Substantivity in Feminist Metaphysics[*]

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1. What counts as metaphysics?

I'm going to argue that the account of substantivity I gave in my book *Writing the Book of the World* does not imply that questions of feminist metaphysics are nonsubstantive, but I'd like to begin with a concession.[1] At various points in my book, particularly at the very beginning, I suggested that *the* central goal of metaphysics is to inquire into the fundamental nature of reality. Not only does this have the vice of inaccuracy, it also has a moral vice in contexts where metaphysics is esteemed: feminist metaphysics is not counted as central metaphysics and hence is portrayed as less important.[2] Metaphysics certainly includes many questions other than those about fundamental reality, questions about the nature of race and gender among them, and I wish I hadn't suggested otherwise. Even if, as I'll argue, the content of my approach is compatible with substantive questions of social metaphysics, the practice of metaphysics—including partly my own—sometimes marginalizes such questions. This needs to change, and I appreciate what Elizabeth Barnes, Mari Mikkola, and many others are doing to bring this about.[3]

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[1]See also Merricks (2013) and my reply (2013c).

[2]See Mikkola's paper for this symposium, and also Barnes (2014).

[3]For what it's worth, the offending rhetoric in my book was, in the first instance, directed against competing accounts of a certain portion of metaphysics, and was not meant to exclude other portions of metaphysics. (I may well deserve criticism for implicitly treating that portion as the only one worth discussing, but in any case I did not mean to be asserting this.) The portion of metaphysics I had in mind is that portion which we may call "ultimate metaphysics", the portion that asks questions like Hobbes versus Berkeley versus Descartes: "Is reality ultimately material, ultimately mental, or ultimately a mix?". Others construe questions of ultimate metaphysics as being about ontology or essence or modality, whereas, I was arguing, we should think of them instead as being about structure.

2. Realism about structure, and levels

The point of my book was to defend realism about "structure". In a famous example, Nelson Goodman begins with familiar concepts such as green and blue, and defines "cooked-up" concepts in terms of them. He calls an object *grue*, for example, if and only if it is green and first observed before a certain time t or blue and not first observed before t; but we can play Goodman's trick with any concepts, from concepts of physics to concepts of economics to concepts of social theory; we could consider, for example, the concept of being a woman and living in a country whose name begins with 'A' or being a man and not living in such a country. The realist about structure says that there is a metaphysically significant, objective distinction between concepts that are cooked-up in this way (like grue) and those that are not. Concepts like color and mass and gender that are not cooked-up "carve reality at its joints", to use Plato's metaphor.[4]
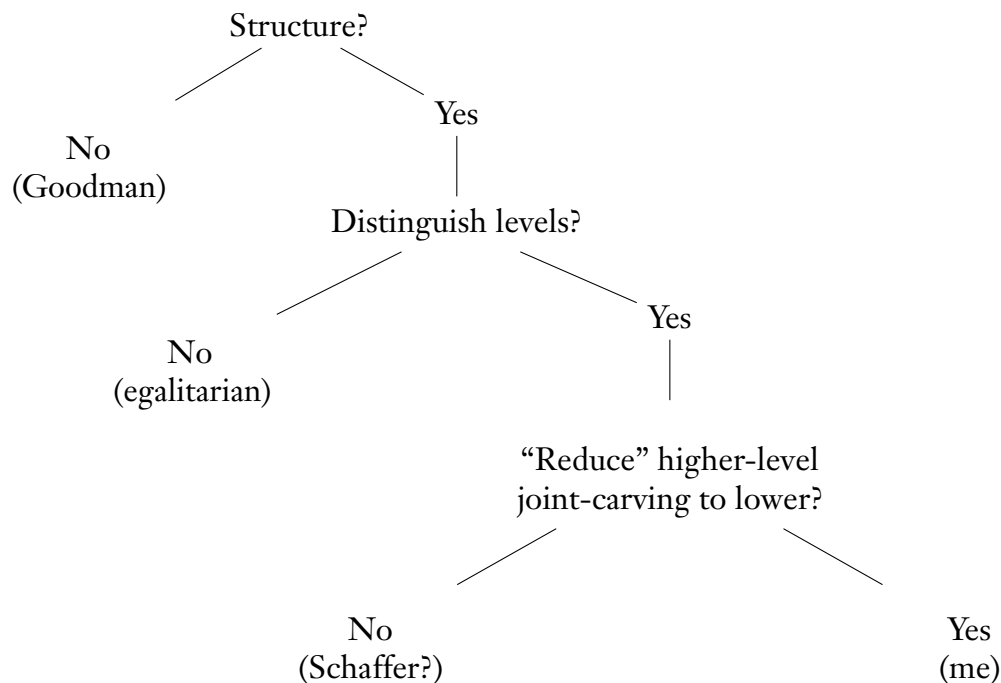
A realist about structure faces several subsequent choice-points. First, amongst the joint-carving concepts, is there any distinction to be made between those that are "fundamental" and the others? I myself say yes; but this is not a forced choice: a realist about structure could be an egalitarian and make no such distinction.

