

# The A-project and the B-project

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## 1

In a number of papers, Sally Haslanger has pursued what she calls an *ameliorative project*. This is a kind of conceptual analysis in which you begin by looking at the purposes behind the use of a concept—you ask what people are actually doing when they apply the concept and why they are doing it—and then go on to evaluate those purposes: you ask if those purposes are ones we ought have, or if there are different ones that should be assigned to the concept. One then considers whether some modification of the concept is called for, given the purposes it ought to have, and, if so, what they are. If the analyst thinks new purposes ought to be assigned to the concept, she may well propose a revisionary account of the concept, one on which it is suited for the purposes it ought to have.<sup>1</sup>

An ameliorative account of a concept is potentially quite different from other sorts of accounts one might give. It is not an attempt at conventional conceptual analysis, in which one “seek[s] an articulation” of a concept (employing, perhaps, a method of reflective equilibrium to arrive at an all things considered definition)—it is not, to

<sup>1</sup> Haslanger writes:

The task is not simply to explicate the normal concept of X; nor is it to discover what things we normally take to fall under the concept we have in common; instead we ask what purpose is served in having the concept of X, whether this purpose is well-conceived and what concept (or concepts) would serve our well conceived purpose(s) ... best ... this approach [to conceptual analysis] is quite comfortable with the result that that we must revise—perhaps even radically—our ordinary concepts. ... (Haslanger (1999): 352)

... we begin by considering more fully the pragmatics of our talk employing the terms in question. What is the point of having these concepts? What cognitive or practical task do they (or should they) enable us to accomplish? ... In the limit case [of the project] the concept in question is introduced by stipulating the meaning of a new term. ... But if we allow that our everyday vocabularies serve both cognitive and practical purposes, purposes that might also be served by our theorizing, then a theory offering an improved understanding of our (legitimate) purposes and/or improved conceptual resources for the tasks at hand might reasonably represent itself as providing a (possibly) revisionary account of the everyday concepts [that are the subject of ameliorative analysis]. (Haslanger 2000: 223–4)

(Here and below, all references to Haslanger are to the reprintings of Haslanger’s work in Haslanger (2012).) I should note that in Haslanger (2000), she uses the phrase ‘analytic account of a concept’ instead of ‘ameliorative analysis’.

borrow Haslanger's terminology, an attempt to uncover the *manifest concept* associated with a term. Neither is it the quasi-empirical (descriptive, as Haslanger calls it) project of looking for a natural, physical, or social kind that (is the most plausible candidate for what) our applications of the concept are in fact tracking (Haslanger 2000: 223). Nor is it the attempt to limn the set of things that it is our practice to apply the concept to, what Haslanger calls the *operative concept*.<sup>2</sup> But while different, these sorts of accounts of concepts as well as ameliorative accounts all seem to involve reference and extension. Conventional conceptual analysis seeks to identify, via conceptual articulation, what we on our best reflection take ourselves to be talking about when we apply a concept. A descriptive account identifies what (kind of) objects our practice 'tracks', and thus what (kind of) objects we should take the concept to contribute to truth conditions; an account of an operative concept computes a concept's "practical extension". And an ameliorative account aims, put roughly, to tell us what objects we *should* (given our "proper purposes") be talking about when we use the concept.

Haslanger herself offers 'ameliorative analyses' of the concepts of woman, man, and (roughly speaking) racial group. She begins by asking "what work the concepts of gender and race might do for us in a critical... social theory" (Haslanger 2000: 36–7). Her answer, put generally, is that what is needed are "accounts of gender and race that will be effective tools in the fight against injustice". As I understand her, in the case of the concept *woman* she reasons as follows. The, or an important, purpose of the concept *woman* is to subordinate people on the basis of their (perceived) female properties. We shouldn't be subordinating people on this basis; indeed, we should be fighting against such subordination. One way to do this is to reformulate the concept so that, so to speak, its noxious purpose is part of its definition. This will put the purposes for which the concept is actually being used front and center, allowing us to fight gender subordination. We should therefore understand what it is to be a woman as being someone who is systematically subordinated on the basis of (perceived) female properties. This makes the concept *woman* determine a response dependent property: women are people who are perceived in a particular way, and as a result are treated in a particular way. Since the behavioral response arises only in certain kinds of societies, on this account women exist only in societies whose ideology marks certain groups for oppression. The concept *man* is taken to be analogous, though men are privileged, not subordinated, on the basis of their perceived properties. Of course this analysis is strikingly out of synch with the accounts most philosophers and non-philosophers would give of the concepts.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The distinctions and terminology here are something of a mash up of the discussions in Haslanger (1999, 2000, and 2006).

A descriptive account of a concept is not an operative account of the concept—we might be clearly be tracking a natural kind with a word but widen or narrow its application due to theoretical confusion. That said, for simplicity, in what follows I ignore whatever differences there might be in a descriptive account of a concept and an attempt to find an operative concept.

<sup>3</sup> The text oversimplifies Haslanger's proposal. Her (penultimate) definition is

S is a woman iff i) S is regularly and for the most part observed or imagined to have certain bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction; ii) that

I will call a project of offering and trying to get others to accept revisionary ameliorative accounts of a concept an *A-project*. An A-project is something that is carried out in a particular social situation at a particular time. It is undertaken as a reaction to a particular social and historical situation as conceptualized in a particular way with a particular vocabulary. It is focused on a particular concept C, expressed by particular vocabulary W, and the way that C functions in its historical milieu. It will be successfully carried off only if a large number of those who think about the world using C, expressing those thoughts with word W, come to do something we might call ‘changing their concept C’ in ways that reflect the revisionary analysis while continuing to use W to express their (revised) concept C. It will be successful only if these uses of W are accompanied by the intention that they should be understood as having the relevant meaning, and are indeed so understood.<sup>4</sup>

It is obvious, I think, that the A-project is often worthwhile. But there are cases—Haslanger’s own version of the A-project is one—in which it can at least *seem* downright odd. Her project, after all, would be successfully carried off only if a large number of those who theorize about gender and race were to come to use ‘woman’, ‘Latino’, and so on with the conscious intention that they should be understood as using the words with the relevant meanings, and indeed are so understood.<sup>5</sup> But why should we want to pull *this* off, as opposed to the seemingly simpler task—the B-project—of getting theorists to agree that most members of the relevant classes—females, those of Hispanic descent—are indeed systematically subordinated on the basis of being members of those classes?

The answer I take it is that our (legitimate) purposes for having concepts of gender and race are much better served by pulling off the A-project than the B-project. These purposes, I take it, are ones like trying to get rid of the subordination of females and Latinos by theorizing about it in a fruitful way, a way that “cuts at the social joints”—that is, that displays social kinds and social forces that explain why the social world is as it is.

