On Haslanger's Meta-Metaphysics: Social Structures and Metaphysical Deflationism

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Abstract
The metaphysics of gender and race is a growing area of concern in contemporary analytic metaphysics, with many different views about the nature of gender and race being submitted and discussed. But what are these debates about? What questions are these accounts trying to answer? And is there real disagreement between advocates of different views about race or gender? If so, what are they really disagreeing about? In this paper I want to develop a view about what the debates in the metaphysics of gender and race are about, namely, a version of metaphysical deflationism, according to which these debates are about how we actually use or should use the terms 'gender' and 'race' (and other related terms), where moral and political considerations play a central role. I will also argue that my version of the view can overcome some recent and powerful objections to metaphysical deflationism offered by Elizabeth Barnes (2014, 2017).

Keywords
Ontological realism, gender, race, social constructionism, concepts.

The metaphysics of gender and race is a growing area of concern in contemporary analytic metaphysics, with many different views about the nature of gender and race being submitted and discussed.[1] But what are these debates about? What questions are these accounts trying to answer? And is there real disagreement between advocates

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[1] See for instance Haslanger 2000, Mikkola 2011, Ásta 2011, Witt 2011 and Jenkins 2016 for different views about gender, and Andreasen 2000, Glasgow 2009, Haslanger 2000, Jeffers 2013, Spencer 2014 and Díaz-León 2015 for different views about race.

of different views about race or gender? If so, what are they really disagreeing about?

In this paper I want to develop a view about what the debates in the metaphysics of gender and race are about, namely, a version of metaphysical deflationism, according to which these debates are about how we actually use or should use the terms 'gender' and 'race' (and other related terms), where moral and political considerations play a central role. I will also argue that my version of the view can overcome some recent and powerful objections to metaphysical deflationism offered by Elizabeth Barnes (2014, 2017). We can then conclude that this view is a serious contender and deserves further attention. Barnes (2017) focuses on Sally Haslanger's work on gender and race as a case study, and argues that the best way of understanding her views about the nature of gender and race is in terms of a version of ontological realism about these debates. In particular, Barnes argues that metaphysical deflationism cannot capture what those debates are really about, and what Haslanger's views are trying to accomplish. In response, I will argue that we can understand the debates in the metaphysics of gender and race in general, and Haslanger's accounts of gender and race in particular, within the framework of metaphysical deflationism. For instance, Haslanger (2000) offers a characterization of gender and race in terms of *social structures*, and more recently she has offered a characterization of social structures in terms of *networks of social relations*, where *social relations* are constituted through *social practices*, which are in turn understood in terms of interdependent *schemas* and *resources* (2016: 125–6). Here I will not focus on the question of whether Haslanger herself is committed to either ontological realism or deflationism. Instead, I will focus on the question of whether understanding Haslanger's accounts of gender and race and other social structures within the framework of metaphysical deflationism can capture what those accounts aim to do and why they matter.

Barnes characterizes the contrast between metaphysical realism and metaphysical deflationism as follows: metaphysical deflationism is roughly the view that there are different ways of describing reality and there isn't one of them that is privileged. In addition, disputes in metaphysics are just about which of these different descriptions we should use, given different purposes. Metaphysical realists

deny this: they believe that there are certain areas of reality that are explanatorily more important than others. In addition, they believe that disputes about metaphysics are disputes about "what the world is like, not what our words or concepts are like" (2017: 2418). Barnes argues that according to her interpretation, debates in social ontology are better captured by the framework of metaphysical realism, since they concern issues about what the world is like, not just about which terms and concepts we should use to describe the world. Against this, I want to suggest that there is a version of metaphysical deflationism that can better capture what debates about the nature of gender and race are about. I will first present my version of metaphysical deflationism, and I will then argue that it can overcome Barnes' objections.

1 Metaphysical deflationism revisited

My version of metaphysical deflationism draws on the work by Amie Thomasson (2007, 2008, 2015, 2017). There are some important differences with respect to Barnes' characterization, so I will try to explain what these differences are, but as I will argue, there are enough similarities so that my defence of metaphysical deflationism as a view about the metaphysics of gender and race is in opposition to Barnes' defence of ontological realism.

