Ideology is a Moral issue

I. Intro & Recap

In my last lecture, I proposed that social structures are theoretical entities, postulated to do work in a social theory. What sort of work?

    a) They are invoked in structural explanations;
    b) They enable us to identify and critique structural injustice;
    c) They provide the context for human agency;
    d) They are, in some sense, constituted by actions of and relations between individuals.

I offered a model for social explanation that depends on networks of social relations and indicated how this helps capture (a) and (b). I also began to sketch a theory of social relations in terms of practices.

One practice I considered is cooking. Cooking pasta is an instance of a more general practice of cooking, and regular engagement in the practice is constitutive of a social role: cook. Being a cook relates one in specific ways to other persons (not only the customer or family, but also the farmer, grocer, garbage collector, sources of recipes, including traditions, cookbooks, etc), and also relates one in specific ways to things (foodstuffs, sources of heat, water, utensils). Cooking is only possible within a social structure that provides the ingredients, skills, tools; the norms for taste, texture and ingredients; the distribution of labor of cooks and consumers, etc.

Borrowing from contemporary anthropology (and social science more broadly), I proposed this hypothesis:

P = S+R: Practices consist of interdependent schemas and resources "when they mutually imply and sustain each other over time." (Sewell 1992, 13*); sets of interdependent practices constitute social structures.*

The questions before us now are:
    1) What are schemas and resources?
    2) How are they related in a practice, and in a structure?
    3) What makes a structure or relation a *social* structure or *social* relation?
    4) Does this account of structure provide resources for understanding ideology?
    5) How is ideology (and social structure more generally?) relevant to moral theory?

By answering these questions, can we develop an account of social structures that satisfies all of (a-d)?

II. Social Structure

Social *practices* are, in the central cases, collective solutions to coordination or access problems with respect to a *resource*. The solution consists in organized responses to the resource. Example: Traffic management. However, practices are not always *conventional*, in Lewis's sense. They may not be arbitrary; there may not be, in any meaningful sense, common knowledge among participants; the responses may not be rational or mutually advantageous. Importantly, a meaningful sense of preference with respect to the resource in question may be constituted only through the practice that organizes our responses.

To say that the responses are "organized" is not to say that anyone organized them: the solution may have evolved through individual trials and errors. But the solution will be, to some degree, self-sustaining. Over time, the practices may become congealed and dissociated from the interests and functions that were their original impetus.

A. Schemas

What are schemas, exactly? Roughly, schemas consist in concepts and shared background beliefs that help us interpret and organize information.[1] Both concepts and beliefs, in the sense intended, store information and are the basis for various behavioral dispositions. I will use the term 'concept' for ways of storing information non-propositionally, and 'attitude' for ways of storing information propositionally. How concepts store information is controversial; I will be primarily interested in the function of concepts to classify or categorize.[2] Fluent driving, for example, will require both seeing something as a "Stop" sign (applying the concept), and acting spontaneously on the belief one ought to stop. The practice of driving involves an interdependence between these schemas and the material prompts, including the sign, the road configuration, the break pedal, the car. The concepts and beliefs constituting the schema are shared and public, but they also play a role in individual psychology.

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[1] See Machery 2009, 10-11.

[2] Because coordination problems only occur when the parties have potentially conflicting interests, social practices are specific to things with interests, but may include non-human animals. Wolves and bees are social creatures with social practices, or so it seems to me.

B. Resources

> Resources are of two types, human and nonhuman. Nonhuman resources are objects, animate or inanimate, naturally occurring or manufactured, that can be used to enhance or maintain power; human resources are physical strength, dexterity knowledge, and emotional commitments **that can be used to enhance or maintain power**, including knowledge of the means of gaining, retaining, controlling, and propagating either human or nonhuman resources. Both types of resources are media of power and are unevenly distributed. But however unequally resources may be distributed, some measure of both human and nonhuman resources are controlled by all members of society, no matter how destitute and oppressed. Indeed, part of what it means to conceive of human beings as *agents* is to conceive of them as *empowered* by access to resources of one kind or another. (Sewell 1992, 20, my bold)

Many things have the potential to be useful to us. Sometimes we recognize this potential, and sometimes not. As I read Sewell, *Penicillium* fungi were not always a resource, but became so.

Something becomes a resource when its (impersonal) use-value is recognized. Its usefulness is something to be managed because access to it is a source of power. Schemas evolve, enabling us to both perceive and organize access to the resource. In interaction with the resource and each other, we reconceive it, change it, and prompt new responses. Our thinking and acting evolve along with the object/artifact.