But this answer invites the question, Why should we think that these purposes are better served by the A-project than the B-project? A reason one *might* have for thinking this is that the notion *group identified in terms of marks M and subordinated on the basis of having M* is of considerable explanatory utility: unless and until you

S has these features marks S within the dominant ideology of S’s society as someone who ought to occupy certain kinds of social position that are in fact subordinate (and so motivates and justifies S’s occupying such a position); and iii) the fact that S satisfies (i) and (ii) plays a role in S’s systematic subordination, i.e., along some dimension, S’s social position is oppressive, and S’s satisfying (i) and (ii) plays a role in that dimension of subordination.

And this requires Chisholming in light of the fact that one’s real or imagined traits may trigger, in different contexts and countries, quite different patterns of ideologically inspired behavior.

<sup>4</sup> Actually, this is not quite right as it stands. An A-project will be directed at a particular audience, and that audience may be considerably smaller than the set of all those (in the relevant historical milieu) who use C, expressing it with W. So the text needs to be restricted: success requires that a large number of those at whom the project is directed who think about the world using C, etc., etc.

<sup>5</sup> The concept *Latino* is an ethnic and not racial term. It’s clear that Haslanger’s intent is that her proposal generalize to such concepts.

see the relevant groups in that way, you will be unable to perceive or explain various social facts. I agree with the thought, but it doesn't seem to be a reason for preferring the A-project to the B-project. Why think that we are more likely to get people to recognize and be able to explain subordination by conceptual reformation than by... getting them to recognize social structures for what they are? Doesn't the A-project require fighting two battles—overcoming resistance to recognizing such things as implicit bias *and* overcoming resistance to using a word in a counter-intuitive way? Wouldn't the project's goals be achieved by fighting and winning just the first battle? For that matter, doesn't the A-project as Haslanger executes it cross the line between conceptual therapy and stipulative rebranding? Isn't the fact that people perceive it in just this way a reason to think that in *this* case we are better off pursuing a B-project instead of an A-project?

One might even argue that Haslanger's ameliorative project borders on incoherence. What I'm calling the A-project is, or at least often involves, a project of offering (certain) 'revisionary' accounts of a concept or of the meaning of a word. There are several ways in which an account of Xs might be revisionary: it might significantly depart from the manifest concept of Xs, from the operative concept of Xs, or from both. Cases in which one holds on to one of the two and brings the other in line with it are of course worthwhile—here theory and practice are brought into harmony. But the more revisionary cases—like Haslanger's own example of an A-project—where the proffered account is pretty strongly at variance with both manifest and practical concept might well be thought to be incoherent. For you might argue so: The semantics of a concept term H—its ex- and in-tension—is surely more or less determined by the manifest and operative concepts associated with it. But in a revisionary version of the A-project one expects that there will be substantial changes in both of these and thus substantial changes in the concept's semantics. But surely the referential semantics of a concept determines its identity—substantial changes in semantics mean abandoning the concept. So revisionary versions of the A-project look to be verging on incoherence.

Someone who so objects thinks of concepts and meanings as things with semantic essences: a concept or meaning, even if it lacks a definition, is essentially a concept with a particular referential semantics, perhaps more or less natural, perhaps more or less gerrymandered. As such, it owns an intension, a shadow across possible worlds. Or better, the intension owns it: change the intension associated with a word and you change the concept associated with it. Haslanger has no patience for this way of thinking of meanings and concepts and neither do I. I agree with her that a concept is something with a history; it is to a certain extent misleading to speak of *the* practical or manifest concept of water, Latinos, or women, for we want to be able to speak a single concept changing over time so that its articulation (which reflects the manifest concept at a particular time) or its *practicum* (reflecting the concept's application) may change while the concept persists.

The revisionary A-project makes no sense at all unless we think of concepts in this way. So it would be good to have some handle on what such a picture of concepts might look like. The next two sections sketch such a picture. Section 4 returns to the question of the prospects for success for A-projects and other attempts at conceptual engineering.

## 2

Word meanings are a kind of concept, and it is on this sort of concept that I propose to focus. Notoriously, some—internalists—take word meanings to be by and large idiosyncratic, a reflection of the individual's individual cognitive history, while others take such meanings to be part of a common store. For the moment, let us not quibble with the internalist: each speaker speaks her own language. Still, when speakers are in actual and potential communication there is typically an enormous amount of similarity in their languages. Communication and language acquisition conspire to insure this: enough evidence that others use a word in ways different than I tends *ceteris paribus* to reproduce the others' usage in my idiolect.

Speakers in actual and potential communication have similar idiolects; they tend to associate very similar inferential roles and presuppositions with their words. Of course for all the similarity there is diversity, not only in presuppositions but in phonology, morphology, syntax, and so on. Linguistic individuals interact, and these interactions produce changes in the idiolects of the interactors, with many of these changes being (more or less) permanent. The changes—that is, the acquired properties—can be and often are transmitted to others. Some such changes may spread aggressively across a population; others fizzle or disappear; yet others (think of slang) persist in a minority equilibrium. Over time changes in a population's linguistic behavior may lead to words' bearing meanings quite different from those they had originally.

To me—and, I hasten to say, to many linguists, as my analogy is hardly novel—it is striking how much this resembles the biological world. There we find populations of individuals who are very similar—they have similar genomes. The members of a population interact with one another, with the interactions resulting in individuals who tend to resemble the interactors. Over time individuals who make up a population lineage may, as changes in transmitted properties become fixed in the population, become so different from their ancestors that we say they are of a different species. I think we gain a certain amount of illumination if we think of linguistic entities—in particular word meanings and the concepts words express—as being like those segments of population lineages that we label species.<sup>6</sup>

If meanings are species-like, what exactly are they? What, for example, is the meaning of 'cousin'?

When a speaker speaks, she makes presuppositions that she expects her audience will recognize she is making, ones she expects the audience will have ready for use in making sense of what she says. Some such presuppositions are tied to particular words and accompany their use. When we speak of cousins using 'cousin', we expect to be recognized as talking about parents' siblings' progeny; we expect the audience can access this idea in interpretation. For some such presuppositions, it will be common ground in a linguistic community that speakers make them and expect that to be recognized by their audience. I call these sorts of presuppositions

<sup>6</sup> I argue for such a view of concepts and meanings in Richard (2019). This section and the next are a sort of *Readers' Digest* synopsis of sections of chapters 1 and 3; section 4 borrows some paragraphs from chapter 6.

interpretive common ground, ICG for short. I say the meaning of lexical items is, to a first approximation, interpretive common ground in the sense just limned.

You should say: What do you mean by ‘meaning’? I could mean something like the determinant of reference and truth conditions—something like Kaplanian character. Or I could mean something that determines what proposition is expressed by a sentence’s use. Or I could mean meaning in the sense of that with which one must be in cognitive contact in order to qualify as a competent speaker in a population.

