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Finean feminist metaphysics

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ABSTRACT
Feminist metaphysicians have recently argued that some of the most influential contemporary meta-metaphysical frameworks are at odds with feminist metaphysics. In this paper I argue that the Finean framework of grounding, essence, and reality evades the main challenges that have been raised for alternative frameworks. The upshot of my discussion is that the Finean framework is an apt one for feminist metaphysics.

KEYWORDS Feminist metaphysics; meta-metaphysics; gender; grounding; Kit Fine

1. Feminist metaphysics and meta-metaphysics

Recent years have seen the growth and development of feminist metaphysics, a branch of metaphysics that investigates the nature and reality of phenomena that have traditionally been of interest to feminists, such as gender, sex, social structures, and social kinds.[1] There has also been a resurgence of interest in meta-metaphysics, a branch of metaphysics that investigates the nature and methods of metaphysics itself – what metaphysics is, how various metaphysical debates and positions should be understood, and what the central notions of metaphysics are.

These two seemingly disparate areas of inquiry are interrelated in two important ways. First, as Elizabeth Barnes (2014) has argued, any adequate meta-metaphysical framework must encompass – and do justice to – all areas of first-order metaphysical inquiry, including feminist metaphysics. Feminist metaphysics is thus a test case for meta-metaphysical frameworks and, as such, has a role to play in the evaluation of competing frameworks. In this way, feminist metaphysics is relevant to meta-metaphysics. Second, feminist metaphysics employs the metaphysician's toolkit (cf. Barnes 2014; Mikkola 2017). Alternative meta-metaphysical

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[1]This characterization of feminist metaphysics may be found in Witt (2011a) and Barnes (2014). See Witt (2011a) and Haslanger and Ásta (2017) for alternative characterizations.

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frameworks, though, come with alternative tools. For instance, the concepts of structure and fundamentality are among the central concepts of Theodore Sider's (2011) framework. In contrast, the concept of grounding plays a central role in Jonathan Schaffer's (2009) framework. A meta-metaphysical framework that encompasses and does justice to feminist metaphysics may reasonably be expected to supply the feminist metaphysician with better and more useful tools. An examination of meta-metaphysical frameworks may thus prove fruitful for the feminist metaphysician, insofar as it may help her to choose the best tools for her purposes in a systematic fashion. In this way, meta-metaphysics is relevant to feminist metaphysics. Both of these interconnections provide motivation for investigating how competing meta-metaphysical frameworks fare with respect to feminist metaphysics.

Feminist metaphysicians have already pioneered such an investigation, arguing that some of the most influential contemporary meta-metaphysical frameworks are in tension with feminist metaphysics. Barnes (2014, 2017) has argued that a number of prominent frameworks entail that feminist metaphysics is not metaphysics, and distort or mischaracterize various positions and debates within feminist metaphysics. And Mari Mikkola (2015, 2017) has challenged that some prevalent 'mainstream' views within meta-metaphysics are at odds with feminist metaphysics insofar as they privilege the fundamental over the non-fundamental, and presuppose that metaphysical inquiry is value-neutral.

However, Barnes and Mikkola restrict their attention to a handful of views within contemporary meta-metaphysics. Barnes examines the frameworks of Sider, Schaffer, and Dorr, while Mikkola focuses primarily on Sider's framework and Bennett's and deRosset's views on what grounds grounding facts. Yet as Barnes notes, it's not clear whether, and to what extent, other frameworks are susceptible to similar challenges. In particular, Barnes indicates that Kit Fine's meta-metaphysical framework might evade one of her criticisms of Schaffer's framework, namely that Schaffer-style grounding cannot adequately represent debates about realism in social ontology. '[T]his is plausibly one area in which the entity-grounding approach defended by Schaffer might come apart in significant ways from the fact-grounding approach to realism defended by Kit Fine', she writes (2017, 2433 n. 15).