What is metaphysical deflationism? First of all, some preliminary clarifications are in order. For our purposes here, I will assume that some form of permissivism about properties is correct (see Schaffer 2009). In particular, I will assume that for any predicate that is satisfied by some entities in the actual world, there is a corresponding property. For example, my nose and my left toe and the Eiffel Tower have a property in common, albeit a not very interesting one. Consequently, there will be many alternative descriptions of reality that are all equally correct. For example, there are descriptions of reality that include a predicate for the property of being either my nose or my left toe or the Eiffel Tower, and descriptions that do not include such predicate, but they can all describe reality accurately. Hilary Putnam (1981) has made a similar point using the following example (as explained in Boghossian 2006 and Mikkola 2016): let us consider a picture with three black dots. If we are asked how many objects

there are in the picture, there are at least two different (but equally correct) ways of answering the question, depending on which concept of object we are using: we could answer '3' (in the sense of three non-overlapping objects), or '7' (including those three, plus the three different combinations of two dots each, plus the combination of the three dots). Do we have good reasons to say that there is a unique answer that is the best one? According to metaphysical deflationism, we cannot give an answer to this question independently of which concepts or classification system we are using. As we have seen, the answer depends on which concept of object we use.

Thomasson (2015, 2017) has argued that metaphysical deflationism is committed to the claim that debates in metaphysics are solvable by a combination of conceptual analysis and empirical investigation. She claims that there are two versions of metaphysical deflationism. On the one hand there is the *verbal dispute* idea, according to which different parties in a metaphysical debate use a central term with different meanings, so that when one utters a sentence like 'x is C' and the other utters 'x is not C', they are using 'C' with different meanings, and therefore their utterances could both be true at the same time. On the other hand there is the *easy ontology* idea, according to which disputes in metaphysics (such as existence questions of the form 'Do Xs exist?') are easy to solve by a combination of conceptual analysis (that is, what are the application conditions for something to fall under 'X'?), and empirical investigation (that is, are there any entities in the world that satisfy those application conditions?). In my view these two versions are not so different, since both assume that questions in metaphysics can be solved by a combination of conceptual analysis, that is, finding out the application conditions for the term one is using, and empirical investigation, in order to find out what entities, if any, satisfy those application conditions. It could be the case that different speakers associate the term with different application conditions, or that they really use the term with the same application conditions. In either case, the crucial idea is that in order to solve the debates, we need to figure out what the application conditions are, and whether something satisfies those application conditions. For example, in order to answer a question such as 'how many objects are there in this picture?', we need to figure out what we mean by 'object'.

It is usually assumed that metaphysical deflationism is committed to the view that all the different ways of describing reality are equally good, since it is only a matter of which concepts or classification system we choose. As we saw above, Barnes suggests that metaphysical deflationism is committed to the claim that there isn't a description of reality that is privileged, whereas ontological realism claims that there is a description that is privileged. But in my view, to say that the answer to existence questions of the form 'Do Xs exist?' depends on which concept of X we are using does *not* entail that the choice of concept is entirely conventional or arbitrary. There might be good reasons for choosing one concept over the others. The reasons might be purely explanatory or theoretical (that is, explanations in terms of one concept rather than the other might have more explanatory or predictive power), or they might also involve practical considerations, including moral and political considerations, as for example when we discuss what should be the meaning of terms such as 'marriage', 'rape' and 'torture'. In other words, metaphysical deflationists' central claim that a certain metaphysical dispute is really about how we use or should use certain terms does not mean that all ways of using the terms are equally correct, or that there aren't good reasons for choosing one framework over another.

It is true that metaphysical deflationists say that metaphysical debates can be solved by finding out what the application conditions for our concepts are (or should be), and that all parties in the debate can say something true when for example one asserts sentences of the form 'x is C' and the other denies it, if they mean different things by 'C'. But this does not entail that the choice between different candidate meanings is entirely arbitrary. It might be the case that there are very important theoretical, moral or political reasons for using 'C' to express concept C^* rather than C^{**}. For example, it might be the case that the property picked up by C^* is more explanatorily useful than the property picked up by C^{**}. This is compatible with my version of metaphysical deflationism, and in my view this is a possible (and indeed plausible) description of what is at stake in contemporary debates about the nature of gender and race. That is to say, advocates of metaphysical deflationism can also hold (contra Barnes' characterization) that there are some areas of reality that are "explanatorily privileged", in the sense that there are some