I mean the last. ICG is relevant to reference and truth, but reference and truth can’t be read off it, if only because what’s common ground is often erroneous. There is, I think, a sense of ‘what is said’ in which what is said is determined by the ICG of the phrases in a sentence and referential semantic values; there are other senses of ‘what is said’ in which ICG does not determine what is said. ICG is meaning as the anchor of linguistic competence; it is what knits us together as beings who share a language and thus can communicate.

A phrase has an interpretive common ground in a particular population at a particular time; its ICG consists of those presuppositions that (it is common ground in the population at that time that) the phrase’s users make and expect their audience to recognize as made and to use in understanding the phrase’s use. But what is a presupposition? What is it for a presupposition to be in a population’s common ground?

I intend something like Bob Stalnaker’s notion of presupposition. One makes a presupposition for certain purposes; to presuppose that *p* for purposes *R* is, roughly, to be disposed, in situations in which *R* is among one’s purposes, to behave as would a person whose *R*-relevant behavior was in part determined by her belief that *p*. To have as a conversational presupposition

Q: ‘Cousin’ is used to talk about parents’ siblings’ progeny

is in the first instance to be disposed to behave for the purposes of conversation like someone whose conversational behavior—in particular, her use of the word ‘cousin’—is determined in part by belief in Q.<sup>7</sup>

Whether a presupposition is common ground in a population is a matter of what is the norm so far as assumptions go. Q and

P: Users of ‘cousin’ presuppose Q

are common ground in the community of adult speakers of English in greater Boston. Does this mean that *every* competent speaker of English in that community presupposes Q and P? Of course not. There might be a few “cousin fanatics” among Bostonian English speakers—people who think only males can be cousins and are on

<sup>7</sup> Thus, the notion of presupposition I’m working with is one that we might say is *quasi-cognitive*. To presuppose *p* for purpose *X* is to be disposed, when one has that purpose, to behave in ways that believers of *p* behave. One way to have such a presupposition is to explicitly believe *p*. But cognitively unsophisticated things like birds, baboons, and babies can be disposed to behave as if they believed *p* without having anything at all like an explicit belief that *p*. I think this is a virtue of the account I’m giving. It allows for meaning in cognitively unsophisticated populations, and it allows that some or even much of what we mean may be opaque to us, as we can be disposed to behave as if we thought *p* without being able to recognize that we are.

a tear about it, challenging anyone who has the temerity to suggest that there are female cousins. These wingnuts don't presuppose Q, but that doesn't mean that P and Q aren't common ground in the population they help constitute. To say that the presupposition that p is common ground in group G is *roughly* to say that

- [G] Gs presuppose p  
 Gs presuppose that Gs presuppose p  
 Gs presuppose that Gs presuppose that Gs presuppose p

and so on up are all true, where the claims in [G] are generics: on a first pass, 'Gs presuppose p' says something along the lines of *all normal Gs presuppose p*; 'Gs presuppose that Gs presuppose p' says something to the effect that all normal Gs presuppose the first generic claim.<sup>8</sup>

Explaining normality is not something I propose to do today, but here is a crumb of elucidation. I assume that for normal As to be Bs is not a matter of statistics, but of there being some explanatory connection between being an A, the situations As (normally) find themselves in, and tending to be a B.<sup>9</sup> Put crudely, the generic claim is that there are mechanisms M (that are normal for As and their situation) which in propitious circumstances tend to lead to As being Bs. If we think of generics and common ground in this way, then to say that Q is common ground amongst adult Bostonians does not imply that every Bostonian presupposes it. Rather, it implies that there is a mechanism that in the normal course of things brings Bostonians to presuppose it, to presuppose that Bostonians presuppose it, and so on. And of course there *is* such a mechanism—it's the Boston public school system.

I trust it is clear that if meaning is something like ICG, then it is indeed something species like. The presuppositions that accompany a word's use in a population are relatively stable but they do change over time—sometimes such change is glacial, sometimes it is saltative. At the level of the individual speaker, presuppositions about how others use a word are very much like the genomes of the members of the species—there is typically a certain amount of allelic variation across speakers in the assumptions they make about how people expect a word to be understood. It is, of course, a large and difficult question as to how much change in a word's ICG precipitates a change in meaning on the order of a demise of an old concept and the birth of a new one. But it should be clear that on reasonable criteria of meaning persistence, change in what constitutes ICG is no more likely to drive a meaning out existence than changes in the distribution of a gene's alleles in a population trigger the death of a species. This is so, for example, if we say that a change in ICG marks the death of one meaning and the emergence of another only when those changes (significantly) impede fluid conversation or the role of term in inquiry.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> P's being common ground in G is something like "it's being out in the open in G that Gs accept p". As is common, the text glosses this idea in terms of indefinitely iterated attitudes. I am not sure that this is the best way to understand the notion. (I'm not sure it's not, either.) So officially I'm taking the notion common ground as a primitive.

<sup>9</sup> I here help myself to the rudiments of the views of my colleague Bernhard Nickel. For a development of the view of both the semantics of generics and of their connection with explanation that I am presupposing here, see Nickel (2016).

<sup>10</sup> This issue is discussed at length in chapter 4 of Richard (2019).

It should also be clear that this is a picture of meanings and concepts that potentially makes sense of the idea that a concept can persist through changes in what it is a concept of. Reference is determined by a host of things—speaker presuppositions, to be sure, but also environmental relations, relations of deference, a term’s role in theory. The latter three reference determinants can change—indeed, they can change quite a lot—while the common ground surrounding a term is more or less stable. Concept persistence doesn’t require persistence of reference.<sup>11</sup>

### 3

Species are a population level phenomenon, one defined in good part by synchronic and diachronic relations among members of population lineages. Species undergo evolutionary change without going out of existence. The distribution of a gene’s alleles within a population can change dramatically over generations, so that an allele—one that controls, say, beak size—that begins as a (statistical) outlier drives to fixation because of some advantage it gives to the possessor. But bigger beaks do not new species make.

To say that meanings are species-like is to suggest that they too are a population level phenomenon. It is to suggest that we should think of them as diachronic ensembles of individuals—ensembles of lexical entries of speakers in actual and potential communication—which undergo diachronic changes that resemble the changes in allele distribution just mentioned. Different speakers have different standing presuppositions which they expect their audience to recognize as being made when a word is used; such differences make a word’s meaning in a population enjoy something like allelic variation. And meanings can be expected to undergo changes that look like the change a species undergoes when one allele of a gene is challenged for whatever reason by an upstart allele.

It is worth discussing an example. I’ll focus on feminist attempts in nineteenth-century America to change the way that both law and society thought of rape. For historical details, I draw from an article by Jill Hasaday (2000).