C. Practices, Relations, Structures

The hypothesis under consideration (*P=S+R*) is that interdependent schemas and resources constitute practices, "when they mutually imply and sustain each other over time." The interdependence between schemas and resources is of two kinds: causal and constitutive.

> *Causally,* schemas develop in response to resources and resources develop in response to schemas. *Constitutively,* a schema for X is a way of collectively interpreting and organizing information about X's qua resource. Schemas are constitutively defined by the resources they organize, and something's being a resource of a particular kind depends on what schema interprets/organizes it.

A rabbit may be a pet in one context and a source of food in another: there are practices of viewing and treating rabbits as pets, and as food. Rabbits, in and of themselves, are not a resource. *Qua resource* rabbits can function as either pet or food, depending on the schema; and being a pet or food schema depends on what resource – what sort of use – the object so-understood affords.

Practices depend on shared schemas, but they require individuals to enact and re-enact them. Consider our original claim (d): structures are, in some sense, constituted by relations between individuals and their attitudes. "…social structures, while they confront us as external and coercive, do not exist apart from our collective actions and thoughts as we apply schemas to make sense of the world and deploy resources to affect people and things." (Silbey & Ewick 1998, 41). This dependence on reiterated human action also allows for revisions of both the schemas and the resources, making individuals potential agents of social change.

With this model (P=S+R) in hand, I propose that:
- Social *relations* are entrenched practices.
- Systems of interdependent practices/relations are *structures*.
- A social *group*, e.g., a gender, a race, but also farmers, nurses, the unemployed, is a set of people who function at a node in a structure.

III. Ideology

In the most basic sense ideologies are representations of social life that serve in some way to undergird social practices. Although the term 'ideology' also has a pejorative use, I will be using it in a non-pejorative sense. We are not simply cogs in structures and practices of subordination, we enact them.

> …'ideology' and 'discourse' refer to pretty much the same aspect of social life – the idea that human individuals participate in forms of understanding, comprehension or consciousness of the relations and activities in which they are involved...This consciousness is borne through language and other systems of signs, it is transmitted between people and institutions and, perhaps most important of all, it *makes a difference*; that is, the way in which people comprehend and make sense of the social world has consequences for the direction and character of their action and inaction. (Purvis and Hunt 1993, 474)

I suggest that we understand ideology in terms of schemas constituting a practice or structure. One focus of debate, however, is whether ideology should be understood and evaluated in epistemic or practical terms. If ideology is a set of beliefs, then it would seem that it should be evaluated in terms of truth, falsity, and related

notions (Shelby); if it is a way of being in the world, a set of culturally tutored dispositions, then it should be evaluated in practical, even moral, terms, e.g., does it serve our collective interests to live in this way (Taylor).

Progress can be made on this issue by considering the *conceptual* rather than the *attitudinal* aspect of schemas. If we assume that ideology consists of propositions that we (typically) believe, then traditional epistemic critique is warranted. But then it is not clear how or whether the pragmatic critique is legitimate. However, if ideology includes concepts, then a combined form of epistemic/pragmatic evaluation is more promising.

How do we evaluate concepts? The first point to note is that concepts, themselves, are neither true nor false, e.g., *loud*. Instead, the question is whether it is apt or not. Is the concept apt when applied to a particular object, say, someone's singing? But more generally, we can ask: Should we have this or that concept in our repertoire at all? If so, how we should construe it? E.g. *underclass*.[3]

> 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 deploy it automatically, unquestioningly, 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 that we can *choose* to use or not, depending on how well the use of these ideas suits our investigative purposes. (Anderson 2001, 22)

In order to create the critical distance that gives us "choice," critique need not introduce a wholly new concept, but can just suggest a revision or rethinking. Ideology critique disrupts conceptual dogmatism and extends this method further to other representational tools, capacities, and culturally mediated patterns of response; it raises questions about their aptness, what they capture and, importantly, what they leave out, distort, or obscure.[4]

On my view, the ideology of a practice or collection of practices consists in the schemas that partly constitute it. They include concepts and other attitudes, and ideology critique involves an articulation and evaluation of both.