Supposing such a distinction is to be made, there is a second choice: is "higher-level" joint-carving reducible (in some suitable sense) to "lower level" joint-carving (plus other notions)? Supposing concepts of economics to carve at the joints and "grueified" concepts of "schmeconomics" not to carve at the joints, is this fact ultimately to be understood in terms of differences in how the concepts of economics and schmeconomics are based in the fundamental joint-carving notions, or is it sui generis?[5] In my view, higher-level joint-carving *does*

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[4]Terminological note: it's sometimes useful to speak of joint-carving as coming in degrees. The *perfectly* joint-carving concepts are the (absolutely) fundamental ones—concepts of physics, for instance; concepts of economics and social theory are less joint-carving; and cooked-up concepts like grue and bleen are still less joint-carving. Here, though, I'm using 'joint-carving' as an all-or-nothing concept, which includes both the first two groups of concepts, and excludes only the third group, the cooked-up concepts. (There then arises a question of just *how* joint-carving, in the degreed sense, a concept must be to count as joint-carving simpliciter in the present sense. I'm not going to try to settle that question, but at a minimum, I have in mind that playing a role in an explanatory causal theory is sufficient.)

[5]The matter is more complex, since there is a further issue: is joint-carving at the fundamental level sui generis, or does it itself reduce to something else? I myself think the former, which is why I put the second choice in the text as concerning whether higher-level structure is sui

reduce; but again, this is not a forced choice: a realist about structure might hold that higher-level structure in no way boils down to lower-level structure. To summarize:[6]

Structure?

No
(Goodman)

Yes

Distinguish levels?

No
(egalitarian)

Yes

"Reduce" higher-level
joint-carving to lower?

No
(Schaffer?)

Yes
(me)

3. My account of substantivity

A virtue of realism about structure, I argued in my book, is that it helps us understand elusive concepts like those of substantivity, objectivity, and conventionality (chapter 4). A substantive question is one that is not merely verbal; its answer is "objective". A crude, first-pass attempt to characterize nonsubstantivity is the counterfactual test:

Counterfactual-sensitivity test Proposition P is nonsubstantive if and only if P would have had a different truth value if we humans had been different, or hadn't existed.

generis. Someone who denies that lower-level joint-carving is sui generis could put the second choice as concerning whether higher-level jointcarving has the same status as lower-level jointcarving, i.e., whether higher-level joint-carving is "relatively" sui generis.

[6]By Schaffer I mean the Schaffer of the present; Schaffer (2004) defended egalitarianism.

But this test has a problem of false negatives. Take the fact that Pluto isn't a planet. In some sense this isn't a substantive matter; it was (to some degree) a conventional decision to not count Pluto as a 'planet'. But, depending on what we in fact mean by 'planet', Pluto's nonplanethood may well pass the counterfactual test. If, for example, 'planet' means *object orbiting the sun that has cleared the neighborhood around its orbit and has sufficient gravity to be spherical*, then the proposition that Pluto isn't a planet is counterfactually insensitive to the doings of human beings.

(The test also has a more well-known problem, a problem of false positives: it counts *any* proposition that is *about* humans—that there exist humans, that humans evolved from apelike ancestors, etc.—as being nonsubstantive. We'll return to this.)

So I proposed a different test, whose first-pass statement is this:[7]

Candidate-sensitivity test Sentence S is nonsubstantive if and only if S would have had different truth values under different *candidate meanings*, i.e., alternate meanings for S that are joint-carving and equally faithful to S's conceptual role.

