Social structural explanations and hylomorphic theories of social groups

by

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Abstract

According to Haslanger's account of social structural explanations, some social phenomena are best explained by appealing to social structures. According to this account, social structures are explanatory because they act as social constraints: they constrain and shape individuals' agencies and actions. In this thesis, I aim at showing that Haslanger's account is built on (or presupposes) a theory of social group. I will argue that a hylomorphic account of social groups can capture Haslanger's idea of social constraint. On a hylomorphic account of social groups, this idea of social constraint can be understood in terms of the constraining feature of social group membership. This can be viewed as an argument in favor of using the hylomorphic framework for proposing theories of social groups. I will also use this hylomorphic framework to clarify some problems regarding Haslanger's account and also highlight the non-causal aspect of it.

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Also I have to note that some expositions of Fine and Koslicki's theories in section 2 of this thesis are from the paper I wrote for the course *Aristotelian metaphysics*. Some ideas in section 4 are also from the paper I wrote for the course *Philosophy of gender and race*. I have the permissions of the instructor of those classes and also my supervisor to use these ideas here as well.

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Introduction

According to Haslanger's account of social structural explanations, some social phenomena are best explained by appealing to social structures. According to this account, social structures are explanatory because they act as social constraints: they constrain and shape individuals' agencies and actions. In this thesis, I aim at showing that Haslanger's account is built on (or presupposes) a theory of social group. I will identify this theory of social group, and I will also use this theory of social group to clarify some problems regarding Haslanger's account and highlight the non-causal aspect of it.

In section 1, I will show how Haslanger argues there is a need for social structural explanations in addition to individualistic explanations. I will explain Haslanger's account of social structures, and I will also draw the most important feature of Haslanger's account, which is the notion of social constraint in terms of parthood relations (or mereology).

In section 2, I will go over the mereological theories of composite material objects. My aim will be to explore which theory has the potential to capture Haslanger's idea of social constraint in principle. I will mainly discuss two groups of theories: theories based on the principle of unrestricted composition; and theories based on the principle of restricted composition. I will explain the problems that are usually attributed to the principle of unrestricted composition, and the theories based on that. I will also illustrate that theories based on the principle of unrestricted composition are not able to capture Haslanger's idea of social constraint. In contrast, I will argue that hylomorphic theories, which are theories that state a material object is a composite of form and matter, has the potential to capture Haslanger's idea of social constraint in principle.

In section 3, I will discuss hylomorphic theories of social groups. My main aim in this section will be to provide a framework to apply the notion of mereological constraint, in Koslicki's account, to social groups. I will use Ritchie's account with more additional features from Passinsky's account to provide this framework. I will also argue that a social group, such as *women*, can be

understood as a structured whole, which has its structure externally. Understanding this kind of social groups in the hylomorphic framework is absent from most theories of social groups.

In section 4, I will argue that the idea of social constraint in Haslanger's account of social structural explanations can be understood as the constraining feature of social group membership in the hylomorphic framework. It follows that a hylomorphic theory of social groups can be viewed as the foundation for Haslanger's account of social structural explanations. This can be considered a point in favor of theories of social groups based on the hylomorphic framework. I also use the hylomorphic framework to clarify some problems and highlight the non-causal aspect of Haslanger's account. In the end, I will turn to a causal account of social structural explanations. I will raise some tentative objections to it, but I will also show that there could be a space for causal accounts in addition to non-causal accounts.

1 Explanations in social sciences

When it comes to explanations of social phenomena, one can make a distinction between two views: individualistic explanations and holistic explanations. Heath holds individualistic explanations in social sciences only appeal to individuals' actions to explain some social phenomena (Heath, 2020). Individuals' actions can further be explained by appealing to individuals' psychological states, such as beliefs, desires, etc. So in the end, individualistic explanations use individuals' psychological states to explain some social phenomena.