The aim of this paper is to examine whether the Finean framework of grounding, essence, and reality – as developed in 'Essence and Modality' (1994), 'The Question of Realism' (2001), 'The Question of Ontology' (2009), and 'Naive Metaphysics' (2017) – does indeed avoid the main

challenges that Barnes and Mikkola raise for other frameworks. I argue that it does. It is worth emphasizing at the outset that in arguing this, I am not taking a stand on whether Barnes's and Mikkola's criticisms of alternative frameworks are sound. That is a separate question that deserves further consideration, and it is beyond the scope of this paper.[2] My main aim here is to show that the Finean has her own distinctive resources, which enable her to successfully answer these challenges. The upshot of my discussion is that the Finean framework is an apt one for feminist metaphysics.[3]

2. Fundamentality

One of the central criticisms that Barnes and Mikkola raise is that some of the most prominent contemporary meta-metaphysical frameworks focus on the fundamental and thereby either altogether exclude feminist metaphysics (and social metaphysics, more generally) from the domain of metaphysics, or else demote feminist metaphysics to secondary importance. Thus, for instance, Barnes claims that on Sider's framework social metaphysics is 'ruled out because metaphysics is about the fundamental and the social is – by stipulation – not fundamental' (2014, 341). And Mikkola contends that some prevalent conceptions of 'mainstream' metaphysics 'hold that really it is the non-constructed, fundamental grounding layer that matters', whereas feminist metaphysicians 'deny this privileging' (2017, 2444–5).

The Finean framework is not subject to such criticisms because it does not focus on the fundamental. A principal way that it avoids such a focus is by countenancing two central branches of metaphysics: foundational and naive.

Fine's characterization of foundational and naive metaphysics rests upon his distinction between appearance and reality. Appearance, Fine suggests, may be identified with 'what is merely the case' (2017, 101). Thus, the world of appearance includes everything that is the case. For example, since it is the case that I am sitting at a desk right now, this is part of the world of appearance. But what is the case in the world of

[2]See Schaffer (2017) and Sider (2017) for their respective replies to the challenges raised by Barnes and Mikkola.

[3]I do not claim that all of Fine's writings on meta-metaphysics are amenable to feminist metaphysics. In particular, Fine's characterization of 'traditional' metaphysics in 'What is Metaphysics?' (2012) appears to rule out feminist metaphysics from the category of traditional metaphysics. This may be thought to be problematic. Be that as it may, this further view of Fine's is entirely separable from his framework of grounding, essence, and reality, which is the focus of this paper.

appearance need not *really* be the case, on Fine's view. Reality is that part of appearance which is really the case. So although in the world of appearance it is the case that I am sitting at a desk right now, in the world of reality this might not be the case (there might, for instance, not be any desks in reality).

Foundational metaphysics is 'that part of metaphysics which is concerned with questions of reality, i.e. with how things stand in reality; and we may define it, very loosely, as that branch of metaphysics whose questions turn on what does or does not hold in reality' (Fine 2017, 100–1). In other words, foundational metaphysics is concerned with questions of a certain sort. Namely, questions as to whether this or that feature of the world of appearance is real or merely apparent. Thus, foundational metaphysics comprises questions such as the following: Are composite objects real, or does reality contain only simples? Does reality contain mental facts, or is reality purely physical? Are there moral facts or properties in reality? It is worth emphasizing that foundational metaphysics may in fact be concerned with phenomena that are merely apparent, as well as phenomena that are real. Suppose, for example, that mereological nihilism is true, and so composite objects are merely apparent. Then the foundational metaphysician who asks whether composite objects are real is in fact concerned with a phenomenon that is merely apparent.

Naive metaphysics is concerned with all other questions about the nature of things (Fine 2017, 101). Examples of such questions include: Is a material thing identical to its matter? Do material things endure or perdure through time? Are musical works abstract or concrete entities? Is consciousness an irreducibly mental phenomenon? These are questions of naive metaphysics because they do not ask whether the things in question are real. Rather, they ask about some other aspect of the nature of these things. Naive metaphysics, like foundational metaphysics, may be concerned with real phenomena, as well as merely apparent phenomena. To illustrate, suppose again that mereological nihilism is true. Then the question of whether a material thing is identical to its matter concerns the merely apparent. In contrast, if mereological nihilism is false and reality contains ordinary material things, then this question concerns the real.

Finally, we may note that Fine does not privilege foundational over naive metaphysics. If anything, he privileges naive over foundational metaphysics. For he believes that questions in naive metaphysics can be pursued independently of questions in foundational metaphysics, whereas questions in foundational metaphysics can only be pursued

once the corresponding questions in naive metaphysics have been settled (2017, §3). For example, we can pursue the question of whether a material thing is identical to its matter without having settled the question of whether material things are real. But we cannot pursue the question of whether material things are real without first settling the question of whether they are identical to their matter. Given that many questions of naive metaphysics have not yet been settled, it follows that at the present stage of philosophical inquiry we should be directing most of our attention towards questions of naive metaphysics (cf. Fine 2017, §5). Thus, Fine himself describes his 2017 paper as a 'plea for naive metaphysics' (2017, 111).