For example: even if the proposition that is actually expressed by 'Pluto is not a planet' is insensitive to our doings (e.g.: Pluto would still not have been a planet if we had chosen a different meaning for 'planet'), there may be other joint-carving meanings we could have given to 'planet' under which 'Pluto is not a planet' would have been false.

4. Substantive questions about nonfundamental matters

Barnes and Mikkola both say that my account classifies certain questions of social metaphysics—for instance questions about gender—as being nonsubstantive. I don't think that's right, and will say why in the next three sections.[8]

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[7]Actually the candidate meanings are only required to be *equally* joint-carving, in the degreed sense of 'joint-carving'.

[8]I'd also like to clarify something in my book that I now realize was unclear. As Barnes mentions, I briefly say that Haslanger's views about gender and race might be classified as conventionalist in a sense; and I elsewhere say that conventionality is a species of nonsubstantivity. But in the latter statement I meant to be using 'conventional' in a different sense. I distinguished two kinds of conventionality: "candidate-selection conventionality", in which the statement has different truth values under different candidates and where the actually meant candidate is selected by convention, and "content conventionality", in which the statement is

My first main point is that my account does not imply that the only sub-stantive questions are those that are about fundamental matters. Mikkola says that "For [Sider], objectivity is about being carved in reality's joints. This rules out the *possibility* of something being both socially constructed and objective because (everyone agrees) socially constructed entities are not found on the fundamental level." But my account does not classify a question as being non-substantive simply because it is not about the fundamental. It is true that being phrased in fundamental terms is a *sufficient* condition for being substantive (or near enough, anyway), but it isn't a necessary condition.[9] The question of whether there is at least one planet orbiting our sun, for example, is not by my lights cast in fundamental terms, but it's clearly substantive in any reasonable sense. And my account correctly classifies it as such: though there are alternate candidate meanings for 'planet', differing over, for example, whether Pluto counts, all the candidates count Jupiter as a planet, and so 'There is at least one planet orbiting our sun' is true under all of them.

Consider, now, a statement about socially constructed kinds—"Gender is distinct from sex", say. Suppose this statement is true on all candidate meanings. Then it counts as substantive on my account—just as substantive as the claim that there is at least one planet. Yes, the statement is not about perfectly fundamental matters, but that doesn't prevent it from being substantive. Yes, the statement is in a sense about human beings and social structures, given Sally Haslanger's (2012) and others' view of the nature of gender and sex, and thus it fails the counterfactual test; but that is not a test I accept.[10] To take this last point a little further: although the *subject matter* of statements about

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about conventions (section 4.3). What I said about views like Haslanger's is that they should not be classified as candidate-selection conventionalist, but rather as content-conventionalist (p. 56, note 13). (As Barnes points out, this isn't really accurate, since the relevant social structures for Haslanger aren't really conventions; but set that aside.) But it was only candidate-selection conventionality that I meant to claim is a species of nonsubstantivity. Claims about which conventions are prevalent in a given society are typically substantive in my sense of substantivity, the sense governed by the candidate-sensitivity test.

[9]See, for example, Sider (2011, pp. 46–7).

[10]Compare Barnes's complaint that my "overlapping glosses of objectivity, joint carving, realism, etc., all rely on a picture of inquiry that aims to track the way the world is 'in and of itself', independent of human thought, human action, or human society", and thus exclude realist views about those parts of the world that concern humans. I grant that the glosses are imperfect if understood under the counterfactual sense of 'independent', but I had in mind the candidate-selectional sense, which I think avoids the problem of false positives. That said, the intuitive glosses may be ill-advised, for the reason that Barnes gives, insofar as they are more naturally understood in the counterfactual sense.

gender and sex concerns human beings, there is no intrusion of the point of view of the human *theorist* on the judgment that sex is distinct from gender: that judgment is not a projection of the theorist's politics or values or outlook, but rather is the objectively correct description of social reality.[11]

It may be objected: in order for 'Gender is distinct from sex' to be substantively true on my view, that sentence must be true on all candidate meanings. But *couldn't* we have chosen to use 'gender' and 'sex' equivalently?