On the other hand, the proponents of holistic explanations in social sciences believe that it is indispensable to go over and beyond individuals, and appeal to social structures, social institutions, cultures, social groups, etc., to explain some social phenomena (Zahle, 2021).

Social group explanations and social structural explanations are two paradigm cases of holistic explanations in social sciences. In what follows, I will focus on social structural explanations and will illustrate how social structural explanations are related to social groups. I will briefly mention why philosophers think that holistic explanations matter, and I will also present their accounts. Before that, it's worth mentioning another distinction. Individualistic and holistic explanations should be distinguished form ontological individualism and holism. Taylor holds according to an ontological holist, social groups exist over and above individuals (Taylor, 2016), and also social structures exist over and above individuals (Soon, 2021).

1.1 Social structural explanations

There are two main theories of social structural explanations in the literature: Haslanger's part-whole account (Haslanger, 2016), and Ross' causal account (Ross, 2023). In this section, I will discuss Haslanger's account. In section 4, I will turn to Ross' account.

Social structural explanations fall under the explanatory holism view. But, why do they think

that there should be a place for social structural explanations in social sciences? Haslanger uses Garfinkel's idea that explanations are contrastive to argue that there is a need for structural explanations in the social realm in addition to individualistic explanations. After explicating the idea of contrastive explanations, I will turn to the Haslanger's view about how social structural explanations work.

1.1.1 Explanations are contrastive

Garfinkel (1981) maintains that explanations are answers to why-questions. Therefore, since there are different why-questions, there are different answers to them, and thus, there are different kinds of explanations. Consider this example from his book:

> Suppose that, in a class I am teaching, I announce that the course will be "graded on a curve", that is, that I have decided beforehand what the overall distribution of grades is going to be. Let us say, for the sake of the example, that I decide that there will be one A, 24 Bs, and 25 Cs. The finals come in, and let us say Mary gets the A. She wrote an original and thoughtful final. (Garfinkel, 1981, p.41)

Suppose we want to know the answer to the following question:

Question 1. Why did Mary get an A?

Garfinkel argues if someone answered "because Mary wrote an original and thoughtful final", that would be inadequate. This answer is inadequate because some relevant presuppositions have been ignored. In this case, the pertinent presupposition is the fact that grading has been done on a curve, where only one student gets an A, 24 students get B, and 25 students get C. Haslanger (2016) holds that in this case, the better question would be Question 2 :

> Given that the instructor is evaluating all and only the students in the class on an A–B–C grading system with A the highest and C the lowest and a curve that allows only one A, why did Mary get an A? (p.116)

Haslanger claims that it is even clearer that the answer "because Mary wrote an original and thoughtful final" is inadequate to this question. Instead, the right answer might be something like:

"because she wrote the best final compared to all the students in the class" (Haslanger, 2016, p.116).

Using this idea, Haslanger concludes that there are some kinds of why-questions in the social realm that structural explanations give better answers to. That is not to say that individualistic explanations are not important. Haslanger holds that social structural explanations just give better answers to some why-questions. That is why social structural explanations matter. Next, I will go over different views on social structures, including Haslanger's. After that, I will explain Haslanger's account of social structural explanations.

1.1.2 What are social structures?

Porpora (2022) holds that these three conceptions of structure are prevalent in social sciences. These three conceptions are (p.501):

1. Patterns of aggregate behavior or behavioral transactions.
2. Cultural rules, resources and schemas that structure behavior.
3. Systems of social relations among social positions and social things.

In what follows, I will elaborate on each of these views according to Porpora's descriptions. First, social structures as patterns of aggregate behavioral or behavioral transactions. Call this kind of social structures the "behavioral conception of social strucures". On this view, social structures are defined in terms of individuals' behavior that are repetitive and stable over time. According to the behavioral conception of social structures, there are two kinds of structures: microstructures and macrostructures. Microstrucures exist when a number people repeat their behavior. Macrostructures exist when a lot of people repeat their behavior. On this view, Porpora maintains, structures are defined in terms of behavior. Also, since on this view, structures are nothing over and above the collection of behavior, Porpora argues that the behavioral conception of social structures can be understood only as an abstraction. In other words, social structures, according to this view, are epiphenomenal, i.e., they do not partake in causal relations (Porpora, 1989).