The nineteenth-century American legal understanding of rape—and surely its dominant social understanding for at least the first two-thirds of the century—was that it occurred when a man had intercourse with a woman who was not his wife without her consent.<sup>12</sup> The nineteenth-century feminist movement in America began arguing publically in favor of the idea that a woman ‘has a right to her own person’—and thus has a right to refuse her husband’s demands for sex—in the mid 1850’s; the radical ‘Free Love’ movement at about this time went so far as to apply the terms ‘rape’ and ‘sexual slavery’ to much of what happened in the marital bed (Hasaday

<sup>11</sup> ICG is meaning *cum* anchor of competence, that with which a speaker needs to be in cognitive contact in order to be competent. A complete discussion would at this point take up the question, What sort of relation must one bear to ICG in order to be competent? I won’t do that here, save to observe that (a) ICG is a collection of ‘first order’ presuppositions (e.g., that ‘cousin’ refers to parents’ siblings’ progeny) and ‘higher order’ ones (e.g., that speakers presuppose that ‘cousin’ so refers); and (b) one can be competent in virtue of being disposed, in interpreting speech, to make both first and higher order presuppositions, or just the first order ones, or just the higher order ones. For discussion, see chapter 3 of Richard (2019).

<sup>12</sup> Throughout what follows I simplify the presuppositions that articulate concepts.



2000: 1415ff). These ideas were pressed fairly vigorously for the balance of the nineteenth century, but had little effect beyond making sexual abuse in some states a ground for divorce. That the idea that women have a right to their bodies was a cornerstone of the feminist movement in the U.S. in the 1800's seems to have been pretty much forgotten for much of the twentieth century.

The legal and cultural surround of the official definition of rape here is of some interest. The idea that a man literally could not rape his wife was tied to two things. The first was a legal view of marriage as involving a status that was permanent and non-negotiable. The state set certain parameters for the rights and duties of marriage partners that were not optional. Hasaday quotes the author of "one of the most influential family law treatises" of the time as writing

[T]he idea, that any government could, consistently with the general weal, permit this institution to become merely [a] matter of bargain between men and women and not regulate it by its own power is . . . too absurd to require a word of refutation.<sup>13</sup>

Secondly, assumptions about marital rape depended on the idea that in agreeing to marry one gave irrevocable consent to having sex whenever one's partner requested it—an idea that, as is well known, traces back to the British jurist Matthew Hale, who wrote that marital rape was impossible "for by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract the wife hath given herself up in this kind [i.e., sexually] unto her husband, which she cannot retract".<sup>14</sup> If you don't question the bizarre view of consent in Hale's doctrine, the idea that marital rape is impossible might well seem correct.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was an *official notion*—ON, call it—of rape, the notion of the moral and legal infraction of sexual intercourse forced upon a woman without her consent by someone other than her husband. Everyone would have recognized that ON was just that: it was the notion of rape that (it was commonly known) played a certain role in law and society so that for legal and most social purposes all and only those things described by its articulation counted as rape. By the mid 1860's there was a *competitor notion* CN, that of sexual intercourse forced upon a woman by anyone without her consent. Though ON continued throughout the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century to be the "official" notion of rape, it seems that by about 1875 it was commonly known—at least among the well educated who paid attention to these things—that ON had in some sense acquired a competitor—there were people who were pushing to have CN play the role of "the official notion" of rape.

What did the word 'rape' as used by tolerably educated adults in the U.S. in 1875 mean? The question could be construed in several ways. Thinking that reference is determined by meaning, one might take it as a question whose answer needs tell us something about reference and truth conditions. Thinking that "what is strictly and literally said" is determined by meaning, one might take it as a question whose answer needs tell us something about "the proposition expressed by a sentence in

<sup>13</sup> Joel Bishop in *Commentaries on the Law of Marriage and Divorce* 11 (Little Brown, 1864); cited at Hasaday (2000: 1387).

<sup>14</sup> Matthew Hale, *The History of the Pleas of the Crown* (1736), quoted at Hasaday (2000: 1397).

which the word ‘rape’ is used”. Thinking that meaning is a handy substantive for whatever it is whose grasp makes one a competent speaker, one might want the answer to the question to tell us what it was about the relations of the minds of adults who understood ‘rape’ to the linguistic and social world that constituted their competence. I take the question in this last sense.

In trying to answer it, I will make some assumptions. In line with the view that I have been developing, I assume that facts about meaning are in a fairly strong sense determined by the presuppositions that speakers make in speech, in particular by those they expect their auditors to bring to the task of interpretation. Many of these presuppositions will be part of what I’ve been calling interpretive common ground—they are the norm, so far as what speakers presuppose in speaking and their normality is common knowledge. But not all such assumptions need be the norm in this way. In particular, some of what nineteenth-century feminists presupposed about rape were not things that most people presupposed, and feminists would have been painfully aware of this fact. What feminists could and (I think) did assume was that educated speakers were aware that a fair number of people used ‘rape’ presupposing that all forced intercourse is rape; they could and did presuppose that when they spoke publically of rape, their audience would recognize that they were making this presupposition. Certainly speech in which the activities in the marital bed were called rape would be accompanied by this presupposition—if the audience didn’t recognize that it was expected to recognize the presupposition, what the feminist said would appear more or less unintelligible.

I think there are five likely answers to our question, What did the word ‘rape’ mean in 1875? (a) It meant what it meant in 1800, ON. (b) It meant CN, or something very much like CN, which in turn is close to the modern meaning of the word. (c) It was ambiguous: in some mouths it expressed something like ON, in others, one or another variant of CN. (d) At least as it was used by the educated, it had a meaning that in a sense (which I will explain presently) combined both ON and CN. (e) The question is misconceived: in times in which a word threatens to undergo meaning change, it will often be impossible to come up with an account of what it means. According to this last answer in the case at hand, there was a distribution of variant uses of ‘rape’ in the population, much as there was a distribution of alleles that, in the normal course of things, led to brown or blue or green or grey eyes. In such a case, there is no more such a thing as the meaning of the word in the population than there is such a thing as the eye color of the population.

Answer (d) needs to be clarified. To do this, we need the notion of *competing ways of using a word* in a population. Speakers often associate several meanings with a word *cum* morpho-phonetic-syntactic object; homophony and polysemy are examples. Even abstracting from population-wide homophony and polysemy, for many words, speakers’ lexicons often contain information that encodes distinct common ways of using a term in a population. If you’ve spent time in Alberta, you interpret the natives’ use of ‘toboggan’ differently from American uses of the word. Someone who travels between Boston and New York and likes soup knows that what the speaker expects if she asks for clam chowder in Boston is very different from what the speaker expects if she asks for it in New York. Someone who knows me and

knows my daughter knows that I assume that a concoction involving vodka and various liqueurs is not and could not be a ‘martini’; not so my daughter.<sup>15</sup>

There are different ways of using ‘toboggan’ and ‘martini’. Ways of using words—Ways, for short—populate a social and linguistic landscape constituted in part by the mentalities of individual users, in part by the roles Ways play in legal, religious, and other social structures. Ways realized by a particular individual’s use of a word carry such things as inferential connections, behavioral dispositions cued to beliefs, and particular presuppositions. Social structures are more or less enduring ways people behave, ones involving standardized patterns of behavior in particular situations, expectations about such behavior, behavioral norms, and publically recognized ways of labelling such behaviors and norms. Information about such structures is typically carried by the (token) Ways used to describe and think about them.