Feminist metaphysics – and social metaphysics, more generally – is clearly not ruled out on the Finean framework. First and foremost, many of the central questions within feminist metaphysics are part of naive metaphysics. For example: What is gender? What is sex? What is it for something to be socially constructed? What is a social kind? These are all questions of naive metaphysics, since they concern the nature of the things in question, but do not pertain to their reality. And since naive metaphysics is a serious and important (as well as indispensable) branch of metaphysics for Fine, it follows that the feminist metaphysicians who are asking these questions are doing serious and important work.

Moreover, the Finean framework leaves open the possibility that some questions within feminist metaphysics are part of foundational metaphysics. Namely, questions such as the following: Is gender real? Are socially constructed entities real? Are social kinds real? In asking such questions, feminist metaphysicians are not asking whether the entities in question are fundamental. It is agreed that they are not fundamental. But that leaves open the possibility that they are asking whether these entities are real in the Finean sense. For Fine's notion of reality diverges from the notion of fundamentality, as this notion is typically understood. For instance, whereas Schaffer defines the fundamental to be the ungrounded, Fine takes the notion of reality to be a primitive, and allows for grounded propositions that are real and ungrounded propositions that are not real (Fine 2001, 26–7). And whereas Sider takes the fundamental to be that which perfectly 'carves nature at its joints', Fine does not invoke any such metaphors which might suggest that the real cannot go beyond the natural. Furthermore, Fine does not conceive of reality as the realm of fundamental physics, or the realm of science (cf. 2017, 111). So while it is certainly true that when feminist metaphysicians ask questions such as 'Is gender real?', they are not inquiring into whether

gender is ungrounded, perfectly joint-carving, or part of fundamental physics, this does not mean that they are not inquiring into whether gender is real in the Finean sense.[4] Moreover, even if some such questions are best construed as being about what exists in the world of appearance, rather than what exists in the world of reality, these questions would still be part of naive metaphysics.

I have argued that the Finean framework can accommodate feminist metaphysics by taking questions such as 'What is gender?' and 'What are social kinds?' to be part of naive metaphysics, and questions such as 'Is gender real?' and 'Are social kinds real?' to be part of either foundational or naive metaphysics. An interesting further question is whether classifying the latter questions as foundational as opposed to naive has any implications for object-level theorizing in feminist metaphysics. For example, consider the question of whether gender is real. Would classifying this question as foundational as opposed to naive have any implications for how we approach or answer the question? Would it have implications for how we approach or answer related questions, such as the question of what gender is?

Let us begin with the second of these questions. Recall that on the Finean view the question 'What is gender?' is part of naive metaphysics, and that questions of naive metaphysics can be pursued independently of questions of foundational metaphysics. It follows that if the question of whether gender is real is classified as foundational, its answer will have no bearing upon the question of what gender is. On the other hand, if the question is classified as naive, then its answer may bear upon the question of what gender is (and vice versa), since questions within naive metaphysics may bear upon one another. Suppose, for example, that we take the question 'Is gender real?' to be asking whether gender exists in the world of appearance, and that we agree that the answer to this question is 'yes'. This answer to the existence question will constrain how we answer the question of what gender is. For instance, it will rule out a view according to which what it is to be a woman is to have a biological feminine essence that explains why

[4]Fine does suggest that the real corresponds to the 'intrinsic structure' of the world (2001, 25). It may be objected that feminist metaphysicians agree that gender is an extrinsic feature of individuals, and so when they ask whether gender is real they are not inquiring into whether gender is part of the intrinsic structure of the world. But I see no reason why an extrinsic feature of *things* cannot be part of the intrinsic structure of the *world*. For example, *being part of the Universe* is an extrinsic property of the Earth, but the Earth's being part of the Universe might be part of the intrinsic structure of the world. Similarly, even if *being a woman* is an extrinsic property of me, my being a woman might be part of the intrinsic structure of the world. Thanks to Jonathan Schaffer and Marko Malink for discussion of this point.

women tend to have certain interests, preferences, occupations, and so on. This view of gender is ruled out by an affirmative answer to the existence question because our best science says that there is no such biological feminine essence.