properties or some patterns of similarity that are more explanatorily useful, or such that using terms that pick out those properties rather than others is more politically useful than the alternative usages. If we accept permissivism about properties, then talking about which properties are more relevant, and talking about which concepts (that pick up those properties) we should use, are just two ways of asking the same question. Hence, distinguishing between questions that are just about our concepts, and questions that are just about reality, is not a useful way of drawing the distinction between metaphysical realism and metaphysical deflationism. As I will explain below, metaphysical deflationism does *not* have to say that a metaphysical debate is only about which words we (should) use, as opposed to what the world is like. On the contrary, metaphysical deflationism can understand a metaphysical dispute as a question about which parts of reality (i.e., which properties or which patterns of similarity) are more relevant or worth talking about and should be picked out by our current terms (and which ones are irrelevant and do not deserve to be picked out by the terms we choose in order to describe reality).

2 Three objections to metaphysical deflationism

Barnes (2017) has offered three main arguments against metaphysical deflationism regarding the metaphysics of gender and race. In what follows I would like to examine these arguments in turn and argue that they pose no fatal objection to metaphysical deflationism about debates on the existence and nature of gender and race.

Barnes' first objection to metaphysical deflationism is called "the noble lie" (2017: 2419). Barnes argues that it should be possible to understand social constructionism as a false but politically useful claim (in the same way that the "born this way" argument could present a false but politically useful conception of sexual orientations as unchangeable, innate traits). But according to Barnes, metaphysical deflationism doesn't allow "for the coherence or possibility of politically effective falsehoods" (2419), since on this view there are many different conceptions of reality and they are all correct. Against this, I believe that metaphysical deflationism also allows for politically useful falsehoods. First of all, metaphysical deflationism allows for falsehoods *simpliciter*, since not every predicate is satisfied

in the world according to metaphysical deflationism. For instance, predicates such as 'witch', 'unicorn', and 'phlogiston' are just not satisfied by anything. (It could be argued that this depends on the meaning of these terms, since for instance if by 'witch' we mean women who were thought to talk to the devil in New England, then it is true that there were witches. This is correct, but it is still the case that given the ordinary concept of 'witch', it is false that there are witches.) Furthermore, metaphysical deflationism is compatible with the possibility that there are falsehoods that are politically useful. Of course, in order to say that a sentence S expresses a politically useful falsehood we have to fix which proposition is expressed by an utterance of S in a certain context (since S might express different propositions in different contexts or when uttered by different speakers , and whether an utterance of S is true or false depends on two things: which proposition is expressed by S, and what the world is like). But once we fix the context or the speaker, we can perfectly well say that utterances of that sentence in that context express a false proposition that is nevertheless politically useful (even if it is the case that that very same sentence uttered in a different context or by a different speaker might have expressed a different proposition, since this does not make that false but politically useful proposition any less false or any less politically useful).

Barnes' second objection (2017: 2420) is basically the idea that metaphysical deflationism does not do justice to actual debates about the metaphysics of gender (or, someone might add, the metaphysics of race). She says: "When Haslanger objects to biological essentialism about gender she isn't merely objecting to the latter's bad political consequences. She's also claiming that the view doesn't adequately describe social reality" (2017: 2420). Barnes' main worry, as I understand it, is that metaphysical deflationism cannot capture the intuitive idea that social constructionism about gender is more adequate than biological realism about gender precisely because social constructionism can better describe reality. In response, I believe that metaphysical deflationism can also capture this idea. As I suggested above, if we want to solve a question such as 'what is gender?', we need, first, to figure out the application conditions for 'gender', and second, to find out what entities in the real world, if any, satisfy those application conditions, and what their nature is. It could

be argued (as Haslanger 2006 suggests) that this depends in turn
on what the most objective, explanatorily useful property shared by
paradigm cases of gender is.[2] So we could understand the rejection
of biological essentialism as the claim that the most objective prop-
erty unifying paradigm cases of gender is not a biological property.
This has to do with what those paradigm cases are really like, but
this also has consequences for what the real referent of 'gender' is.
And as I have suggested, we could understand this question in terms
of what the most explanatorily useful candidate meaning for 'gen-
der' is. It might be the case that there is a unique candidate meaning
that is the most explanatorily useful, and if so, given objective-type
externalism, this will become the referent of 'gender'. But it might
also be the case that there are several candidate meanings that are
equally explanatorily useful, and if so it is up to us to choose the one
that is politically more useful. In either case, I believe we could say
that the debate about what the referent of 'gender' is (or should be)
is a substantive one. If there is a candidate meaning that is the most
explanatorily useful (for the relevant purposes, which can include
the purposes that feminists have in mind), then that will be the ref-
erent of 'gender'. If on the other hand there is no unique candidate
meaning that is the most explanatorily useful, but there are several
candidate meanings that are equally good candidates, we can then
appeal to moral and political considerations in order to figure out
what the most politically useful way of using 'gender' is, and which
candidate meaning should be the referent. In either case, the ques-
tion about how we actually use or should use 'gender' is a very sub-
stantive question.