According to Haslanger (2012, pp. 12–16), 'gender' and 'sex', in the sense relevant to the dispute, are something like theoretical terms in the sense of Hilary Putnam (1962) and Saul Kripke (1972), terms for features that play a causal/explanatory role in explaining, for instance, the existence of certain sorts of oppression.[12] Thus candidate meanings for those terms, if they're to fit the conceptual role that 'gender' and 'sex' play, must play that causal/explanatory role. And on Haslanger's view, any conceptual scheme that fails to distinguish gender and sex will be unable to accurately describe these mechanisms of oppression, and so will fail to deliver candidate meanings in the sense relevant to the candidate-selection test. Such a conceptual scheme will simply miss out on an aspect of the world's causal/explanatory structure, just as do conceptual schemes based on grue or schmeconomics, or on astrological sign. So any pair of candidate meanings for 'gender' and 'sex' must be distinct—my account classifies the claim that gender and sex are distinct as being substantively true.

In social theory (and other higher-level domains), there is presumably the potential for *some* nonsubstantive questions. Concepts of social theory no doubt admit indeterminacy, for instance, which leads to some nonsubstantive questions of classification (the question of where exactly to locate the borderline of being a woman, perhaps). But saying this does not require saying that the central questions of interest about gender are nonsubstantive.

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[11]Or anyway, there is no need to regard the theorist's point of view as intruding; there is no *obstacle* to being a realist about these social concepts. One might embrace the intrusion of the theorist's point of view, for political purposes say; see Mikkola's discussion of contextual values, Haslanger (2000, section 2), and Haslanger (2012, 22–29).

[12]Haslanger of course rejects the idea that gender is a "natural kind" in the sense of being rooted in nature and thus inevitable; but higher-level joints need not be "natural" or "fixed" in this sense; they can stand for made or constructed features. Understanding any part of the world requires recognizing the objective facts about that part of the world. If the objective facts about a certain part of the world involve the construction, by humans or groups of humans, of social structures, then an objective account of that part of the world needs to use concepts of social structures, in which case such concepts will carve at the joints, even though social structures are made and not fixed by "nature".

5. Higher-level joint-carving

My argument so far has assumed that gender and sex play a role in an explanatory theory, and I argue in my book that explanations must be cast in joint-carving terms (section 3.1). But can I recognize gender and sex as joint-carving? Barnes argues that I cannot.

Recall that my brand of realism about joint-carving is based on two unforced choices, either of which a realist about joint-carving might reject. One could instead be an egalitarian about joint-carving, or, alternatively, claim that higher-level joint-carving is sui generis; and as will become evident, in neither case would Barnes's concerns arise. I will argue, though, that even my own approach is compatible with joint-carving socially constructed kinds.

As Barnes points out, whether a high-level concept carves at the joints partially depends, according to me, on how simply it may be "defined" in terms of fundamental concepts. (Recall David Lewis's (1986, p. 61) claim that properties can be more or less "natural" depending on how short and nondisjunctive their "definitions" in terms of the perfectly natural properties are.) But, she says:

> [Haslangerian structures] will plausibly have extremely complicated and very long definitions in a fundamental language (and other things we might mean by our gender and race terms might well have simpler such definitions…).

The problem here is not confined to socially constructed kinds; it arises for any kinds that are multiply realized in the physical. One might similarly worry that the core concepts of biology, economics, and psychology lack simple definitions in terms of fundamental notions.

Part of the answer is to be liberal in how much complexity is allowed in the definition of a higher-level joint-carving concept. But the more important part is to point out that such definitions can be functional. Definitions of social kinds might well have the form "that which has such-and-such (social) effects and such-and-such causes".[13] Functional definitions of this sort don't mention any particular fundamental basis, and thus can be realized by any properties with appropriate causes and effects. Such definitions will be much simpler, in the case of social kinds, than definitions of the form "having parts with thus-and-so physical makeup". (Similar remarks apply to biological, psychological, and

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[13] See (Sider, 2011, p. 130). Schaffer (2013) raises a concern about my approach; see Sider (2013b) for my reply.

economic kinds; but the functional definitions of Haslangerian kinds will need to be particularly "high level" because of the multiplicity of ways in which the social roles in question are realized in different cultures; see Haslanger (2000, p. 39).)

The parenthetical concern in the quotation from Barnes is also important to address. Maybe Haslangerian gender has a more complex definition than certain competing concepts—think: naïve biological sex. That's right, but it doesn't challenge what I'm saying. Despite having a simpler basis in the fundamental, the competing concepts will be incapable of playing the explanatory role in social theory that is played by gender, if Haslanger is right about the causes of oppression.