A token Way—the understanding Vice President Schuyler Colfax or the feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton voiced in 1870 with ‘rape’, for example—has a particular role, one determined by its properties in an individual’s lexicon, and the connections it has to the social structures it describes and is used to think about. The types such tokens realize may come to ‘compete’ to occupy a particular niche. In the case at hand, the competition is (idealizing only a bit) one between ON and CN to occupy the niche in the population of English speakers defined by (a) the functional and inferential roles associated by users with the word; and (b) the legal and social role that the notion of rape had in the society. And this really is a competition: One can’t, in using ‘rape’, presuppose both that marital intercourse is never rape and that it sometimes is; legally, forced intercourse in marriage can’t be and not be rape.

That said, there is a way that the understanding one assigns to the word ‘rape’ can be constituted by both ON and CN, a way not altogether unlike the way a heterozygote combines two variants of a particular gene. It’s common for someone to associate several overlapping sets of presuppositions with a word; ‘toboggan’, ‘clam chowder’, and ‘martini’ are examples. This is not like standard cases of homophony or polysemy. If Jane says “I went to the bank yesterday to make a deposit” and Jim says “I went to the bank yesterday to collect reeds”, one cannot say things like “Jane and Jim each went to a bank yesterday” or “Jane and Jim both said that they went to a bank yesterday”. If Jim says ‘Let’s smoke a blunt’ and Jane says ‘Let’s smoke the salmon’, one cannot say ‘Jim and Jane each want to smoke something’. But if Jane says ‘May I have a vodka, Chambord, and pineapple martini’ and Jim says ‘Gimme a dirty Hendricks martini’, I can (and, to expedite communication, will) say ‘Jane and Jim each asked for a martini’ or ‘Jane and Jim both had a martini’, even though I reject Jane’s presuppositions about martinis. I take it this indicates that, however reluctantly in the case of Jane, I interpret the Ways that lie behind Jane and Jim’s utterances with the Way that I use ‘martini’ when I speak of martinis, even though I am aware of a difference in the meaning *cum* endorsed presuppositions that Jane and I assign to the word ‘martini’.<sup>16</sup> Something similar will be true of Jane’s interpretation of me if she knows my feelings about what counts as a martini: If

<sup>15</sup> I got the example of ‘martini’ from Ted Sider, who tells me that he got it from Karen Bennett.

<sup>16</sup> Whether I will say Jane had a martini actually depends in part on my audience.

I ask for a martini, she will interpret me as having asked for the same sort of drink as she did—she'll think I asked for a martini—though she knows that there is a difference in meaning *cum* endorsed presuppositions between us. All this suggests that Jane's and my uses of 'martini' stand in a relation of 'interpretive coordination': though we knowingly differ in the presuppositions we endorse, we discount that difference in communication, each interpreting the other's use of 'martini' with her own.<sup>17</sup>

In this situation there are two Ways of using 'martini', Ways defined by sets of presuppositions made by a user and expected by her to be recognized as being made. Furthermore, it is common knowledge that there are these two Ways of using the word: those who use it in one way know that others use it in the other. And these Ways stand in a curious relation. On the one hand, embedded in a single individual they are in some sense inconsistent; they are in some sense distinct concepts whose presuppositions aren't consistent. One can't (without hypocrisy, at least) adopt a policy of using the word in full voice sometimes in one Way, sometimes in another.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, the two Ways of using the term are treated socially as if they expressed the same concept. My daughter and I interpret each other as speaking about "the same thing" with 'martini', as evidenced, for example, by our practices of interpreting and reporting each other's thinkings and sayings.

The structure of the 'rape' example is much the same as that of 'martini' example. A feminist and a conservative in the 1880s who recognized that they differed as to whether marital rape was possible would *of course* interpret uses of 'rape' in a way that indicated their lexical entries for the word were interpretively coordinated with one another and with those of other members of the society: They would report one another as disagreeing about rape.

We can now clarify the idea that 'rape' in late nineteenth-century America had a meaning that in some sense combined ON and CN. In the population we are discussing, Ways of using the word to pick out sexual violation were interpretively coordinated. This network of coordinated Ways was associated with a particular sort of individual functional role (everyone, for example, expected all to take rape to be a serious crime) and a particular social role (it was a felony). We call such a network of coordinated Ways with a tolerably well-defined individual and social role a *p*- (for public) *word* in the population. Note that a *p*-word need not be used with the same first order presuppositions by those who share it: Jane assumes a martini can be made from vanilla vodka; I don't. And that this is so may be common knowledge within a population: People in 2005 knew that there was a Way of using 'marriage' on which the user presupposed that marriage between those of the same sex is impossible (and

<sup>17</sup> There is another difference between the martini example and standard examples of homophony and polysemy. There is a sort of tension between Jane's and my uses of 'martini'—I can't endorse both uses in full voice. But I feel no tension in my uses of 'smoke' with its various transitive meanings—as something one does to a cigarette or a salmon filet or to another person. Those meanings do not strike me as being—they are not—in the kind of competition that differing uses of 'martini' are. Likewise for 'bank'.

<sup>18</sup> This needs qualification. I could, of course, adopt a policy of using the word in different ways as the way it is used by my audience shifts. The point in the text is that there is something very odd about a person who willfully (and without fairly elaborate signaling) uses the word now one way and several sentences down the conversation the other.

expected their audience to recognize this), and another Way of using it on which the user presupposed that same sex marriage is possible (and expected their audience to recognize this).

When it is common knowledge among users in the network that constitutes a p-word  $w$  that a particular Way  $S$  accompanies (some) uses of  $w$ ,  $S$  is a *p-sense* of  $w$  in the population. The set of presuppositions about rape made by feminists that they expected their audience to recognize was one p-sense of ‘rape’ in 1875; the set of corresponding conservative presuppositions another. When there are multiple p-senses of  $w$  in a population, we say (with a nod to Gallie (1956)) that the sense (sometimes I say ‘the meaning’) of  $w$  is *contested* in the population.<sup>19</sup> The meanings of ‘martini’, ‘rape’, and ‘marriage’ are all contested in the relevant populations.