Barnes seems to be suggesting the following: if metaphysical
deflationists want to claim that, say, 'gender' has several candidate
meanings that are equally explanatorily useful (perhaps for differ-
ent purposes), so that we cannot choose a unique referent given
theoretical considerations, and we then turn to moral and political

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[2] Haslanger (2006) argues that we could appeal to semantic externalism in
order to motivate the view that terms such as 'gender' and 'race' refer to the most
objective properties that are shared by paradigmatic instances of gender and race,
respectively, which could turn out to be socially constructed properties, for all
we know. See Diaz-Leon 2012 for further discussion of the role of semantic ex-
ternalism in defending social constructionism about gender and race.

considerations in order to argue that one candidate meaning is more politically useful than another, then this view does not seem to do justice to what disputes about gender and race are about. First, I would like to point out that several philosophers of race have said that this is exactly what is at stake in debates about the nature of race (see for instance Glasgow 2009, Ludwig 2015 and Mallon 2006)[3]. I do not want to claim that Haslanger's herself is committed to this meta-metaphysical view; rather, my main point here is that it is possible to defend social constructionism about gender or race along these lines, that is, as the claim that social constructionism is true because either (i) a socially constructed property is the most explanatorily useful referent of 'gender' or 'race' (as Haslanger 2005, 2006 suggests), or (ii) a socially constructed property is the most politically useful referent (as Haslanger 2000 and Glasgow 2009 suggest). I do not see why this meta-metaphysical framework should be seen as dismissive or as misrepresenting what metaphysicians of gender and race are in the business of doing. As I said above, it might be the case that 'gender' is such that there are several candidate meanings that can do useful explanatory work, and if so, we should appeal to any relevant moral and political considerations in order to settle the referent of 'gender'. Whether 'gender' has a candidate meaning that is more ex-planatorily useful than the rest or not is a controversial dispute in the semantics and metaphysics of gender that we cannot settle without

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[3] Glasgow (2009) argues that 'race' is actually an empty term but that we should revise its meaning (for moral and political reasons) so that it comes to refer to social structures. Ludwig (2015) and Mallon (2006) both argue that what is really at issue in the debates about the metaphysics of race is a normative dispute about how we should use 'race' and akin terms. Mallon and Ludwig suggest that *since* these debates are about how we should use the relevant terms, *then* they are not genuine metaphysical debates. In my view Barnes makes a similar assump-tion, but from the opposite starting point: she suggests that *since* debates in the metaphysics of gender are clearly genuine metaphysical debates, *then* they cannot be just about how we should use 'gender' and akin terms. In response to all of them, my aim here is to argue that debates about the metaphysics of gender and race can be genuine metaphysical debates even if they are about how we should use the relevant terms. See Diaz-Leon (ms) for further discussion of Ludwig and Mallon on the metaphysics of race, and how to characterize genuine metaphysical debates more generally.

further argument. [4] And even if there is a unique candidate meaning that is the most explanatorily useful one, this is still compatible with metaphysical deflationism, in Thomasson's sense that metaphysical debates can be solved by a combination of conceptual analysis and empirical investigation, that is, in terms of what the application conditions for the concepts are (or should be), and whether some entities satisfy those application conditions or not.

Barnes' third objection to metaphysical deflationism is the most challenging one in my view: she argues that metaphysical deflationists get the direction of explanation wrong, since they would say, for instance, that it is true that trans women are women just because using 'women' in a way that includes trans women in its extension better serves our moral and political goals. But this seems unsatisfactory, according to Barnes: the sentence 'trans women are women' is true just because trans women are women! The point is not just that treating trans women as women better serves our moral and political aims and therefore we should use 'women' in that way: it is true that using 'women' to refer to both cis and trans women better serves our moral and political goals precisely because it is *antecedently* true that trans women are women (2017: 2420).