Let us now turn to the first question. Classifying the question 'Is gender real?' as foundational as opposed to naive will certainly have implications for how we approach and answer this question. Suppose that the question is classified as naive because it is construed as asking whether gender exists in the world of appearance. Since the Finean is a Moorean when it comes to such existence questions (cf. Fine 2001, 2), she will say that this question can be easily answered in the affirmative. In contrast, suppose that the question is classified as foundational because it is construed as asking whether gender exists in the world of reality. The Finean will say that this question is more difficult to answer. Below, in §4, I discuss Fine's proposed methodology for answering such questions, and I examine how it might play out in the case of gender. For now, suffice it to note that on the Finean framework, there is no easy answer to the question of whether gender exists in reality.

3. Grounding and essence

Barnes raises another challenge directed specifically at Schaffer's grounding framework. The challenge is that the framework cannot adequately represent many of the central debates and positions within social metaphysics, because these debates are not about what grounds what (or about what is fundamental). Since grounding also plays a prominent role in Fine's framework, it may be thought that a similar challenge may be raised for his framework.

To ascertain whether that's the case, we need to consider more closely the sorts of debates that Barnes believes are misrepresented on Schaffer's grounding framework. One central class of such debates are those centered on questions of the form 'What is *x*?', where *x* is some social entity. As an example, Barnes considers the dispute between Sally Haslanger and Katharine Jenkins about the nature of gender. On Haslanger's view:

> 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. (2000, 39)

Jenkins (2016) argues that this definition is inadequate because it excludes some *prima facie* women, namely trans women who don't regularly 'pass' as cis women. Her competing proposal is that in addition to Haslanger's category of *gender as class*, we need to countenance another category of *gender as identity*. The category *gender*, on her view, is comprised of these two subcategories. This proposal does not exclude any trans women from the category *woman*, since all trans women will belong to this category on account of having a female gender identity. As Barnes understands this dispute, Haslanger and Jenkins disagree over 'what gender is', despite agreeing on what grounds the existence of gender, viz. 'a complex network of interpersonal social hierarchies' (Barnes 2014, 344). In construing the dispute as one over the grounds of gender, Schaffer's framework is thus misconstruing the dispute, according to Barnes.[5]

The Finean can easily avert this challenge, since she need not construe debates over the nature of gender as debates over the grounds of gender. That is because for Fine, the *grounding project* – viz., the project of figuring out what the fundamental or real facts are, and how they ground or otherwise generate the other facts – is but one of the projects of metaphysics. Another project centers on the notion of essence. This notion, Fine says:

> may be used to characterize what the subject [of metaphysics], or at least part of it, is about. For one of the central concerns of metaphysics is with the identity of things, with what they are. But the metaphysician is not interested in every property of the objects under consideration. In asking 'What is a person?', for example, he does not want to be told that every person has a deep desire to be loved, even if this is in fact the case. What then distinguishes the properties of interest to him? What is it about a property which makes it bear, in the metaphysically significant sense of the phrase, on what an object is? It is in answer to this question that appeal is naturally made to the concept of essence. For what appears to distinguish the intended properties is that they are essential to their bearers. (1994, 1)

Thus, for Fine, another project of metaphysics is the *essentialist project* of figuring out what things are, i.e. of giving an account of the essence of things. On Fine's understanding of essence, this amounts to giving a

[5]Barnes's construal of the dispute between Haslanger and Jenkins is controversial. As Barnes herself notes, it may be objected that Haslanger and Jenkins do disagree over the relevant grounds (Barnes 2014, 344 n. 10; cf. Schaffer 2017, 2460–1; Griffith 2018, 400). But I think there are less controversial examples that serve Barnes's purposes. For instance, consider the debate over what a social group is. Two possible views are SET and AGG: SET says that a social group is the set of its members, whereas AGG says that a social group is the aggregate of its members. SET and AGG are plausibly taken to agree on what grounds the existence of a social group – namely, the existence of its members. Nevertheless, they disagree about what a social group *is*.

real definition of these things, which is a definition of the things themselves as opposed to a definition of our words or concepts for them. For example, the number 1 itself might be defined as the successor of 0 (Fine 1994, 14). The essentialist project aims to give such real definitions of the various objects that are of interest to metaphysics.