The idea of a word’s having a contested meaning is a fairly straightforward generalization of the idea of a word’s meaning being its ICG. When a word’s meaning is contested, each competent user uses it with one of its p-senses: competent users make the presuppositions that are the basis of that sense, expect auditors to recognize that, and make whatever higher order assumptions make the fact that  $w$  is used with this p-sense common knowledge. And for each Way of using the term—for each of its p-senses—it is common knowledge that *that* is a way the term is used in the population.<sup>20</sup> If one insists on synchronic stand-ins for word meaning, *the* meaning of a word, when its meaning is contested, is (realized by) the collection of its p-senses. This collection, after all, is something that competent speakers are in cognitive contact with. They know that its member senses are ones that users employ in communication: each constituent sense is known to include the assumptions that some subset of the population makes and expects its audience to recognize. The collection of p-senses associated with the relevant word are publically acknowledged; they are known to be senses that are in a certain sense “co-interpretable”. If Colfax presupposes the first order assumptions in ON and Cady Stanton those in CN in joint conversation, they will, even if they know this, interpret one another as “talking about the same thing” when they use ‘rape’; each will say things like ‘well, you and I just disagree as to whether that is a case of rape’.

I think this is the best way to think of meaning in the case at hand. Compare it to the nihilistic view that in 1875 there was no more such a thing as the public meaning of ‘rape’ than there was such a thing as the eye color of human beings. The nihilist, it seems to me, has got ahold of the wrong analogy. True, there’s no such thing as the eye color of human beings. But there *is* such a thing as the human eye. Its realization varies from individual to individual, but there are commonalities enough that make it

<sup>19</sup> Gallie assumed that only words whose meaning was in some sense normative could express what he called contested concepts—his idea, as I understand it, was that it was essential to the phenomenon he was interested in that differences in conception resulted from the way one’s values or other broadly normative commitments influenced one’s conceptualizing. One might agree with Gallie about this by arguing that *every* concept has a normative element.

George Lakoff, influenced by the work of his student Alan Schwartz, has made much of the notion of contested concepts. For a summary of Lakoff’s take on the notion, see chapter 12 of Lakoff (2008); see also the quite remarkable senior thesis, Schwartz (1992).

<sup>20</sup> This is oversimplified, since there are different ways to be competent; again, see the discussion in chapter 3 of Richard (2019).

sensible to talk of *the* human eye, a reification of what's common to all normal eyes. There is variation across tokens of the human eye in such things as color and pupil size, but the variation is relatively constrained. In describing the human eye, one describes both the commonalities—rods and cones are always present—and the variations—one finds a range of pigmentations. Likewise, there was a common structure—a common set of first order presuppositions—to conservative and feminist views of rape in 1875, as well as something like allelic variation. Both the common structure and the variations can be read off of the (contested) meaning of the term 'rape', and it justifies the reification involved in speaking of *the* meaning of the term at the time.

The human eye is a biological object that has a history. While its structure is currently stable, it's nonetheless a historical entity. New eyes tend to resemble the eyes of those responsible for the body in which they are situated; future distribution of properties like eye color is determined by the way current eye owners and their progeny interact with each other and the environment; the eye is in principle liable to historical change due to mutation, selective pressures, and drift. All of this is mirrored in the semantic case: meaning structure is heritable; variant distribution is determined by such things as interaction of variants with one another and the environment and forces analogous to drift and mutation. The nihilist's view, refusing to think of meaning in population terms, misses just the sort of thing we miss if we refuse to speak of the human eye—or for that matter, the human species.

What was said above about coordination and reported speech gives reason to reject the view that in 1875 'rape' was ambiguous, as people like Stanton meant one thing with it while people like Colfax meant something else. This is really a version of the nihilistic view that there was no such thing as *the* meaning of the term. Agreed, there is a clearly *a* sense in which it is correct to say that different people meant different things in using the term—this difference in meaning resided in the differences in presuppositions speakers made and expected the audience to recognize as being made. But from the fact that people mean different things in *this* sense with the word, it doesn't follow that there isn't such a thing as *the* meaning of the word as it is used by everyone. First of all, there is of course a good deal that the various ways of using the term had in common: the presuppositions involved in each way of using the term were in a clear sense an extension of a 'common core' of presuppositions. Second of all, I take it to be an upshot of the sort of interpretive coordination of uses mentioned above that in interpreting the use of 'rape', speakers proceeded in the way one proceeds when one takes another to mean what one does with a term though differing on some of the "theory" associated with it. Speakers proceeded as would speakers with at least some commitment to reaching a common understanding of how the term was to be used—they co-interpreted but reserved the right to insist that their own conception was the one that all should adopt. That they proceeded in this way, I would say, means that they understood one another as sharing a word which had the same public meaning whoever used it. We, I would say, should understand them in this way as well.

The drift of the last few pages is that we are best off if we take the word 'rape' to be univocal as Stanton and Colfax use it. I imagine that some will agree with the claim

about univocality, but say that what the word meant in 1875 is pretty much what it means today. The argument is simple: When Stanton and Colfax used the word, they were talking about, they were referring to, what *we're* talking about when we use the word. For suppose Colfax uttered

(R) It's impossible for a man to rape his wife.

Stanton would probably have asserted both

- (1) When Colfax uttered 'it's impossible for a man to rape his wife', he said that it was impossible for a man to rape his wife.
- (2) If Colfax said that it was impossible for a man to rape his wife, he was wrong.

All of *us* will say these things. The truth of (1) and (2) when uttered by Stanton and endorsed by us suggests identity of reference of 'rape' as used by Stanton, Colfax, and us.

Reference supervenes on meaning. So, whatever the word meant in 1875 has to be pretty closely related to what the word means today, closely enough so that the reference of the word then is what it is now. The simplest account is that the word's meaning is what it contributed and still contributes to what is said when the word is used. But this is what's determined by an articulation of CN—it's an extension, or (structured) intension, or something of the sort that picks out any and all forced intercourse.

We can agree for the sake of argument with the argument's steps—the nineteenth- and twenty-first-century references were the same; reference supervenes on meaning in some sense of meaning (and on environmental relations and other things); this means there has to be a pretty significant similarity in meaning in some sense of meaning across the centuries—up to the last one. I observed above that there are number of different notions of meaning: meaning as what determines reference and truth conditions; meaning as what is contributed to what is said; meaning as the anchor of competence, as that with which one must be in cognitive contact in order to be competent. It is meaning in this last sense that we are discussing. Why should we suppose it to be "simpler" (in a sense of simplicity that governs choice of theory) to identify this last sort of meaning with (what determines) reference than to say that what a word means is something that is constituted by the evolving practice of speakers and auditors to attempt to describe, think about, condemn, and regulate certain aspects of the social world? The idea that meaning *cum* the anchor of competence is something like interpretive common ground is one way of working out such a picture of meaning. When we think of meaning in this way there is distance between meaning and reference. If a meaning or concept is something like interpretive common ground, there is nothing particularly odd about the idea that all of those who think with a concept at a particular time are radically misconceiving what they are thinking about—there is nothing odd about the idea that the meaning of a term misrepresents what it is a concept of. So there is no problem, if we think of concepts in this way, with thinking that both (1) and (2) are true. But their truth doesn't imply that we have said what needs to be said about the once and current meaning of 'rape' once we have trotted an articulation of CN.