In response: I am sympathetic to the spirit of this objection, but I think it does not have force against metaphysical deflationism. The main idea is this: whether the sentence 'trans women are women' is true or false (in English) depends on two factors: one, what the sentence 'trans women are women' means in English, and two, what the world is like. Then, in this sense we cannot deny that whether a sentence such as 'trans women are women' (or any other sentence) is true or not depends in part on what we mean by the relevant terms. So the truth of any (empirical) sentence will always depend on two

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[4] See Sider (2017) for a very interesting defence of the claim that debates about the metaphysics of gender are really about whether terms such as 'gender' have several candidate meanings that are equally explanatory or not. He suggests that the debate will be a genuine metaphysical debate only if there is a candidate meaning that is more explanatorily useful than the rest. In Diaz-Leon (ms) I argue that the debates about the metaphysics of gender (and race) can be genuine metaphysical debates even if all the relevant candidate meanings were equally explanatory (and if so, we would have to appeal to any relevant moral and political considerations that could settle the issue).

things, namely, on facts about meaning and facts about what the world is like. Otherwise, we cannot make sense of what it means to say that the sentence is true. But I take it that Barnes' point goes beyond this: what she is saying is that if it is politically useful to use 'woman' in the more inclusive way, it is in part because of what reality is like, namely, the fact that trans women are women, and we wouldn't be able to explain why it is more politically useful to use 'woman' in the more inclusive way without appealing to this antecedent fact.

In my view, it is compatible with metaphysical deflationism to say that the sentence 'trans women are women' is true in part because it is an antecedent fact that trans women are women. As I said above, a sentence is true in part in virtue of what it means, and in part in virtue of what the world is like. And it seems that in principle we could think of several candidate meanings for 'women': we could use 'women' in a way that is trans-exclusive, or in a way that is trans-inclusive.[5] If we use 'women' in the trans-exclusive way, then the

[5] For example, Bettcher (2013) defends a multiple-meaning view according to which different communities of speakers use 'woman' with different meanings, some of which are more inclusive than others (as opposed to what she calls 'single-meaning' views, which assign a unique, shared meaning to our term 'woman' and because of this, she argues, they cannot do justice to the aims of trans women). In particular, she claims that there are some dominant meanings that are more widespread in privileged communities, according to which not all trans women fall under the extension of 'women', or at least not all trans women are paradigm cases (some of them might count as borderline cases of 'woman', which is problematic on Bettcher's view). In contrast to this, there are some resistant meanings that are more common in trans-friendly communities, according to which all trans women fall under the extension of 'women', and in addition trans women can be paradigm cases of women, as opposed to peripheral or borderline cases, as was the case with dominant meanings. Bettcher argues that theories of the meaning of 'woman' should appeal to the intuitions of speakers that belong to the resistant communities and use these resistant meanings. She also argues that not only do we have moral and political reasons for not using the dominant meanings, namely, they have harmful consequences, but also metaphysical reasons, since these dominant meanings embed a worldview that is factually wrong. See Diaz-Leon (2016) for further discussion of Bettcher's view, and a comparison with Saul's (2012) contextualist view about 'woman'. See also Jenkins 2016 for a compelling argument for the view that it is wrong to use 'woman' in a way that excludes trans women.

sentence 'trans women are women' expresses a proposition that is false, because the referent of 'women' (used in the trans-exclusive way) does not include all trans women. But if we use 'women' in the trans-inclusive way (as we should!), then the sentence 'trans women are women' expresses a proposition that is true, precisely because this proposition corresponds to the way the world is, that is to say, given what 'women' (used in the trans-inclusive sense) means, the world is such that the extension of 'women' includes trans women. So metaphysical deflationists can capture the intuition that those sentences are true in terms of what the world is like. In other words: metaphysical deflationists can very well say that the relevant sentences are true in virtue of *antecedent facts*. What metaphysical deflationists cannot say is that a sentence is true or false independently of what meaning it has, but I do not think this is a problem for metaphysical deflationism, because it is not clear what this means. As I said, a sentence is true or false in part because of what it means, so it is not clear to me that it is intelligible to say that a sentence is true independently of which concepts or meanings we are using, for it seems confused to say that a sentence is true *independently of what it means*.