Second, social structures as cultural rules, resources and schemas that structure behavior. On this view, the term "social structure" refers to the rules, principles, etc., that "generate and reproduce systematic patterns of relationships". Call this kind of social structures the "rule-based social structures" (Porpora, 1989, p.201).

Third, social structures as systems of social relations among social positions and social things. This conception of social structure goes over and above the behavior of individuals. Porpora claims this conception of social structures are characteristically tied to ideas that go back to Marx. According to this view, social structures are "systems of relationships among social positions" (p.199). Call this kind of social structures the "Marxist conception of social structures".

1.1.3 Haslanger's account of social structures

Haslanger understands the notion of structure as "complex entities with parts whose behavior is constrained by their relations to other parts" (Haslanger, 2016, p.118) When it comes to social structures, she defines social structures as "networks of social relations" (p.125). Social relations, she holds, are constituted by social practices. She takes a family as a system, for instance. This family includes several particular individuals. They stand in relations of "parent of", "child of", "dog of", etc. Haslanger argues we can abstract from this particular system of relations as instantiating a more general structure of families. Haslanger contends we should distinguish between individuals and positions (or nodes) that they occupy in a structure. It is clear that Haslanger's account is not very different from those three kinds of social structures in social science discussed above. Haslanger's understanding of social structures is close the Marxist conception of social structures.

1.2 Haslanger's account of social structural explanations

Haslanger (2016) offers an account of social structural explanations. According to Haslanger, social structures are explanatory by acting as social constraints. Her understanding of social con-

straints has two components: the "social" component; and, the "constraint" component. In what follows, I will elaborate on both of these components. First, the constraint component. According to Haslanger, the idea of constraint should be understood in terms of part-whole relations. When something is a part of a larger whole, we can explain the behavior of this part by appealing to the behavior of the larger whole, and the fact that the part is constrained by the whole. She gives the following example.

> Suppose I am playing ball with my dog. I stuff a treat into a hole in the ball and throw it for him. The ball goes over the lip of a hill and rolls down into a gully. Why did the treat end up in the gully? If we imagine the trajectory of the treat alone, from a space near my hand, through an arc the air, then landing about an inch above the ground and moving at about that height down the hill until it stops, it would be a huge task to explain the particular events that determined each of its movements. A much easier explanation would be to point out that the treat was inserted into a ball that was thrown and rolled down the hill into the gully. (Haslanger, 2016, p.114)

Maybe another more straightforward example by Haslanger could be that one can explain where the tail of a dog is by stating the location of the dog itself. This explanation works because the tail is a part of the dog (Haslanger, 2016, p.118). These explanations, which are in terms of part-whole relations, are related to the notion of constraint, because in both of these examples, the behavior of the part is constrained by the whole.

If one is not careful, these examples by Haslanger can be misleading. In both of these examples, the part is *physically* constrained by the whole. But physical constraints are not what Haslanger has in mind. Haslanger holds that social structures are explanatory by acting as *social* constraints (Haslanger, 2016, p.127). Haslanger contends:

> Social constraints set limits, organize thought and communication, create a choice architecture; in short, they structure the possibility space for agency... Elucidating this possibility space and the position of an individual within the structure of that space, can explain their behavior. (Haslanger, 2016, p.127)

I aim to show that Haslanger's account of social structural explanations is built on a specific theory of social groups. From Haslanger's account of social structural explanations, I will extract two features that a theory of social groups must satisfy. The first feature is that the theory should be in terms of part-whole relations.[1] The second feature is that the theory should be able to capture the idea of social constraint. In this thesis, I will argue that a theory of social groups based on the hylomorphic framework[2] will be able to capture the features that Haslanger's account of social structural explanations has. Therefore, it follows that a hylomorphic account of social groups has an advantage over other theories, because it is compatible with Haslanger's account of social structural explanations. Once it is established that Haslanger's account is built on a hylomorphic account of social groups, I will use the hylomorphic framework to answer some of the objections that have been raised with regards to Haslanger's account. These objections are as follows.

