

Münster Lectures in Philosophy 7

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Themes
from the Philosophy
of Sally Haslanger:
Gender — Race —
Ideology

Münster Lectures in Philosophy

Volume 7

Series Editor

Department of Philosophy, University of Münster
Münster, Germany

Since 1997 the Department of Philosophy at the University of Münster has hosted the Münster Lectures in Philosophy. This lecture series gives especially young researchers in philosophy and adjacent disciplines the opportunity to enter into an intellectual exchange with internationally and nationally renowned philosophers. Each volume of the series contains an evening lecture by the guest, critical contributions regarding the guest's work provided by the participating young researchers, and commentaries of the guest relating to these contributions.

Anna Kahmen • Lea Kipper
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Editors

Themes from the Philosophy of Sally Haslanger: Gender – Race – Ideology

 Springer

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Preface

The present volume is the result of the 23rd *Münster Lecture in Philosophy* held with Sally Haslanger. In November 2019, Sally Haslanger was invited to be a guest at the Department of Philosophy, University of Münster, where she gave an evening talk and joined a two-day colloquium dedicated to her work. The papers presented in this volume are the written versions of the authors' colloquium talks. They are prepared by graduate students from the Department of Philosophy as the result of several months' engagement with Haslanger's philosophy in seminars and discussion groups. This volume comprises the evening talk that Haslanger gave, the papers presented in the colloquium as well as Haslanger's detailed reply to the critical remarks made by the students.

Sally Haslanger stands as a prominent figure in contemporary philosophy, particularly in the realms of social philosophy, gender and race theory, metaphysics, and epistemology. Widely recognized for her contributions in these areas, she has become a leading voice in discussions surrounding social ontology, feminist philosophy, and critical race theory. As a philosopher, Haslanger has dedicated her career to unraveling the complexities of social categories and structures. Her work tries to challenge traditional notions and prompting a reevaluation of deeply ingrained assumptions. Haslanger has significantly shaped the discourse on social issues, inspiring scholars and activists alike. Sally Haslanger's contributions, both in her scholarly endeavors and her intellectual involvement during her time in Münster, demonstrated the capacity and necessity for philosophy to actively participate in public discourse and political deliberation.

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Acknowledgment

The *Münster Lectures in Philosophy* depend on the efforts of many people and several institutions. First of all, we would like to thank all the graduate students who participated in the colloquium. It is their enthusiasm that makes the *Münster Lectures in Philosophy* so worthwhile. We would also like to thank all colleagues and students from the Department for attending the colloquium and becoming involved in the philosophical discussions.

The *Münster Lectures* 2019 were hosted by the Department of Philosophy. We are very grateful for all the financial and organizational support that they provided. We would like to thank the Department of Philosophy and everyone who helped us with organizational and administrative matters, especially Claudia Güstrau and Tanja Uekötter. We would like to extend our thanks to the student assistants whose support in handling numerous tasks significantly contributed to the success of the event. We also wish to express our sincere gratitude to the Society for Women in Philosophy (SWIP) and the German Society for Analytic Philosophy (Gesellschaft für analytische Philosophie, GAP) for their generous financial support, which was instrumental in facilitating the event. We appreciate their commitment to promoting philosophical discourse and supporting young researchers within the academic community.

We also wish to express our sincere appreciation to our publisher Springer, and especially Chris Wilby, for their assistance in the publication and preparation of the manuscript.

Of course, our special thanks go to Sally Haslanger herself for her readiness to accept our invitation as the 23rd Münster Lecturer. We could not have wished for a more agreeable guest. Sally's amiable nature and empathetic attitude created an inviting and open atmosphere that facilitated rich and meaningful discussions. Her profound thoughts resonated deeply with us, inspiring us to think more critically about the topics at hand. Her contributions to the dialogues were invaluable,

providing new perspectives and challenging our preconceived notions in the best possible way. We are deeply appreciative of her time and the intellectual enrichment she brought to our colloquium and to this book.

2023

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Introduction

This volume presents a collection of essays and reflections on the seminal work of Sally Haslanger, whose contributions to social justice, feminist theory, social epistemology, and political philosophy have earned international acclaim. By bringing together diverse perspectives on Haslanger's oeuvre, along with her own writings and responses to these scholarly engagements, this book offers an examination of the contemporary discourses her theories stimulate.