The dispute between Haslanger and Jenkins may thus be understood, on the Finean framework, as a dispute over the real definition of the kind *woman* (and more generally, as a dispute over the real definition of the kind *gender*). Since there is no reason to suppose that a dispute over the real definition of *x* must always lead to a dispute over what grounds the existence of *x*, there is no reason to suppose that such disputes over the real definition of gender must always lead to disputes over what grounds the existence of gender. Thus, by construing debates about the nature of gender as debates over real definition rather than ground, the Finean framework leaves open the possibility that the disputants may agree on what grounds the existence of gender while disagreeing about what gender is. Barnes's challenge is thereby averted.

Let me now mention some further reasons for thinking that real definition is a useful tool for understanding debates about the nature of gender. First, many participants in these debates have explanatory aims. They aim to explain phenomena such as persistent inequalities between women and men, and the apparent systematic disadvantaging of women and privileging of men.[6] Yet it's not entirely clear what sort of explanation is being offered. It's evidently not a causal explanation of these inequalities. It's also not a rationalizing explanation, since it is not meant to explain why these inequalities are rational. Nor is it a functionalist explanation, since it is not explaining the existence of these inequalities in terms of some social function that they serve. By construing these debates in terms of real definition, we can clarify the sort of explanation on offer. It is an essentialist explanation, which explains something by appeal to essence or real definition. Here's an example of such an explanation: what is known is true because part of *what it is* to be known is to be true.[7] If we construe Haslanger's account in real definition terms, we can take her to be giving an explanation of a similar form. Namely, there are persistent inequalities between women and men because there are women and men, and part of *what it is* to be a woman is to be

[6]See, for example, Haslanger (2000, 36) and Barnes (2017, §3).
[7]This example is adapted from Glazier (2017). Note that my conception of essentialist explanation is broader than his.

systematically subordinated while part of *what it is* to be a man is to be systematically privileged.[8]

Second, feminist philosophers debating the nature of gender sometimes appeal to modal intuitions in the course of their arguments. For example, Mikkola (2011) argues that Haslanger's account of gender has the counterintuitive implication that women and men could not exist without sexist oppression. This argument appeals to our intuition that it is possible for there to be women and men in a world with no sexist oppression. I take it that such appeals to modal intuition are warranted, and that any adequate construal of the debate should be able to account for this. The real definition construal of the debate can easily account for it. Real definitions entail necessary truths, and so different accounts of the real definition of gender will entail different necessary truths concerning gender. Consequently, intuitions about what is and is not possible when it comes to gender are relevant data.[9] In contrast, a ground-theoretic construal of the debate – on which accounts of gender are taken to be articulating the grounds of gender – cannot so easily account for the relevance of modal intuitions such as the one Mikkola appeals to. For grounding claims do not entail necessary truths in the way that real definitions do. For example, the claim that $p \vee q$ is fully grounded in p does not entail that necessarily, if $p \vee q$ then p. Similarly, the claim that the existence of gender is partly grounded in the existence of systematic subordination does not entail that necessarily, if gender exists then systematic subordination exists. So on the ground-theoretic construal of the debate, Mikkola's appeal to modal intuition turns out to be unwarranted. This speaks in favor of the real definition construal over the ground-theoretic construal.

Third and lastly, the real definition construal of debates about the nature of gender is fairly non-revisionary. Many of the disputants, including Haslanger and Jenkins, already formulate their accounts as definitions. Moreover, Haslanger even claims to be giving a real definition of gender.

[8]Note that the real definitions of woman and man only *partly* explain the existence of persistent inequalities between women and men. That is as it should be, since the explanandum is a contingent truth. Since most of the truths that feminist metaphysicians are interested in explaining are contingent, real definitions will rarely fully explain the truths that are of interest. Nevertheless, they may partly explain these truths, as shown by the present example.

[9]Such modal data may be helpful in adjudicating various debates, for instance, the debate between Haslanger and Jenkins. Haslanger's view, construed as a real definition, implies that it's not possible for there to be a woman who isn't regularly and for the most part perceived as having bodily features associated with a female's biological role in reproduction. Jenkins's view, construed in real definition terms, does not have this implication. Since it is intuitively possible for a trans woman to never be so perceived (cf. Jenkins 2016, §2.b), Jenkins's view does a better job of accounting for the modal data than Haslanger's view.

'I am offering a theory of *what gender is* … This is the goal of real definition', she writes (2014, 31). A ground-theoretic construal of the debates would be more revisionary, given that the disputants don't formulate their accounts using typical grounding locutions such as 'in virtue of' or 'because'. Other things being equal, this is a reason to prefer the real definition construal.