Often it seems that Haslanger equates a structure with a system, and that is what the whole is. All of these confusions aside, even if we accept that the underlying relation for explanations is the part-whole relation, it is not clear why this relation gives rise to constraints.

I will turn to Ross's account in section 4, but before that I will go over some objections that Ross (2023) raises to Haslanger's account. First, as I noted above, Ross also holds that sometimes Haslanger suggests that the relationship between an individual and the structure is not part-whole. Rather, the individual is a part of a system, and the system has both the individual and the structure as its parts. If this is the case, Ross asks, then how is this account of social structural explanations based on part-whole relations (p.6)?

Second, Ross holds that an individual can be part of different wholes, then the question is which whole matters? For instance, an individual can be part of a family, a work community, a society and the planet earth. Ross contends most of these wholes are unexplanatory, then what is the rele-

[1] Or, in terms of mereology as I will explain in section 2

[2] I will use the terms "hylomorphism" and and "neo-Aristotelian mereology" interchangeably.

vant whole (p.6)?

I will come back to these objections in the last section.

2 Mereological constraint

In this section, I will go over different theories of material composite objects that are in terms of mereology. Varzi (2019) defines mereology as "the theory of parthood relations: of the relations of part to the whole and the relations of part to part within a whole" (introduction). My main aim is to identify which of these theories has the potential to capture the notion of social constraint that is present in Haslanger's account of social structural explanations.

I will show that Koslicki's hylomorphic theory is able to capture this notion of constraint in principle, because her theory endorses the principle of restricted composition. For understanding, restricted composition, first, I will discuss what unrestricted composition is, and why the proponents of hylomorphism endorse restricted composition by criticizing unrestricted composition.

I have to note that my argument will be incomplete by the end of this section. In this section, I will show that the hylomorphic framework has the potential to capture the notion of constraint that Haslanger has in mind. In section 3, I will turn to theories of social groups that are based on hylomorphism. In section 4, I will argue that a hylomorphic theory of social groups is able to capture Haslanger's notion of social constraint.

2.1 Metaphysics of material composite objects

Koslicki (2008) holds that "material objects", are also usually called "concrete particulars" by metaphysicians (p.9). She defines concrete particulars as "objects which occupy a single region of space-time at each time at which they exits and which have a certain range of properties that go along with space-occupancy, such as weight, shape, color, texture and temperature" (2008, p.9). She notes that almost all ordinary material objects have parts. So in studying ordinary material objects, what interests us is how the parts are related to the wholes that they compose. What's more she call objects that have parts, "mereologically complex", "compound", "composite objects", or "wholes" (pp. 9-10).

The study of the metaphysics of material composite objects can be divided into two groups based on van Inwagen's "special composition question". van Inwagen (1990, ch.2) poses the question: when do a plurality of things compose a composite object? There are three answers to this question: always, sometimes, never.[3] Those who answer "always", are committed to the principle of unrestricted composition. And those who answer "sometimes", are committed to the principle of restricted composition.

Sattig (2015) maintains that it follows from the principle of unrestricted composition that anytime there are a number of objects, there is at least one new material object that they compose. For instance, given the material objects, a,b, and c, there is a new material object a+b+c, which is the sum of a,b, and c. Any plurality of objects could compose another object, no matter how they are arranged, or what kind a composite object belongs to.