The opening chapter, "[Gender, Power, and Agency: Empowerment Under Conditions of Structural Injustice](#)," authored by Haslanger herself and based on the evening talk she gave when being the guest of the 23rd *Münster Lecture*, provides an analysis of gender as construct within social structures defined by norms and meanings that govern our actions and identities. Haslanger elucidates how social structures, conceptualized as networks of practices, often enshrine sites of injustice by distributing power and opportunities inequitably. The chapter further explores mechanisms of social critique and collective action as essential tools in challenging and transforming dominant norms and ideologies.

Following this foundational chapter, the volume features an extensive interview titled "[Between Pessimism and Hope: Being a Philosopher in Public Discourse](#)." This dialogue with Haslanger delves into her intellectual trajectory and her substantial contributions to philosophy. The conversation highlights her interdisciplinary methodology, which synthesizes feminist theory, metaphysics, and social epistemology, and reflects on her engagement with critical theory and political philosophy. The interview also addresses the broader implications of public discourse in philosophy and the pivotal role of philosophers in advocating for a more just society.

Monja Reinhart's chapter, "[Leibniz Has a Dream: Philosophy as a Social Techné](#)," addresses pertinent questions regarding how academic philosophy can preclude discrimination against minorities while avoiding dogmatism. Reinhart criticizes limited rationality standards and supports Haslanger's theory of social techné with insights from Leibniz's meta-philosophical essay, proposing a novel approach termed "academic perspectivism."

Nils Höppner's chapter, "[On Sally Haslanger's Concept of Ideology: Reflections on the Connection between Ideology and Reification](#)," offers an examination of

Haslanger's conceptualization of ideology. Höppner explores the paradox of self-perceived emancipation in oppressive social relations and aligns Haslanger's insights with a theory of reification to unpack the implicit assumptions in her understanding of ideology.

"[Is the Ameliorative Project Compatible with Semantic Externalism?](#)" by Lukas Steinbrink and Hans Tapfer interrogates the internal coherence of Haslanger's seminal ideas on amelioration and semantic externalism. This chapter situates Haslanger's contributions within recent developments in conceptual engineering and raises pivotal questions about the consistency of her theoretical framework.

In "[How Radical Towards Autonomous Agency?](#)", Leonard Brauch and Charlotte Poller scrutinize Haslanger's argumentation concerning the moral foundations of knowledge. The authors contextualize her earlier work on knowledge with her more recent contributions to ameliorative projects, positing that her approach seeks to morally legitimize and expand, rather than fundamentally alter, conventional epistemic practices.

The chapter "[Positions in Feminist Standpoint Theory](#)," authored by Tobias Heinz and Eva Pöll, engages in a comparative analysis of Haslanger's alignment with feminist standpoint theory. The authors argue that Haslanger, despite not explicitly endorsing the theory, essentially adopts its tenets, drawing parallels to feminist standpoint empiricism and exploring the involvement of non-subordinated allies in advocating for social justice.

Annika Berger, Sven Schwalda, David Vetten, and Markus Seidel's chapter, "[Puzzling Out Sally Haslanger's Social Constructionism: Constructing a Stable Building or Being Left with Unsolvable Puzzles?](#)," seeks to elucidate and resolve complexities in Haslanger's distinctions within social constructionist theories. The authors identify interpretative challenges and propose areas for further clarification from Haslanger to enhance understanding of her theoretical distinctions.

Finally, Jonathan and Nastasja Sieberg's chapter, "[Amelioration on What Grounds? An Analysis of Sally Haslanger's Normative Sources](#)", investigates the normative sources underpinning Haslanger's theoretical mandates. The chapter examines the interplay between epistemic normativity and social justice, positing that these elements are instrumental in achieving the overarching goal of epistemic success within Haslanger's framework.

In the final chapter of this book, Sally Haslanger responds to these student essays, and offers a reflective dialogue on her work over the past decades. Haslanger acknowledges the evolving nature of her thoughts and terminology while seeking to clarify her current positions. Haslanger engages deeply with the critiques and expands on the subtleties of social constructs, aiming to bridge gaps in understanding as well as tease out different interpretations and philosophical approaches. She delves into the pragmatic and normative dimensions of conceptual engineering, examining both epistemic and moral justifications for ameliorative projects. Discussing ideology, she differentiates her approach from traditional notions of external critique and emphasizes the interconnectedness of epistemic and practical considerations. Through this intellectual exchange, she highlights the importance of continuous philosophical inquiry and the influence of diverse perspectives.

This comprehensive collection offers analyses and critical discussions of Haslanger's work, advancing her theories while opening new avenues for philosophical inquiry and societal transformation. It is our hope that this assemblage of essays and reflections will inspire readers to engage deeply with the themes of philosophy and social justice that Sally Haslanger has so profoundly illuminated.

