

I. Four concerns

- 1) Race is both biological and social (Neo-naturalism (Kitcher, Andreassen))
- 2) Race is neither biological nor social (Eliminativism (Glasgow))
- 3) Race/gender is not hierarchical (Saul)
- 4) Race/gender should be studied historically/empirically and a priori stipulations cannot do justice to the phenomena. (Mills)

II. Revisiting my project

What are we doing in theorizing race (or gender)?

- a) Providing a theory of *our concept of race*.
- b) Providing a theory of race.
- c) Providing a theory of what the term 'race' means.

Compare: What are we doing in theorizing water?

- a) Providing a theory of *our concept of water*.
- b) Providing a theory of water.
- c) Providing a theory of what the term 'water' means

My project is, and has always been, (b); though I have obscured this throughout by distinguishing different projects by reference to different *concepts* we are investigating (manifest, operative, target). This was confused and confusing.

Re (4): I agree with Mills that race/gender should be studied historically/empirically. A theory of race is not a theory about our concept of race. (I'll return to the issue of stipulation.)

Re (1) and (2): How do we study race/gender? VERY roughly:

Neo-Fregean strategy: figure out what we mean by 'race' by analyzing our concept and then develop a theory about what fits the concept. (Adjust the extension, as needed.)

Non-Fregean strategy: consider a variety of "reference fixing" clues for 'race,' and develop an empirical theory about what we are talking about, if anything. (Adjust the concept, as needed.)

I favor the second non-Fregean strategy, but both strategies will have difficulty in cases where it is unclear either what we are picking out, or where the concept is less than fully clear or determinate. There will also be difficulty if/when our linguistic practices evolve.

III. Jazz model of meaning (Bigelow and Schroeter)

Meaning isn't fixed but is constantly evolving. We are engaged in a collaborative project to communicate about the world. As our understanding of the world develops and changes, we collectively adjust. At some points we track form, at others function, etc. What we hold fixed through any particular change is up for negotiation, or sometimes power (who holds the means of (linguistic) production).

That said, there are several comparisons that need to be explored, for we are in a period of discovery with respect to facts that pertain to race and gender, and these discoveries produce linguistic instability:

- 1) 'Race' is like 'atom,' i.e., the term 'atom' was once thought (by definition!) to pick out the smallest indivisible particle, but now we know that atoms have parts. (|| Neo-naturalism)
- 2) 'Race' is like 'witch,' i.e., we once thought there were witches with supernatural powers, but now we know there aren't any human beings with supernatural powers, so no witches. (|| Eliminativism)
- 3) 'Race' is like 'monarch,' i.e., we once thought that monarchs were granted divine right that was passed down through the lineage, but now we know that monarchs are individuals whose power derives from custom, broadly construed. (|| Social constructionism)

When we find that the world is not what we had thought and our linguistic tools don't quite work, what should we do? Should we give up or refine a tool that we had been using? When do our revisions result in a new tool?

In such cases, the pressing question is whether there is a division between things that is important for the purposes at hand. In the case of 'atom' and 'monarch,' the accepted extension of the term picked out a group of entities that remained significant given our interests in the domain (chemistry, government), even if they weren't exactly

what we thought they were. In the case of ‘witch,’ the presumed extension did not remain a significant group once we learned the members of it weren’t capable of supernatural powers. But things could have been different. It could have been that there was something else that witches had in common that made the group significant; it could have been that once the divine right of kings was rejected, monarchs lost power.

In my work on race, I maintain that the presumed extensions of racial terms ‘Black,’ ‘Asian,’ ‘White,’ etc. remain socially/politically/legally significant even though members of the groups are not unified by biological commonalities. So we have reason to be attentive to and demarcate the groups and to correct our previous understanding, just as we did with ‘atom’ and ‘monarch.’

In Ch. 10 of *RR* I suggest that linguistic negotiation can be quite local. Within the biology lab it may be legitimate to use the term ‘race’ as neo-naturalists propose. However, it is a separate question how we should use the term ‘race’ in public discourse. The reason for adopting a constructionist account of race, I argue, is not for the purposes of biological theorizing, but for the purposes of social justice. Moreover, as Mills suggests, the neo-naturalists conception is problematic if the goal is social justice, both because it will not track the groups as they have been racialized, and because of the racist history of biological essentialism. Because social justice is a broad public goal, the revised social meaning has a claim on being a dominant meaning in public discourse. This remains, however, a matter for negotiation.

Returning to Mills’ first two concerns, I claim that the term ‘race’ can have several meanings, depending on context. But in public discourse, it is wrong to say that race is biological, or to say that races don’t exist. Taking into account both how the world is and what in the world we have reason to track, race is a social category.

This leaves Saul’s concern unaddressed, however, for she argues that the social/political/legal context for understanding gender, at least, does not support an understanding of the significant groups (men/women) in terms of subordination/privilege. This is an important site for debate and discussion, and I agree that it is an open question. I emphasize subordination/privilege because I believe that social justice will be best served if current injustice is made vivid in reconceiving what we mean – which isn’t changing the meaning. But I don’t have the empirical research to support this. I’m happy if my work has raised this question, even if it hasn’t answered it.

IV. Definitions, Stipulations, and Generalizations

Because, on my view, meanings aren’t “in the head,” then there isn’t a stable distinction between analytic truths and synthetic generalizations. But what, then, am I doing offering *definitions* of race and gender?

Our thinking and speaking should focus on phenomena that are significant within the context (context of inquiry, context of discourse). We have reason to track some kinds rather than others, and language provides us tools to pick out a kind of thing and hold it fixed for the purposes at hand. This is one purpose of stipulated definitions; they play a role in any theoretical project and are a key device in linguistic negotiation. I agree with Mills that:

We need to be open to the possibility that race as a social category may have existed at certain times without racism and without racial social subordination; this cannot be settled by conceptual fiat. So our categories should not beg the question in favor of a particular interpretation’s being true in advance of an examination of the historical evidence... (19)

However, the adequacy of an interpretation depends on what we are aiming to do with it. It is an open question what we want the language of ‘race’ (or ‘gender,’ ‘man,’ ‘woman’) for, and in what context. So as Saul suggests, there will be contexts in which it is valuable to understand race (or man/woman) without subordination (|| to biology lab?). But in our negotiation over public discourse I am urging that the significant phenomena that project forward concern social groups in which hierarchy is central. This is what we have been tracking all along, though we didn’t realize it.

Mills worries, however, that I am letting my politics unduly influence the descriptive projects of semantics and ontology. I’m not sure I understand the “unduly.” There are many distinctions that can be drawn, many truths to articulate. Accurate description is not enough for my purposes, for I am not simply trying to describe reality, I am trying to change it. And selecting what distinctions to draw and what truths to articulate based on political considerations is, I believe, a legitimate part of that project.