4. Grounding and realism

Let us now move on to consider the second class of debates that Barnes believes are not adequately represented on Schaffer's grounding framework. These are debates about realism in social ontology. Schaffer (2009, 362) suggests that realism debates – for example, metaphysical realism versus idealism about ordinary objects, realism versus constructivism about numbers, and realism versus nominalism about universals – may be re-construed as debates about grounding. In particular, debates about whether certain *x*s are real may be re-construed either as debates about whether the *x*s are ungrounded (i.e. fundamental), or as debates about how the *x*s are grounded. For example, the debate between the realist and the nominalist about universals may be re-construed as a debate about whether properties are fundamental; and the debate between the metaphysical realist and the metaphysical idealist may be re-construed as a debate about whether entities such as rocks are grounded in our ideas. Barnes challenges that debates about realism in social ontology cannot be re-construed in either of these ways, since whether/how certain *x*s are grounded is not what's at issue in these debates.

As an example, Barnes considers the debate between Haslanger and Ásta about the reality of genders.[10] Barnes suggests that Ásta 'would agree with Haslanger that gender is grounded in a complex network of human thought, behavior, and norms', but that despite this, Ásta is plausibly characterized as an antirealist about genders whereas Haslanger is well-described as a realist (Barnes 2017, 2432). What makes Haslanger a realist, on Barnes's construal, is that she believes that 'gender itself plays an important causal and explanatory role' (Barnes 2017, 2432–3) and therefore 'needs to be part of our ultimate metaphysical explanation of the world' (Barnes 2017, 2425). Ásta does not think that gender itself plays such an irreducible causal and explanatory role, according to

[10]See Ásta Sveinsdóttir (2013), Ásta (2018), and Haslanger (2012, 2014).

Barnes, and this makes her an antirealist. Yet on Schaffer's ground-theoretic re-construal of their dispute, insofar as they agree on the grounds of genders they also agree on the reality of genders, Barnes contends.

Fine's distinctive ground-theoretic approach to questions of realism allows him to evade this sort of challenge. On Fine's view, debates about whether certain *x*s are real may be understood as debates about whether the *x*s figure in some 'real proposition', which is a true proposition that is descriptive of reality (2017, 100; cf. 2009).[11] Such debates, Fine says, typically lead to debates about ground (2001, §5–9). But for Fine, unlike for Schaffer, these debates need not be about what grounds the existence of the *x*s (or what grounds the *x*s, as Schaffer would put it). Rather, the debates may concern whether/how some other true propositions involving the *x*s are grounded. Exactly which propositions these are is a nuanced and open-ended matter for Fine. For present purposes, it will suffice to note that one general way in which a debate about the reality of the *x*s may manifest itself on the Finean framework is as follows: the realist maintains that there is some true factual proposition[12] involving the *x*s that is ungrounded;[13] whereas the antirealist denies this.[14] And in particular, the debate may concern whether there is some true factual proposition about what the *x*s *cause* or *explain* that is ungrounded.

I would like to suggest that as Barnes construes the positions of Haslanger and Ásta, there is just such a debate between the two of them concerning the grounds of propositions about what genders cause and explain. Barnes's Haslanger and Ásta would *agree* that there are true factual

[11]On Fine's (2001) approach to questions of realism, some realism debates are to be understood as debates about *factuality* rather than *reality*. I set aside the possibility that the debate between Haslanger and Ásta is best construed as a debate about factuality, on Fine's framework. While this is an interesting possibility to explore, it would be less in line with Barnes's interpretation of their respective positions.

[12]Fine defines a factual proposition to be a proposition that is real or grounded in the real (2001, 28). Fine's framework makes room for nonfactual propositions in addition to factual propositions. Since my discussion here only concerns factual propositions, I will not elaborate upon this further piece of Fine's framework.

[13]Maintaining that there is some true factual proposition involving the *x*s that is ungrounded is sufficient for being a realist about the *x*s, on the Finean framework. That is because Fine takes any ungrounded factual proposition to be real (2001, 26). Thus, if there is some true factual proposition involving the *x*s that is ungrounded, then there is some real proposition involving the *x*s. And if there is some real proposition involving the *x*s, then the *x*s are real.