## 4

The A-theorist introduces a novel allele into the conceptual gene pool with the hope that it will be driven to fixation by social and intellectual forces, its competitors driven, if not to extinction, then at least to the status of marginal conceptual alternatives. Under what conditions does such a project have any chance of success? A preliminary to giving an answer is considering concrete cases.

The nineteenth-century feminist A-project is not an example of a completely successful A-project. Insofar as the audience addressed was not simply women willing to listen to feminist arguments, but the society as a whole, the project failed; witness that it was necessary to launch the whole thing again a hundred years later. But it succeeded in the sense that a significant number of people accepted the competitor notion CN, as opposed to the official notion ON, as 'the correct' way to think about the topic.

Why is this? Well, for one thing, the feminist project was conceptually, though not socially, rather conservative. The purposes the feminists in effect were assigning to the concept of rape would likely appear to the target audience to be more or less continuous with the cognitive and social purposes the concept already served, even at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Even then, to call something rape was, first and foremost, to identify it as a sexual, not a property, violation, and to condemn it for that reason; one did not, after all, need to be married to be raped. Insisting that marital rape is possible preserves this aspect of the concept of rape, while attempting to undermine an ideology that constrained the way in which the concept could be applied. Arguing for the understanding of rape embodied in CN is in good part a matter of straightforward ideological critique of ideas that are in some sense independent of the concept: once one rejects the view of consent underlying Hale's doctrine it is natural and hardly surprising that the legal and cultural understanding of rape would be transformed from ON into something like CN. A consequence is that it would not feel like false advertising—it would not have *been* false advertising—for feminists to represent themselves as pointing out that the best way to understand the **existing** practice of labeling and prosecuting things as rape is as a practice whose rationale—rationale, not practical upshot—is to condemn sexual violation of women no matter who the agent is.

Consider, next, the example of that brilliant *provocateur* who began using 'queer' as a badge, if not of honor, then at least of defiance and pride. There is a sense in which her 'proposal' for reworking the concept expressed by the word is also conceptually conservative. For the proposal—to express approval or at least neutrality towards gay people in applying the word 'queer'—is not a proposal to change what we might call the 'practical extension' of the term—that is, it is not a proposal, the upshot of which is to add or subtract from the collection of those to whom the term would commonly be taken to apply. The 'proposal', as I see it, is to change the affective, expressive component in the concept—its common, mutually recognized pragmatic trappings, if you will. Classification itself—the circumscribing of a particular (albeit fuzzily defined) group of objects—remains the same.

Consider now Haslanger's own version of the A-project. As noted above, when one reads her proposed analyses of concepts like *woman* and *Latino*, one has a strong



feeling that she is engaged in a subject changing maneuver. It is not difficult to see why one might feel this way.

Haslanger's idea is that the application of a concept like *Latino* is the first step in a systematic (though partially non-conscious) process of discrimination against the group to which the term is applied. Latinos are so-classified in good part in order to discriminate against them; indeed, Latinos *are* people with a certain ethnic heritage who are discriminated against on the basis of that heritage. It is important to recognize this social fact. One way to do this is to revise our understanding of 'Latino' to reflect it.

One feels that, unlike the two examples of 'concept engineering' just mentioned, Haslanger's proposal **imposes** understandings of and purposes upon talk and thought involving the concept *Latino* that are quite foreign to the ways such thought and talk can be understood and the purposes it in fact serves. The proposal is certainly not classificatorily conservative in the way the feminist or the appropriative projects are.<sup>21</sup> The new concept doesn't arise simply by removing ideological accretions from something that could be said to be a notion that was there all along. We do not hold constant the classification the concept effects in practice while flipping its emotive valence. Nor do we claim that there was a kind users of the word in some sense meant to be talking about with the term, a kind that is more clearly conceptualized once the alternative analysis is adopted. One feels that the proposal's analysis is pretty much discontinuous with the analysandum on all relevant dimensions.

Now, it is not altogether clear whether this feeling is correct. There are any number of stories one might tell about "the" purpose or purposes of our gender and race concepts. Focus on the concept *Latino*. My suspicion is that the story most people would on reflection tell about the meaning of 'Latino'—and thus the core of the presuppositions most people make and expect to be recognized as making in using the term—is something like

P1: The concept *Latino* is the concept of a person whose heritage includes (a significant number of) ancestors from Latin American countries who were themselves of Hispanic descent. Thus, to think of someone as a Latino is to think of them in this way.

Certainly the way we actually proceed in classification seems to be captured by something like this. Because of this convergence of presupposition and practical application, one is inclined to say that the best way to understand our existing practice of classifying people as Latino is given by P1. And so, one might argue, an account of the concept *Latino* like Haslanger's that incorporates a notion of subordination that is absent from both what's presupposed and from classificatory behavior is simply changing the subject.

<sup>21</sup> If this is not clear: The proposal, for reasons discussed in note 3, is probably best understood as a proposal that makes terms like 'Latino' relational: one is a Latino only relative to a culture in which one is systematically subordinated in virtue of one's ancestry or "Latino appearance". This seems to imply that if I go to, say, Mexico and comment on how many Latinos there are there, I am speaking falsely, for (there being no pattern of subordination on the basis of the "marks of being Latino"), there are, if the word's reference is determined by the proposal, no Latinos in Mexico.

But one might also say that, whether we are conscious of it or not, the following is true:

P2: An important function of the concept *Latino* is that it facilitates classifying people whose heritage includes (a significant number of) ancestors from Latin American countries who were Hispanic as having such a heritage *so that* they can be discriminated against and otherwise subordinated. Thus, “the”, or a point of having the concept is to facilitate discrimination on the basis of ethnicity.

Let us agree that a good part of the upshot of classifying people as Latinos is captured by P2. Because of this, one might say, a good part of the purpose of the concept is to conceptualize people ethnically so as to subordinate them on that basis. And so an account of the concept like Halsanger’s, an account that incorporates a notion of subordination, is one that simply brings the concept’s “point” into focus. So it can’t be said to be an account that is “changing the subject”.

I have doubts about this argument. There is difference between what a thing is and what it gets used for: a screwdriver doesn’t become a can opener by being used almost exclusively to pry the lids off paint cans. I worry that the argument just given blurs this sort of difference. To agree that the *upshot* of ethnic classification is subordination is not to agree that in classifying ethnically we are classifying (in part) on the *basis* of subordination.