One of the most important theories of metaphysics of composite objects, which endorses unrestricted composition, is Lewis' four-dimensionalism. Sattig states according to four-dimensionalism, a composite material object has both spatial parts and temporal parts (Sattig, 2015). On a four-dimensionalist theory, composite objects are usually called "fusions", or "mereological sums" (Koslicki, 2008; Sattig, 2015). So, in the remainder of this thesis, whenever I use the terms "fusion" and "mereological sum", I mean to refer to a theory of composite objects based on the principle of unrestricted composition.

There are a number of objections against the principle of unrestricted composition and theories based on that. For instance, one consequence of this principle is that very disparate and unrelated objects, such as my left shoe and the Eiffel tower[4], could have a fusion. So, according to this principle, many objects exist, which their existence is not very intuitive[5]. One way that someone

[3]Those who answer "never" believe in nihilism: Nothing can ever compose another object. Since I started with the assumption that social groups exist, I will not discuss nihilism.

[4]This example is inspired by Markosian (2008, p.5).

[5]There is another way to reject the principle of unrestricted composition as well, which is based on vagueness. See

like Lewis can overcome this problem is to propose a solution along these lines:

> Unrestricted Composition is ontologically innocent. For the sum of some xs is nothing "over and above" the plurality of the xs. If you are committed to the plurality, then you are thereby committed to the sum. (Markosian, 2008, p.5)

So according to Lewis, a mereological sum of some objects is identical to the plurality of those objects. This is called "the principle of composition as identity". Sattig describes the principle of composition as identity as follows: the identity of a mereological sum of a+b+c completely depends on its being composed of a,b, and c. Again, no matter how the parts are arranged. In other words, a mereological sum is an "unstructured whole" (Sattig, 2015, p.2).

Many philosophers have questioned the principle of composition as identity. One of the most popular strategy to raise an objection to this principle is by using Leibniz's law, which states that if two objects are identical, then they share the same properties.[6] In short, using Leibniz's law, they argue that a composite object (or, a mereological sum) is not identical to all of its parts collectively. In this way, Lewis' argument that the existence of those bizarre mereological sums is innocent is undermined. Consider a statue and a piece of clay. The statue is composed of a piece of clay.[7] It is argued that the piece of clay and the statue do not share all of their properties. For instance, the statue could be destroyed, while the piece of clay stayed intact. Moreover, the statue was created by someone at the time, say, t, while the piece of clay existed even before the statue was built. From all of the differences in properties between the statue and the piece of clay, they conclude that the statue is numerically distinct from the piece of clay. So, any other mereological sum is numerically distinct from its composing parts as well. As a result, the principle of composition as identity is false. And the principle of unrestricted composition is problematic because it overpopulates the

Koslicki (2008, pp.29-41).

[6] In particular, see Fine (1982), and Koslicki (2008, ch.3) for detailed discussions using Leibniz's law to argue against the principle of composition as identity.

[7] Or the statue is constituted by the piece of clay. Philosophers like Fine and Koslicki understand constitution in terms of mereology. In this way, the piece of clay is a part of the statue. See Evnine (2011) for a detailed discussion about the relation between constitution and composition on different theories.

world with some strange composite objects.

2.2 Fine's theory of embodiments

Fine (1999) argues that the correct theory of composite material objects requires new, sui generis, relations of composition, which should be different from those used by other philosophers, such as Lewis. Fine (1999) goes on to give his theory of "rigid embodiment theory". Fine puts the rigid embodiment theory as follows:

> Given objects *a,b,c,...* and given a relation *R* that may hold or fail to hold of those objects at any given time, we suppose that there is a new object- what one may call "the objects *a,b,c,...* in the relation *R*". (p.65)