[14]Maintaining that there is no true factual proposition involving the *x*s that is ungrounded is indicative of being an antirealist about the *x*s, on the Finean framework (though it is not strictly speaking sufficient for being an antirealist). The reason is that Fine takes there to be a general presumption in favor of grounded propositions not being real (2001, 27). Thus, if there are no true factual propositions involving the *x*s that are ungrounded, then unless there is some special reason to take one of the grounded propositions involving the *x*s to be real (cf. 2001, 27), we may conclude that there are no real propositions involving the *x*s. And if there are no real propositions involving the *x*s, then the *x*s are not real.

propositions about what genders cause and explain. For example, they would agree that the following proposition is true and factual:

GENDER INJUSTICE Genders cause injustice.

However, they would *disagree* over the grounds of GENDER INJUSTICE and other such propositions. In particular, they would disagree over whether the ultimate grounds of these propositions involve genders. Since Barnes's Haslanger believes that genders have emergent causal powers that cannot be reduced to the causal powers of the human thoughts, behaviors, and norms that ground the existence of genders (Barnes 2017, 2424), she would deny that GENDER INJUSTICE is fully grounded in propositions about what human thoughts, behaviors, and norms cause. Provided that she takes causation to be a real relation,[15] she should maintain that the ultimate grounds of GENDER INJUSTICE include some ungrounded, true factual proposition about what genders themselves cause.[16] On the other hand, since Barnes's Ásta believes that the causal powers of genders are reducible to the causal powers of the underlying human thoughts, behaviors, and norms, she would maintain that any true factual proposition about what genders cause is fully grounded in propositions about what human thoughts, behaviors, and norms cause. Thus, she should maintain that the ultimate grounds of GENDER INJUSTICE do not include any propositions involving genders themselves (and likewise for any other proposition about what genders cause or explain).

In sum: on the Finean framework, Barnes's Haslanger is plausibly construed as affirming that there is some true factual proposition about what genders cause or explain that is ungrounded (for instance, one of the propositions that ultimately grounds GENDER INJUSTICE). Barnes's Ásta, on the other hand, is plausibly construed as denying that there is any such ungrounded proposition. This dispute between Haslanger and Ásta indicates that Haslanger is a realist about genders whereas Ásta is an anti-realist, on the Finean framework. The framework thus evades Barnes's challenge, since it classifies the positions correctly and accurately represents what's at issue.

[15]I think it is fair to attribute this view to Barnes's Haslanger. If she did not take causation to be a real relation, she would have no reason to associate reality with causal efficacy in the way that she does. Note that it is irrelevant to my argument whether Fine himself takes causation to be a real relation. As a matter of fact, he does not take a stand on this question in his writings on meta-metaphysics.

[16]See Fine (2001, 27) for a related case involving causation. He imagines an ontology that takes certain simple events and the causal relationships between them to be real. He then suggests that if compounds of simple events have causal powers that are not reducible to the causal powers of their components, then the proposition that a certain compound of simple events causes a simple basic event is ungrounded.

To conclude, let me mention one advantage that the Finean framework has over the Schafferian framework when it comes to meeting the present challenge. Schaffer argues that his framework can meet Barnes's challenge because Haslanger and Ásta are plausibly taken to disagree over the specifics of how human thoughts, behaviors, and norms ground genders (Schaffer 2017, §3.2). However, even if Schaffer is right that there is such a disagreement between Haslanger and Ásta, re-construing their debate in these terms does not accurately represent what's at issue according to Barnes. For what's really at issue, says Barnes, is whether genders play an irreducible causal and explanatory role. Barnes's Haslanger says 'yes' and this makes her a realist about genders, whereas Barnes's Ásta says 'no' and this makes her an antirealist. But on Schaffer's ground-theoretic re-construal of their debate, the causal and explanatory role of genders is irrelevant. So even if his framework is able to correctly classify Barnes's Haslanger as a realist and Barnes's Ásta as an antirealist, it won't do so for the right reasons. In contrast, the Finean re-construal that I have proposed not only classifies the positions correctly, but also does so for the right reasons.