The A-project is a project that seeks to change the meaning of a term. There are at least two things that are naturally labelled as changing the meaning of a predicate, a change in its ex- or possible worlds in-tension—*r-change*—and a change in the presuppositions that constitute the predicate’s ICG—*c-change*. The version of the A-project we are discussing looks to involve both, since it is a matter of giving an extension shifting meaning to terms like ‘woman’, ‘Latino’, and the like, and a matter of getting a group to take a certain way of thinking of the extensions for granted.<sup>22</sup> Insofar as this particular version of the project involves extension shifting, it strikes me that it was never likely to be successful. Halsanger tells us that she wants to answer such questions as *What is it to be a man? What is it to be a Latino?*. The answers are to be ‘critical analytical’ ones, in the sense that the search for answers is to be guided by considering “what work the concepts of gender and race might do for us in a critical . . . social theory” (Halsanger 2000: 226). But of course we *begin* by using the concepts *man* and *Latino* in delimiting the project. An extension shifting answer strikes me as one very difficult to make stick—as very difficult to get people to accept—if it is not grounded in something about prior usage that can be adduced to make plausible that the answer “simply reveals what we were talking about all along”, or that the answer is an apt response to an ambiguity, confusion, or inconsistency in prior use.

It is worth observing that *r-change* is in this regard quite different from *c-change*. Suppose, addressing feminists and race theorists, that I point long and loudly to the facts that women and people of color *as classes* are subordinated, and that this

<sup>22</sup> “way of thinking” has unfortunate Fregean connotations: Fregean ways of thinking (senses) are reference determining. I intend here ways of thinking in a more or less colloquial sense, on which (for example) stereotypes associated with racial and gender terms are ways of thinking of their references associated with the terms. Of course ways of thinking in *this* sense are not reference determining.

subordination is achieved on the basis of a classification in terms of “observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of their role in reproduction (women) or ancestral links to a certain geographic region (racial groups)”. To say that these classes are subordinated on these bases is of course not to say that all the members of the classes are. Rather it is (in part) to say that there are mechanisms in place that tend to lead those who display the features to be subordinated; the claim is a generic, not a universal. Suppose I make it clear that the fact that I am pointing to is a fact about history and culture—it is a fact about women and minorities in particular historical and cultural contexts, significant in part because the relevant sort of subordination occurred and occurs in a startlingly wide swath of history. Suppose I go on to say that this fact about females and people who have the relevant racial heritage is significant enough that it should be at the forefront of our theorizing about gender and class. And suppose finally that I am heard: people accept what I say, recognize that others do, and come to expect others to know these facts. As a result, **generics** like *women are subordinated on observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of their role in reproduction* become **part of the ICG** of the term ‘woman’ (and so in a tolerably clear sense, that I have been trying to lay out, become part of the concept *woman*); as a result, such generics come to play a role in thought and theory about women and minorities.

All of this would effect a change in the meaning of ‘women’, ‘Latino’, and so on—not an r-change, but a c-change. It is not a change in what people are talking about or in what they think they are talking about with those terms. Rather, it is a change in the way they think about what they are talking about, a change in the assumptions and presuppositions they make when they use the terms. It is a change that is relatively easy to effect—indeed, it’s plausible that some progress has already been made in getting people in general, not just activists and academic theorists, to think of the relevant groups in this way. Effecting this sort of change, it seems to me, achieves much, perhaps most, of what Haslanger’s project was meant to achieve. And it does this without having to take on the burden of shifting the reference of anything. For changing what everyone takes for granted in using a word is not, in itself, shifting what anyone is talking about with a word.

Bringing about what I’ve been calling c-change is a sort of ‘conceptual engineering’. One might engage in it with the intention that it will lead to r-change. But there’s no need to have such an intention in order to try to change what is common ground about what users of a (term expressing a) concept presuppose. And of course this sort of ‘conceptual engineering’ is not particularly the province of philosophy or of the academy in general. It happens all the time.

Conceptual engineers and ameliorists often describe their projects in ways that imply that they will be successful only if the reference of the concept under their scalpel shifts. That seems to me a pretty narrow vision of what it could be to ameliorate our thinking. Certainly the arch conceptual engineers—propagandists, advertising copy writers, spinmeisters, cagey politicians—don’t think of what they are doing in such terms. The trumpets of the Trump have pretty much succeeded in getting the generic idea that illegal immigrants are bad *hombres* into the common ground of certain groups, so that members of those groups presuppose and expect to be recognized as presupposing this when they use ‘illegal immigrant’. Doing this,

I would say, clearly changed the meaning of ‘illegal immigrant’ in those groups, but of course it didn’t change its reference. Pretty obviously the goal was never to change the reference of the term: shifting the reference would have been the wrong outcome, since the goal was obviously to get people to think of *illegal immigrants*, not of illegal immigrants who are bad *hombres*, as rapists and murderers.

We ought to think of conceptual amelioration and engineering as an attempt to foster a kind of evolution within a population. The revisionary analyst drops a mutation into a population, hoping that it will “reproduce” and in one way or another establish itself, even replace all of its alternatives over time. The goal might be referential shift, but often enough such shift will be unnecessary for the project to achieve whatever goals are driving it. In order to think fruitfully about the prospects of success for such a project, we need to answer various questions. In what sense do meanings and concepts reproduce? Given a population into which a new use of the word is introduced, under what conditions can we expect the new use to establish itself? What sorts of conversational encounters make people adopt a new interpretive strategy, one changing the presuppositions they take to accompany a term’s use? Do new meanings reproduce fastest if they are first firmly entrenched in small groups, or do they naturally spread like the flu? Etc., etc.

If you think of the A-project not as an ivory tower exercise—an *ex cathedra* philosophical pronouncement of what the little people should be meaning with their words—but as a genuine attempt to effect social change you should be thinking about these sorts of questions. You should be asking questions like: What are reasonable, what are unreasonable models of how conceptual change occurs in a population? Given that we think a model reasonable, which of its variables are open to manipulation by the revisionary analyst? How do we change the strategies that people bring to the game, that is, to the project of interpreting others?

These are the sorts of questions that we ought to be asking, not only about versions of the A-project, but about conceptual analysis in general. Conceptual analysis is generally not just descriptive but normative. In interesting cases—the analysis of knowledge, of free action, of truth—what we tend to find is evidence not of a single underlying albeit vague concept, but a profusion of more or less mutual, not altogether consistent, presuppositions and patterns of application that (with a bit of the philosopher’s art) can be resolved into a collection of candidates for what we might mean by the terms we use. To arbitrate amongst them is at least in part a matter of asking, not what natural or gerrymandered kind we are trying to pick out, but asking what the point or points of having and applying the concept under study is. Philosophical analysis is pretty much *always* a (thinly veiled) version of the A-project. As such, philosophical analysis is not simply theory; it is practice. And as practice, it demands that its practitioners be practical.

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