To recap: if we use the term 'women' in the trans-inclusive way, then the proposition expressed by the sentence 'trans women are women' is true, precisely because the world is such that the proposition expressed by that sentence obtains or is the case. If we used the term 'women' in the trans-exclusive way, then the proposition expressed by the sentence would be false. Of course, it is clear that we should use 'women' in the trans-inclusive way, and in this way the proposition we will express by uttering the sentence 'trans women are women' corresponds to that part of reality that in fact makes it true. That is to say, the proposition expressed when we use 'women' in a trans-inclusive way corresponds to that part of reality that deserves to be highlighted, as opposed to the part of reality that corresponds to the sentence 'trans women are *not* women' when we use 'women' in a trans-exclusive way (which is real, but irrelevant and not worth talking about). So I agree with Barnes that there are parts of reality that are more *privileged* than others in some sense, but they are all equally *real*. It is just that there are some properties or certain patterns of similarity (for example, the similarities between cis and trans women) that are more worthy of being emphasized than others

(say, the similarities among all of those who were assigned female at birth, which is politically irrelevant in many contexts).

Just to emphasize one last point in connection with this: I agree that the sentence 'trans women are women' is true (in part) because of an antecedent fact, namely, the part of reality that corresponds to the sentence 'trans women are women' (when 'women' is used in a trans-inclusive way). And that part of reality *is* independent of how we use the terms, that is, that part of reality is not constituted by our concepts or anything like that. But of course we cannot *talk* about the fact that trans women are women, prior to assigning a meaning to the terms in English that I just used, since in order to describe reality using a language, we need to use terms that are meaningful. (I take this to be pretty obvious.) That is to say, the *fact* that trans women are women is prior to fixing the meaning of our terms, but we can refer to that fact in virtue of using the sentence 'trans women are women' only if we use the term 'women' in the trans-inclusive way. So, in this sense, metaphysical deflationists can do justice to the intuition that it is an antecedent fact that trans women are women, precisely because, given what we (should) mean by the sentence 'trans women are women', the fact that corresponds with this sentence obtains independently of what we mean by our terms (but that sentence will be true only if we use the terms in a certain way).

Perhaps the core of Barnes' objection is the following. She suggests that it is not clear how we could make claims about what is useful in order to achieve social justice about gender (and in particular which terms are more politically useful), if we do not assume that there is a privileged way of talking about gender, or some antecedent facts about gender that are independent about how we talk about it or which concepts we use. But this is misleading, in my view. We can compare the (potential) benefits and harms of using a certain term in one way or another, in the same way that we can compare the benefits and harms of other morally and politically relevant actions. (If one is sympathetic to some form of utilitarianism, one could understand this in terms of maximizing utility.) Therefore, we can formulate arguments about which way of using the term 'gender' is better, without having to use the word 'gender' ourselves (that is, we would

mention but not *use* that word).[6] But of course, in order to argue that one way of using the term 'gender' is more politically useful than another, we might need to refer to that part of reality that in fact 'gender' refers to (or that we should refer to when we use 'gender'). In this sense, I agree that gender itself can be relevant to claims about how we should use the term 'gender', as Barnes suggests. But this does not entail that there is a property in the world that corresponds to our term 'gender' independently of how we use the term 'gender'.

We can therefore conclude that metaphysical deflationism can make sense of the intuition that certain normative claims about how we should use 'gender' or 'woman' are true precisely because what the world is like, with regards to facts about women and gender. As I explained, this is true to a certain extent: given the ordinary meaning of 'woman' and 'gender' (or perhaps given the ameliorative meanings that we should associate with these terms), the part of reality that we (ought to) describe when we use the terms 'woman' and 'gender' will be relevant in order to argue that we should use the terms in this or that way. Thus, I believe that metaphysical deflationism can indeed do justice to the claim that if it is better to use the term in one way rather than another, this is in part because of the way reality is.

Therefore, I see no obstacle here for an understanding of debates about the nature of gender and race along the lines of metaphysical deflationism, that is, in terms of debates about what the meanings of 'gender' and 'race' are, or should be.

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[6] Chalmers (2011) argues that when a philosophical dispute might turn out to rely on a verbal dispute about how to use a crucial term T, it might be useful to eliminate this term and formulate the remaining disagreements in ways that do not *use* that term, although we might *mention* it, that is to say, the remaining disagreement might be a disagreement about what the term should mean. I am suggesting a similar strategy here. See Plunkett 2015 and Thomasson 2017 for further discussion of this "metalinguistic" understanding of metaphysical debates.

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