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Chapter 1

Gender, Power, and Agency: Empowerment Under Conditions of Structural Injustice



Sally Haslanger

Abstract This paper explores the concept of gender as both enabling and constraining within social structures influenced by norms and meanings that shape our actions and identities. It argues that social structures, framed as networks of practices, establish relations which often embody sites of injustice by distributing power and opportunities unfairly. The paper further addresses how structural power and social injustice, particularly regarding gender, emerge through practices and norms deeply embedded in cultural frameworks. Finally, the paper discusses mechanisms of social critique and change, emphasizing the role of collective action in challenging dominant norms and ideologies.

Keywords Social justice · Social change · Gender · Feminism · Social critique · Collective action · Political change

On the one hand, no one is marched off for electrolysis at the end of a rifle, nor can we fail to appreciate the initiative and ingenuity displayed by countless women in an attempt to master the rituals of beauty. Nevertheless, insofar as the disciplinary practices of femininity produce a “subjected and practiced,” an inferiorized, body, they must be understood as aspects of a far larger discipline, an oppressive and inegalitarian system of sexual subordination. This system aims at turning women into the docile and compliant companions of men just as surely as the army aims to turn its raw recruits into soldiers. (Bartky 1990, 75)

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1.1 Introduction¹

Gender, like other social positions and identities, is both enabling and constraining. Our actions take place against the backdrop of social norms and meanings, and depending on how our bodies are interpreted certain actions are intelligible, correct, surprising, empowering, risky, offensive, or not. The social norms and meanings create a topography of social space with paths that are well-worn, and yet sometimes with dangerous cliffs along the way. A false step, a lack of attention, a curiosity about what lies off the path, can have devastating effects. Many paths are open or closed according to social group membership and the paths differ in where they lead and the risks along the way, e.g., men and women, people of different racial/ethnic groups, the able-bodied and disabled, have very different choice architectures. Depending on one's social category, the paths available may or may not bring status, wealth, authority, happiness, respect; and there may be no path to where you want to go. In effect, the paths available to those in different social categories don't just shape our agency, but also distribute power and well-being.

In my recent work, I have argued for a conception of social structures based in a theory of practice (Haslanger 2018). Very roughly, practices set up divisions of labor that enable us to coordinate. The relations established in the practices, e.g., breadwinner and caregiver, parent and child, shopkeeper and customer, employer and employee, constitute a structure (a network of the relations), that forms the skeleton of a social system.² Structures are potential sites of injustice, e.g., the division of labor may be unfair or exploitative, one party may have more exit options, and this may give them more power to control the terms of the relationship, or the cultural norms may accord more status to one position than the other. In order to achieve justice, we must be attentive not only to the legal and economic relations—though these are, of course, important, but must also attend to the socio-cultural factors that shape practices and relations. We must also attend to the ways in which

¹I gave the Münster Lecture before the COVID19 pandemic and I was much delayed in producing the written version. In the meantime, I have developed the ideas I presented in the lecture and published them in different papers. When returning to the task of writing up the lecture, I incorporated some of the material as it was developed. But this version brings together various arguments from my other papers with some new material in distinctive ways. See also Haslanger 2019a, b, c, 2023, forthcoming.

²Systems may be described at different levels of generality to capture what is similar and different between them. For example, my family is a small system of a relatively common type in my social milieu: two differently gendered spouses and two children. However, the relation of parent/child is a broad type of relation that has different subtypes. Our family is an instance of a rather unusual subtype by virtue of the fact that the children were adopted as infants. And it is a subtype of adoptive families by virtue of the fact that the adoptions are transracial. The spousal relation also has different subtypes, e.g., some spouses divide labor according to a caregiver/breadwinner model, some don't. So although the legal relationship of marriage may create a broad type of spousal relation, there are subtypes that divide labor according to social or cultural norms, and others that divide labor in more resistant or radical ways. Also not all marriages are legally recognized.

formal relations that may seem acceptable in the abstract differ materially when they are instantiated in different geographical and cultural contexts.

In this paper I will sketch an account of structural injustice and locate some ways that gender relations are oppressive. My aim is not to provide a normative account of oppression, but to illuminate the phenomenon, highlight some of the forces that sustain it, and identify some of the leverage points for social change. In the next section I will summarize briefly my account of social structures as networks of practices; in Sect. 1.3, I will discuss how we become fluent social subjects through participating in practices, and how this produces and reproduces power relations. In Sect. 1.4, I will elaborate a bit on the nature of structural power as distinct from the power of individuals. In Sect. 1.5, I will consider options for critique and contestation. And then I will conclude.