Fine thinks if a number of objects are put in a relation, they can form another new object. The new object is called *a rigid embodiment*. *a,b,c,* is the matter of a rigid embodiment. And the relation *R*, which is the form a rigid embodiment, is called *the principle of rigid embodiment*. Also, the operation by which a rigid embodiment is formed form the matter *a,b,c,* and the form *R* is called the *operation of rigid embodiment*. Now we can see how Fine's theory is different from theories, such as Lewis'. Fine's theory is not based on the principle of unrestricted composition, since on his theory, it's not the case that composition always occurs. It only occurs if there is a relation, the principle of rigid embodiment (R), between the material parts of a composite object. Moreover, Fine's theory is not based on the principle of composition as identity either. On his theory, the composite object is not identical to its matter, there should be a relation, R, between matter as well. In other words, a material object is a composite of material parts and the relation R.[8][9]

Also, I have to note that Fine does not think there is only one R for every object. This means that different relations could stand between a certain collection of matter. As a result, different

[8] Fine takes the relation R as the part of a composite just like the material parts are parts of the composite.

[9] Fine also proposes the theory of "variable embodiment", which accounts for a composite object having different temporal parts at different times. See Fine (1999, pp.68-72).

principles of rigid embodiment could exist, and in turn, different composite objects could exist, all of them occupying the same location.

Also, Fine maintains the operation of rigid embodiment is *sui generis*. The operation of rigid embodiment cannot be understood "in terms of any other way of forming wholes from parts, whether from standard mereology[like Lewis' theory] or elsewhere" (p.66).
These two are important points to which I will return later. These are points that Koslicki is critical of.

2.3 Koslicki's theory of hylomorphism

Koslicki (2008) criticizes Fine's theory of embodiment mainly on two grounds. She calls these problems "The Proliferation of Sui Generis Relations", and "The Superabundance of Objects". Koslicki thinks the former is a methodological problem and the latter is an ontological problem. Here, I only briefly mention what these problems are. In short, "The Proliferation of Sui Generis Relations" states that Fine, on his account, appeals to sui generis relations, namely the the operations of rigid embodiment and variable embodiment. Koslicki thinks this sui generis relations are uncalled for and we can dispense with. In "The Superabundance of Objects", Koslicki criticizes the idea that on Fine's account, every region of space is populated by numerous rigid embodiments[10], because as already stated, no principle of rigid embodiment is ontologically privileged. There could be different relations, and thus different principles of rigid embodiment, between a certain collection of matter[11]. To steer away from these problems, Koslicki sets out to propose her own account. She thinks her account avoids Fine's proliferation of primitive, sui generis relations, and assumes a single notion of parthood. Also, she gives an even more restricted account of composition, on which, contra Fine, certain relations between matter are ontologically privileged: those relations that specify which kind an object belongs to. In this way, she avoids the "superabundance

[10] And also variable embodiments.
[11] Fine himself accepts this consequence (Fine, 1999, p.73).

of objects" objection. She cashes out her account as follows:

> Some objects, $m_1, \ldots, m_n$, compose an object, O, of kind, K, at a time t just in case $m_1, \ldots, m_n$, satisfy at t the constraints dictated by some formal components simpliciter, $f_1, \ldots, f_n$, associated with objects of kind, K. (p.190)

So, as I already said, to avoid the problems she associates with Fine's theory of embodiment, she appeals to the notion of kindhood. She thinks the world contains kinds of objects, and each kind is identified with a set of formal components. Koslicki's commitment to an ontology of kinds can be understood as follows: "a plurality of objects composes a whole of a particular kind, when the objects in question satisfy the selection of requirements set by the formal components associated with the wholes" (Koslicki, 2008, p.170). Furthermore, Koslicki contends identifying what kinds of objects exist is not a duty of a mereologist, but of an ontologist with the help of other domains such as science and common sense. Koslicki (2018) dives deep into the nature of a hylomorphic compounds, form and matter. In addition, she delineates the nature of relations between compound-matter, compound-form and form-matter.

With regards to the relations between a composite-form and matter-form, Koslicki maintains (Koslicki, 2018, p.115):

> Composite–Form Relation: form is a proper part of composite; and form figures in composite's essence.
>
> Matter–Form Relation: matter satisfies constraints dictated by form.
>
> Matter–Composite Relation: matter is a proper part of composite.

