. Relativism can be a productive tool in social change. Given the relations between epistemology and metaphysics in the context of the social domain, I have further argued that worries about the hegemony of the status quo and of pernicious, solipsistic epistemological and metaphysical relativism may be unavoidable in some cases. However, I have also argued that neither worry constitutes a wholly damning threat to ameliorative social constructionist programs' success, especially when success is contextualized to a particular group or community and in terms of degree rather than as an all or nothing affair.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alcoff, Linda M. (2006) *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (*Studies in Feminist Philosophy*). Oxford University Press.

Anderson, Elizabeth S. (2001) "Unstrapping the Straitjacket of 'Preference': A Comment on Amartya Sen's Contributions to Philosophy and Economics," *Economics and Philosophy*. 17(1). pp. 21-38.

Ásta Kristjana Sveinsdóttir (2013) "The Social Construction of Human Kinds," *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*. 28(4). pp. 716-32.

Bakan, Joel (2011) *Childhood Under Siege: How Big Business Targets Your Children*. Free Press.

Beauvoir, Simone de ([1949]/1989) *The Second Sex*. Trans. and Ed. Parshley, H.M. Vintage Books: Random Rouse, Inc.

Beder, Sharon (2009) *This Little Kiddy Went to Market: The Corporate Capture of Childhood*. Pluto Press.

Bicchieri, Cristina (2006) *The Grammar of Society: The Nature and Dynamics of Social Norms*. Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Routledge.

Butler, Judith (1993) *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. Routledge.

Code, Lorraine (2006) *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location* (*Studies in Feminist Philosophy*). Oxford University Press.

_____ (1995) *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Locations*. Routledge.

Cormier, Harvey (2007) "Ever Not Quite: Unfinished Theories, Unfinished Societies, and Pragmatism," Eds. Sullivan, S. and Tuana, N. *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*. State University of New York Press. pp. 59-76.

Dunn, Kevin (2008) "Interrogating White Male Privilege," Eds. Parpart, J.L. and Zalewski, M., *Rethinking the Man Question: Sex, Gender and Violence in International Relations*. Zed Books. pp. 47-69.

Fay, Brian (1987) *Critical Social Science: Liberation and Its Limits*. Cornell University Press.

Flathman, Richard E. (1989) *Toward a Liberalism*. Cornell University Press.

Fuller, Steve (1988) *Social Epistemology*. Indiana University Press.

_____ (2007) *The Knowledge Book: Key Concepts in Philosophy, Science and Culture*. Routledge.

Gellner, Ernest (2003) *Selected Philosophical Themes: Contemporary Thought and Politics*. Vol. II. Routledge.

Geuss, Raymond (1981) *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School*. Cambridge University Press.

Hacking, Ian (2004) *Historical Ontology*. Harvard University Press.

_____ (1999) *The Social Construction of What?* Harvard University Press.

Haslanger, Sally (2012) *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique*. Oxford University Press.

Jaggar, Alison (1983) *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Khalidi, Muhammad Ali (2010) "Interactive Kinds," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*. 61. pp. 335-60.

_____ (2015) "Three Kinds of Social Kinds," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. 90. pp. 96-112.

Koopman, Colin (2009) *Pragmatism as Transition. Historicity and Hope in James, Dewey, and Rorty*. Columbia University Press.

Kukla, André (2000) *Social Constructivism and the Philosophy of Science*. Routledge.

MacKinnon, Catherine (1987) *Feminism Unmodified*. Harvard University Press.

_____ and Dworkin, Andrea (1997) *In Harm's Way: The Pornography Civil Rights Hearings*. Eds. Mackinnon, C and Dworkin, A. Harvard University Press.

_____ (1993) *Only Words*. Cambridge University Press.

_____ (1989) *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*. Harvard University Press.

Mallon, Ron (2007) "A Field Guide to Social Construction," *Philosophy Compass*. 2(1). pp. 93-108.

_____ (2004) “Passing, Traveling and Reality: Social Constructionism and the Metaphysics of Race,” *Noûs*. 38(4). pp. 643-77.

Marx, Karl ([1843]/1997) *Critique of Hegel’s “Philosophy of Right,”* Trans. Jolin, A. and O’Malley, J., Cambridge University Press.

_____ and Engels, Friedrich ([1972]/2001) *The German Ideology: part one with selections from parts two and three, together with Marx’s “Introduction to a Critique of Political Economy.”* International Publishers.

McGowan, Mary Kate (2005) “On Pornography: MacKinnon, Speech Acts, and “False” Construction. *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*. 20(3). pp. 22-49.

Mills, Charles W. (2007) “White Ignorance,” Eds. Sullivan, S. and Tuana, N. *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*. State University of New York Press. pp. 11-38.

Purvis, Trevor and Hunt, Alan (1993) “Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology…,” *The British Journal of Sociology*. 44(3). pp. 473-99.

Richerson, Peter J. and Boyd, Robert (2008) *Not By Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution*. The University of Chicago Press.

Root, Michael (2000) “How We Divide the World,” *Philosophy of Science*. Supplement. Proceedings of the 1998 Biennial Meetings of the Philosophy of Science Association. Part II: Symposia Papers. pp. 628-39.

Rorty, Richard (1989) *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge University Press.

_____ (1993) “Feminist, Ideology, and Deconstruction: A Pragmatist View,” *Hypatia*: *A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*. 8(2). pp. 96-103.

_____ (2001) *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers.* Vol. I. Cambridge University Press.

Rust, Joshua (2006) *John Searle and the Construction of Social Reality* (*Bloomsbury Studies in American Philosophy*). Continuum.

Sahlins, Marshall (2004) *Apologies to Thucydides*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Searle, John R. (1992) “Collective Intentions and Actions,” Eds. Cohen, P., Morgan, J., and Pollack, M., *Intentions in Communications.* The MIT Press. pp. 401-16.

_____ (2010) *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization*. Oxford University Press.

_____ (2008) *Philosophy in a New Century: Selected Essays*. Cambridge University Press.

_____ (1995) *The Construction of Social Reality*. The Free Press.

Sewell, William (1992) "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency and Transformation," *The American Journal of Sociology*. 98(1). pp. 1-29.

Sullivan, Shannon (2000) "Reconfiguring gender with John Dewey: Habit, bodies, and cultural change," *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*. 15(1). pp. 23-42.

Sutherland, Anne and Thompson, Beth (2001) *Kidfluence: Why Kids Today Mean Business*. McGraw-Hill Ryerson.

Taylor, Charles (1971) "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man," *The Review of Metaphysics*. 25(1). pp. 3-51.

Taylor, Paul. C. (2007) "Race Problems, Unknown Publics, Paralysis, and Faith," Eds. Sullivan, S. and Tuana, N. *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*. State University of New York Press. pp. 135-52.

Thomasson, Amie L. (2003) "Realism and Human Kinds," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. lxvii(3). pp. 580-609.

Zalewski, Marysia (2000) *Feminism After Postmodernism: Theorising Through Practice*. Routledge.