1.2 Structures and Practices³

To address these issues, it is helpful to turn to William Sewell's (1992) influential account of social structure. Although Sewell provides a theory of structure, his account embeds a conception of practice. Following Giddens (1979), he claims that "Structures shape people's practices, but it is also people's practices that constitute (and reproduce) structures" (Sewell 1992, 4). Sewell argues—in terms that will require explication—that "Structures...are sets of mutually sustaining schemas and resources that empower and constrain social action and that tend to be reproduced by that social action" (19). As I develop his view, the various "mutually sustaining schemas and resources," when taken up by agents are practices; networks of practices constitute the structures when they are stably reproduced. So what does he mean by "mutually sustaining schemas and resources" and how is that an account of practices? I have discussed this in detail elsewhere (Haslanger 2018), so I will only summarize the main points here.

Very roughly, Sewell uses the term *schemas* for the tools that a culture provides to human and some non-human agents for perceiving, thinking, feeling, and acting in ways that facilitate coordination (see also Balkin 1998, Ch. 1; Lessig 1995). They are public, and so like the meanings of words, are not best thought of as mental states.⁴ I often call them "social meanings." As in the case of linguistic meanings, publicity is necessary in order for us to rely on them to coordinate. Sewell proposes that schemas consist of "the array of binary oppositions that make up a given society's fundamental tools of thought, but also the various conventions, recipes,

³In this section I draw on Haslanger 2023.

⁴There is a literature on psychological schemas that is relevant, for it provides insight into how public schemas are internalized. This is also relevant to the literature on implicit bias. However, schemas in the sense intended by Sewell and others, are cultural, not psychological. I have switched to using the term 'social meanings' in order to avoid the confusion with psychological schemas. (Admittedly, my previous work has not always been clear about this!)

scenarios, principles of action, and habits of speech and gesture built up with these fundamental tools” (7–8). Drawing on Sewell, Balkin (1998, 3) and others, I think we should include⁵:

- (i) *Simple meanings* (pink means girl, red means stop) and other forms of signaling (greeting rituals, clothing choices, logos);
- (ii) *Narrative tropes* (“First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby in the baby carriage”) and material signals and prompts for one’s place in them (wedding rings, “gender reveal” events and associated paraphernalia);
- (iii) *Default assumptions* (“Marriage is between one man and one woman” “The US Constitution protects liberty and justice for all.”); concepts (bachelor, marriage, sex, gender, race, water, justice) and alleged analytic truths about them);
- (iv) *Elements of architectural design* (brick and ivy, toilets designated for men and women only, spaces only accessible by stairs, facade columns (Bell and Zacka 2020; Chwe 2001));
- (v) *Heuristics* (imitate-the-majority, or imitate-the-successful (Hertwig et al. 2013, 7; Gigerenzer et al. 1999));
- (vi) *Familiar patterns of metaphor and metonymy* (“God is love,” “The pen is mightier than the sword,” (Camp 2006));
- (vii) *Entrenched conceptual homologies* (reason : passion :: man : woman (Balkin 1998, Ch. 10; Balkin 1990));
- (viii) *Explicit public declarations* (“Black Lives Matter,” “Blue Lives Matter”).

Often a particular practice relies on a relatively narrow set of social meanings, e.g., the practice of greeting relies on the meaning of an outstretched right hand, or the depth of a bow or curtsy, or the number of kisses on each cheek. I call the various (sometimes contradictory) social meanings that interweave in a social structure a *cultural technē*. (Sewell sometimes speaks of this as a “symbolic net.” (2005, 49).)

On Giddens’ account, *resources* are “anything that can serve as a source of power in social interactions.” Sewell 1992, 9; interpreting Giddens 1979, 100). This can include such things as knowledge, money, status, but also material stuff such as factories, weapons, and land. Giddens and Sewell take resources to be at least regarded as positively valuable, a source of power, but I have argued that because we also coordinate around the need to eliminate or avoid what is harmful, toxic, and disgusting, we should allow a broader range of things as resources, or what I sometime call ‘*sources*’ to avoid the positive connotation of ‘resources’. Resources, in this sense, include anything recognized (drawing on the available schemas) as having some kind of (positive or negative) value.⁶

⁵This is something of a grab bag, and a full account would need to sort through it and organize it, with interdisciplinary help from, e.g., scholars in cultural studies, literature, sociology, architecture, and psychology.

⁶Note that I am a pluralist about value and do not assume that all values are commensurable. So to say that something has positive or negative value, I do not mean that they fall at a particular place on a monistic scale of value.