My defense of joint-carving social kinds so far has amounted to a defense of joint-carving functional kinds in general. But here we must confront a concern that Barnes raises which is specific to social kinds: Haslanger's explanation of oppression in terms of social structures is different from other sorts of explanation in the social sciences since it employs "thick", morally loaded concepts such as oppression and hierarchy. But what exactly is the problem? Causation itself is not limited in scope to thin notions.[14] So the problem must be in the distinctive causes and effects in a functional definition of a social kind: since those involve thick concepts, they cannot be joint-carving by my lights. Here Barnes mentions an interesting problem of "bootstrapping": if causation by thick concepts is allowed, then couldn't just any cluster of concepts be argued to carve at the joints because of putative causal relations amongst the members of the cluster? But why think that causal relations are so cheap? The attempt to bootstrap might fail because the alleged causal relations simply don't hold.[15]

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[14]And I see no reason in principle why the reductionist about higher-level joint-carving should find broader notions of causation or law, which may be applied to thick concepts as well as thin, as being more problematic than narrower notions of causation or law.

[15]There is a further dimension to Barnes's bootstrapping concern, which involves my Humeanism about laws and causation (another unforced choice!). For the Humean, causation and laws boil down to patterns in particular matters of fact rather than involving "heavy-duty" metaphysical notions such as that of "governing" laws. But it's a familiar point that if no constraints at all are placed on what counts as a "pattern", then patterns are cheap, and so Humean causal/nomic relations are cheap. So, following David Lewis (e.g., 1994), I require that the concepts used to articulate lawlike patterns have reasonably simple definitions in terms of the fundamental concepts. The further dimension of Barnes's bootstrapping concern, then, is this: if patterns involving social kinds are to count as lawlike, the constraint must be liberal—patterns involving concepts with fairly complex definitions must still count as

6. Ontological realism and social structures

I'll close by discussing one final claim of Barnes's: that on my approach to "ontological realism", Haslanger would not count as an ontological realist about social structures such as genders and races.

Ontology is that branch of metaphysics that deals with questions of existence, questions about what entities there are. Ontological realism, as I use the term, says roughly that such questions are substantive.[16] This is only rough because the question of whether there are Fs might be nonsubstantive due to the predicate F. It might be nonsubstantive whether there are martinis made from brandy, not because it's nonsubstantive what entities exist, but rather because it's nonsubstantive whether any of these entities that are made from brandy should be classified as martinis.[17] Thus a slightly less rough formulation would say that ontological questions, qua ontology rather than qua classification, are substantive.

In light of my preferred metaphysics and approach to substantivity, I defend a particular form of ontological realism, according to which (unrestricted) quantifiers express fundamental concepts. Thus in the claim "there is an F", the quantifier 'there is' expresses a fundamental concept, and hence does not have multiple candidate meanings.[18] So unless the predicate F has multiple candidate meanings, the sentence as a whole won't have multiple candidate meanings, and will therefore be substantive.

There is one final twist. When I said that my form of ontological realism says that unrestricted quantifiers express fundamental concepts, that wasn't quite right. Although I think that unrestricted quantifiers *can* be used to express fundamental concepts, I allow that quantifiers can also be used to

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laws—which then opens the door to cheap causal relations and bootstrapping. In reply, first, recall that the definitions can be functional, which limits the required complexity. Second, only a very minimal constraint of definitional simplicity is needed to rule out cheap causation and laws. The constraint does not need to rule out concepts of grue's ilk, for example, since generalizations about grue presumably do not occur in syntactically simple and strong theories. (See Sider (2011, p. 131).) Only by using concepts with *massively* complex definitions can we construct syntactically simple theories that are strong enough to rival the real laws of nature. (There is a further wrinkle that I won't explore: I've been talking just about cheap laws, but what about cheap causation?)

[16]See Sider (2009, 2011, chapter 9).

[17]The example is Karen Bennett's (2009).