IV. Gender and Race (with a focus on gender here)
I have argued elsewhere that gender and race should be understood in terms of social relations (Haslanger 2000). Let 'male'/'female' refer to sexes, 'man'/'woman' to genders. Then roughly:

S *is a woman* iff$_{df}$ S is systematically subordinated along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.), and S is marked as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction.

S *is a man* iff$_{df}$ S is systematically privileged along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.), and S is marked as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of a male's biological role in reproduction.

A group G is *a gender* (in context C) iff$_{df}$ its members are similarly positioned as along some social dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.) (in C), and the members are marked as appropriately in this position by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of reproductive capacities or function.

A group is *racialized* (in context C) iff$_{df}$ its members are socially positioned as subordinate or privileged along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.) (in C), and the group is marked as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of ancestral links to a certain geographical region (call this "color").

Within the framework I have just sketched, my view can be restated: gender and race are social structures. The resource for gender is primary and secondary sex characteristics, i.e., sexual and reproductive capacities.[5] Gender schemas store and organize information about how "we" should respond to these capacities, where the "we" is

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[3] Roughly, the underclass consists of those who are situated at the bottom of a class hierarchy, below the working class. Sometimes they are characterized as not only unemployed, but unemployable. Controversies about the term include its homogenizing and demonizing tendencies.

[4] Miranda Fricker (2007) introduces the term 'hermeneutic disablement' and discusses the kinds of epistemic and political injustice that arise when our concepts fail us.

[5] Gender and sexuality are clearly related. As I see it, practices of sexuality and practices of sexuality are parts of overlapping structures. Sexed bodies function as a more specific sort of resource in practices of sexuality than in some practices of gender.

indexed to those with whom one is collectively managing sexual difference. Gender schemas are relevant in virtually every dimension of our lives. The schemas are ways of distributing power that comes from access to sexual and reproductive resources. To say that gender is a social structure is to say that there are a variety of practices built up around the interpretation and enactment of sexual difference and these practices are systematically interconnected and also overlap structures of race, class, etc.

V. "Are You My Mother?"
Grant for now that gender is a structure that organizes access to sexual and reproductive capacities. The nuclear family is an overlapping structure that organizes access to sex, children, property/wealth, and status. Some of the practices that constitute families are quite general (cohabitation) but many are local and are inflected by class, etc. Because family is the primary site for the entrenchment of current gender structures (men and women) and because these gender structures are unjust, we should identify and critique the way in which gender is implicated in schemas and resources concerning family.

Social positions were once mostly gender differentiated: 'waiter'/'waitress' (cf. 'server'). Some gendered terms are falling out of use. However, gender differentiated terms/concepts for family members are not. We have the terms 'spouse,' 'parent,' 'sibling,' but the terms 'husband,' 'wife,' 'mother,' 'father,' 'brother,' 'sister,' remain firmly entrenched. Why? (NB: the term 'cousin,' is not gender differentiated.) We should ask: are these gender differentiated family concepts apt? Should family life have a gendered structure? Why?

The concepts of *mother* and *father, sister* and *brother* encode different responses to the resources of family life along lines of sex. Mothers and fathers are differently situated with respect to children and wealth; husbands and wives with respect to work and community; sisters and brothers with respect to each other and to the parents. Although in some families children are born of the mother, after the child is born (or weaned), parents are physically on a par. What are the practices that differentiate mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, husbands and wives? What resources are being (or need to be?) managed? Can we do without these concepts/schemas?[6]

VI. Ideology and Morality
If what I have argued is plausible, then much of social life is ideologically governed. Our actions and interactions are both constrained and enabled by implicit schemas and the resources available to us. These – including concepts we use to organize our social lives – are proper objects of moral scrutiny and moral critique. I believe this account of social structure poses challenges to three ideas in contemporary moral theory:
1) that moral theory should be primarily concerned with individual action (or the action of states/NGOs);
2) that the only morally relevant sort of action is intentional action guided by propositional attitudes; and
3) that morality concerns what we ought to do, qua persons (and the rest is just etiquette!).
If we extend moral theory to include how we ought to organize ourselves collectively in response to resources, then we should be developing normative frameworks for evaluating social structures (including both schemas and resources), social roles, and role-obligations, access to power, and the formation of selves to fit the structures. Social practices do have conventional elements, but they are not arbitrary and are rarely mutually beneficial.

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[6] It may be desirable to have non-gendered terms for the genetic parents, gestational parent, childbearing parent as well as life-parent to be used in particular, e.g., medical, contexts. But these terms need not define ongoing gendered parental roles.