5. Value-neutrality

The last challenge that I will consider is one that is raised by Mikkola (2015, 2017), and it concerns the presumed value-neutrality of metaphysics. Mikkola says that 'metaphysics seems to be a paradigm value-neutral endeavor, which is *prima facie* incompatible with feminism's explicitly normative stance' (2015, 781; cf. 2017, 2436). To explicate this seeming incompatibility, Mikkola draws on Elizabeth Anderson's work in feminist epistemology. Anderson construes theoretical inquiry as aiming to give answers to questions. A good scientific theory, in her view, is not only true but also adequately answers the question that is motivating the inquiry (Anderson 1995, §2–3). But this question can only be properly understood in terms of the interests and aims of the inquirers, which often include 'contextual values and interests – that is, moral, political, cultural, economic, and other concerns drawn from the social context in which science is practiced' (Anderson 1995, 40). Thus, on Anderson's view, contextual values and interests are relevant to scientific theory choice insofar as they are relevant to determining the precise question that a theory is meant to be answering. As I understand Mikkola, her suggestion is that feminist metaphysicians may wish to extend Anderson's model of scientific inquiry to metaphysical inquiry. But such a model of metaphysical inquiry is *prima facie* incompatible with prevailing views within meta-metaphysics,

which presuppose that metaphysical inquiry is value-neutral (cf. Mikkola 2015, §2).[17]

To defuse the worry that the Finean framework is in principle incompatible with an Andersonian epistemology, I will show how a proponent of the Finean approach to debates over the nature of gender can, at the same time, subscribe to the Andersonian view that contextual values and interests are relevant to theory choice. Recall that on the Finean approach, debates over the nature of gender are to be understood as debates over the real definition of gender. Thus, the Finean will maintain that the disputants are proposing answers to the question 'What is the real definition of gender?'. The Finean who is also an Andersonian will make two further claims. First, that the question 'What is the real definition of gender?' may be understood in various ways. And second, that the contextual values and interests of inquirers play a role in determining how this question is to be understood within a given context.

Thus, for example, the Andersonian-Finean might maintain that the question 'What is the real definition of gender?' may be understood in either of the following two ways (cf. Haslanger 2000, §1):

Ordinary Gender	What is the real definition of the phenomenon that is picked out by our ordinary concept of gender?
Ameliorative Gender	What is the real definition of the phenomenon that should be picked out by our concept of gender, given the theoretical and practical purposes that we want this concept to serve?

Furthermore, she will maintain that the contextual values and interests of inquirers play a role in determining whether Ordinary Gender or Ameliorative Gender is being addressed in a given context. For example, Charlotte Witt's inquiry into the metaphysics of gender is primarily motivated by a concern with the apparent centrality of gender to our individual lived experience and our understanding of ourselves (Witt 2011b, xiii, 3). Given that she is concerned with gender as we ordinarily experience and understand it, her theory is plausibly construed as addressing Ordinary Gender. In contrast, Haslanger's ameliorative inquiry into gender is

[17]Mikkola's main concern in (2015) is to argue that feminist insights are of value to metaphysics. In particular, she argues that Anderson's model can be fruitfully applied to metaphysical inquiry into what grounds grounding facts. She raises the challenge that I focus on here in the course of this argument.

underpinned by a concern to fight gender injustice. Her account is meant to aid this fight by identifying and elucidating the phenomenon that feminists ought to be thinking about (Haslanger 2000, §1–2). Given that she is concerned with the phenomenon that she believes ought to be picked out by feminists' concept of gender, her theory is plausibly construed as addressing AMELIORATIVE GENDER.

On this Andersonian-Finean approach, the contextual values and interests of inquirers are relevant to the evaluation of theories of gender. These values and interests play a role in determining which precise question a given theory is addressing, which in turn partly determines the standards of adequacy for that theory. For example, given that Witt's theory is addressing ORDINARY GENDER, the standards of adequacy for her theory might not include the desideratum that all trans women be classified as women by the theory. For it's unclear whether the phenomenon picked out by our ordinary concept of gender is such that this is true. But in that case, it would be inappropriate to reject Witt's theory on the grounds that it is insufficiently inclusive of trans women. In contrast, given that Haslanger's theory is addressing AMELIORATIVE GENDER, the standards of adequacy for her theory arguably do include the desideratum that all trans women be classified as women by the theory (cf. Jenkins 2016, §1); and so Jenkins's criticism of her theory is appropriate.

6. Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that the Finean meta-metaphysical framework of grounding, essence, and reality is able to evade the central challenges that Barnes and Mikkola have raised for alternative frameworks. I have also provided some positive reasons for thinking that the Finean framework may be useful to feminist metaphysicians. My conclusion is that the Finean framework is an apt one for feminist metaphysics. If Barnes's and Mikkola's objections to alternative frameworks are sound, then the arguments of this paper constitute an argument in favor of the Finean framework, while at the same time giving feminist metaphysicians reason to opt for the Finean metaphysical toolkit.

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