[18]Setting aside Kris McDaniel's (2009) ontological pluralism, that is.

express nonfundamental concepts, and perhaps are normally used this way.[19] This is especially likely if fundamental ontology is very sparse. Suppose, for instance, that in the fundamental sense of 'exist', the only entities that exist are subatomic particles. Most ordinary claims about existence—about tables and chairs, planets, people, societies, economies, and so forth—would then be false if understood as concerning the fundamental sort of existence. But perhaps such claims are rightly understood as concerning some nonfundamental sense of existence, so that they are true (albeit "made true", in some sense, by truths in a fundamental language that quantify only over subatomic particles).

Is there a tension between feminist metaphysics and ontological realism thus understood? If there is, it must be because of some distinctively ontological claim of feminist metaphysics, some claim that turns on the existence of genders and races *as entities*. Ontological realism has no bearing at all on the substantivity of claims like "Women are systematically oppressed because they are women", or other claims about the causal/explanatory structure of the social world in which terms for social kinds like 'woman' occur as predicates, not as referring terms.[20] As Barnes is quite clear to point out, it is only when genders and races are reified, treated as entities, as in "The social kind *woman* is a distinct entity from the biological/social kind *female*", that ontological realism comes into play. The problem, she says, is that I cannot recognize the existence of genders and races as entities in the fundamental sense of the quantifiers. Here is her statement of the concern:[21]

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

In fact I think there's no tension here, for two reasons. First, even if fundamental ontology does not include Haslangerian social structures, that would

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[19]See Sider (2009, section 11; 2011, sections 7.7, 9.3).

[20]Assuming, that is, that the ontology of individual persons is not at issue—it's clear that this is not Barnes's concern.

[21]I replaced Barnes's 'purely joint-carving' with 'fundamental' in order to match the terminology of the present paper.

not compromise the realist credentials of Haslanger's view, since the causal explanations she gives of social and moral phenomena could still be substantively true. Compare the impact of nominalism in the philosophy of mathematics on the realist credentials of astronomy. Given nominalism, "the number of moons in the solar system is greater than one" isn't fundamentally true (since it quantifies over numbers), but nevertheless can take part in substantively true causal explanations in astronomy. Even if genders and races do not fall in the domain of the fundamental quantifier, many claims about gender and race do not reify genders and races (recall "Women are systematically oppressed because they are women"); and those claims that do reify genders and races ("The social kind *woman* is a distinct entity from the biological/social kind *female*") may be true in the nonfundamental sense of the quantifiers. Moreover, the latter class of claims will in general be substantive: as we saw earlier, containing nonfundamental concepts is not sufficient for being nonsubstantive, on my view. That the planets move in elliptical orbits around the sun, and that the stock market crash in 2008 was caused by a real estate bubble, are substantive truths about the causal structure of physical and social reality, even if fundamental reality doesn't contain such entities as planets, stars, market crashes, and real estate bubbles, with the result that these truths involve nonfundamental quantification.

Second, Haslangerian genders and races might exist fundamentally after all. Why does Barnes think they couldn't, given my approach to ontology? Because of their persistence conditions, the conditions under which they are caused to come into and go out of existence. She says that they are "unnatural, created things based on relatively arbitrary distinctions between groups of people", and that "Part of what causes and sustains them are our collective social practices and beliefs." But an ontological realist could accept the fundamental existence of objects with these features. I'll mention two quite different ways this could happen.

First, an ontological realist could embrace a "multi-level disciplinary ontology", by which I mean a fundamental ontology that contains the distinctive objects from theoretical disciplines at all levels (but no other entities). In addition to containing objects with the persistence conditions of entities from physics, such an ontology would also contain objects with the persistence conditions of the entities of chemistry, biology, economics, and social theory. (It would be natural to pair this ontology with an expansive view about which properties are fundamental; compare the egalitarian position from section 2.)

I myself would prefer to avoid an ontology that is delineated in this way by

higher-level theoretical disciplines. Thus I'll mention a second approach, more "physicalist" in spirit, that includes entities with the right persistence conditions to be Haslangerian races and genders while remaining consistent with my ontological realism. (But this physicalist spirit is another unforced choice.) I have in mind a "plenitudinous" ontology, that includes objects possessing "all possible" persistence conditions.[22] Suppose, first, that fundamental ontology is "spatiotemporally plenitudinous", in that every filled region of spacetime is occupied by an object.[23] Thus there exist objects with arbitrary spatiotemporal spread: in addition to spatiotemporally continuous entities such as tables, persons, and planets, there also exist spatiotemporally scattered objects, such as decks of cards, galaxies, and even such "miscellaneous" things as the sum of all the coins in my pocket with the Eiffel Tower. Suppose second that fundamental ontology is "modally plenitudinous", in that there exist objects with arbitrary "modal spread". As Karen Bennett puts it:[24]

> …every region of space-time that contains an object at all contains a distinct object for every possible way of distributing 'essential' and 'accidental' over the non-sortalish properties actually instantiated there. A certain principle of plenitude holds; there is an object for each possible combination of modal properties. Each spatio-temporal region is, as my Australian friends would say, *chocka*.

In virtue of this spatiotemporal and modal inclusiveness, the defender of the "chocka" ontology refuses to pick and choose which entities to accept based on the concerns of higher-level disciplines, and in that sense remains physicalist in spirit.

The causal features of an object are, I assume, a function of the qualitative, spatiotemporal, and modal features of it and other objects. Thus given the chocka ontology's spatiotemporal and modal plenitude, it also manifests

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[22]There are other relevantly plenitudinous ontologies beyond than those I discuss in the text, such as Fine's (1999) ontology of variably embodied entities (though Fine does not regard his ontology as fundamental—p. 73), and Lewisian counterpart theory (1971) combined with either temporal parts (Quine, 1950; Smart, 1972; Sider, 2001) or—my current preference— "atoms-plus-sets" (Sider 2011, chapter 13; 2013*a*). Barnes in fact mentions the possibility of a fundamental ontology with a large enough domain to contain what one might have regarded as nonfundamental entities; she says: "for Lewis tables are in the domain of the fundamental quantifier, because of his universalism about mereology".

[23]Sider (2001) defends such an ontology.

[24]Bennett (2004, p. 354–5). The restriction to "non-sortalish" properties is because sortal properties like *being a person* are thought to have modal implications. See also Yablo (1987).

persistence-conditions plenitude: it contains objects that are caused to come into and go out of existence in arbitrarily specifiable circumstances. So, in addition to containing entities whose persistence conditions concern their physical surroundings, the chocka ontology also contains entities with extrinsic persistence conditions, including conditions sensitive to social surroundings. Among such entities, some are fit to be identified with Haslangerian social structures. These social structures are spatiotemporally scattered, but that is no barrier since the ontology is spatiotemporally plenitudinous. The social structures are created and sustained by social practices, but that is no barrier given the persistence-conditions plenitude. If we assume, in a physicalist spirit, that the distinctive properties of social theory are nonfundamental, then the *properties* of the social structures will be nonfundamental, but that is compatible with their *existence* being fundamental. (Even a defender of a nonplenitudinous ontology should admit that fundamentally existing things can have nonfundamental properties: an electron, say, might have the property of *being my favorite thing*.)

The question of whether Haslangerian social structures really should be identified with objects in a chocka ontology may strike some readers as absurd.[25] I can't fully concur with this reaction since I think the question is a facet of a perfectly good question of general ontology, but I do think the reaction is partly justified, simply because the question is irrelevant to the issues in which Haslanger is primarily interested. Her claims about the causal structure of the social world, about the self-sustaining nature of social structures and their role in causing injustice, remain important and substantive regardless of how genders and races, as entities, fit into fundamental ontology.

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The ultimate concern had by both Barnes and Mikkola is well-expressed by Barnes's summary comments on the conflict between my approach to metaphysics and Haslanger's approach to social metaphysics. She says that I "rely on a picture of inquiry that aims to track the way the world is 'in and of itself', independent of human thought, human action, or human society." Whereas this approach might be appropriate in some domains (such as the physical sciences), she says, it is inappropriate in the social domain, because "we are part of the world, and…collective human activity can affect the way the world

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[25]Though probably not Haslanger herself; she explores the analogy between social structures and material constitution in Haslanger (2007, 78–80).

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is—can affect what is real, and what is objectively 'out there'." What I have tried to show is that there is in fact no such conflict. "Independent of human thought and language" is to be understood in the candidate-selectional rather than counterfactual sense; thus what is demanded is that the *theorist's* point of view should not intrude into an objective description of reality, not that facts about the dependence of phenomena on human activity must be banned from the *content* of the description. A description of the world "in and of itself" in this sense must mention any facts about humans and what they cause that are indeed objectively true. These claims might include claims about socially constructed gender and race.

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