In this section, my aim was to explain how the notion of mereological constraint is related to different theories of metaphysics of composite material objects. As we have seen, Lewis' theory endorses unrestricted composition. In his theory, any plurality of objects can compose another object. In this way, there is no constraint imposed on the parts of a mereological sum.

Fine's theory is more restricted in some ways but also unrestricted in other ways. His theory is more restricted than Lewis' theory, because on Fine's view, parts of a composite object have to be arranged in some ways to compose a whole. This arrangement imposes some constraint on the parts. But as we have seen, since Fine's theory is neutral about multiple arrangements for parts, it could give rise to existence of many composite objects as well.

Koslicki's theory is more restricted than Fine's. On her account, the form (or structure) of an object imposes constraints on material parts of the object. What's more, this form is essentially related to the kind that the composite object belongs to. Koslicki holds:

> The presence of structure within an object contributes mainly two sorts of constraints which must be obeyed by the object's material components, if they are to compose a whole of a particular kind: (i) constraints concerning the types of constituents of which a compound consists; and (ii) constraints concerning the topological or geometrical configuration or arrangement that is exhibited by these constituents. (Koslicki, 2008, pp.254-255)

Consider a car. A car has an engine as one of its parts. This specific part of the car (engine) is constrained by the form (structure) of the car. The form of the car imposes some kind of a role on this part, which only an engine could play. Also, for instance, the location of the engine in a car can be constrained by the structure of the car.

This is the notion of mereological constraint that, I think, could have the potential to capture Haslanger's idea of social constraint. As I stated, this hylomorphic notion of mereological constraint can include things like physical constraints, but also it is much broader than that, and can include other kinds of constraints including the type of the object that can be a part of a composite object, the role it has to play, and its relations to other parts.

Given that this hylomorphic notion of mereological constraint has the potential to capture Haslanger's idea of social constraint, in the next section I will go over the theories of social groups that are based on hylomorphism. In section 4, I will show that how this hylomorphic notion of

mereological constraint can manifest itself in the context of social groups, and that will be exactly what corresponds to Haslanger's idea of social constraint.

3 Hylomorphic accounts of social groups

In this section, I will go over the hylomorphic theories of social groups. The reasons that I only examine hylomorphic theories is: first, these theories are in mereological terms (or parthood relations).[12] Second, as I have shown in section 2, the hylomorphic framework has the potential to capture Haslanger's idea of social constraint (I will fully delineate this point in section 4). Regardless of Haslanger's account and social structural explanations, there are other reasons that make hylomorphic theories attractive compared to other theories. I will gesture towards some of them along the way as well.

There are three important hylomorphic accounts of social groups in the literature: Ritchie (2013, 2015, 2020), Fine (2020), and Passinsky (2021). All of these theories can be considered hylomorphic, because all of them state that social groups are composite of form (or structure) and matter (individuals)[13]. Having said that, these theories are different in details, namely in what they take the form to be, and whether they use the notions of kind and essence. In what follows I will present these views; however, my aim is not to give a comprehensive and detailed theory of social groups. My aim is to extract some important features of a hylomorphic theory of social group, so that I can use them in social structural explanations.

Fine (2020) thinks that social groups have the same nature as material things. According to Fine the difference between social groups and other material things is "intra- rather than extra- categorical", which means their difference resembles the difference between chairs and tables rather than the difference between chairs and say, the color red (Fine, 2020, p.81). Fine applies his famous operations of composition of material objects to social groups (he considers social groups as belonging to the more general category of social objects). As already stated in the last section, these

[12] That is a positive aspect, since Haslanger's account of social structural explanations uses parthood relations, and I'm looking for a theory of social groups that is compatible with her account.

[13] Ritchie does not explicitly use the term "hylomorphism". Having said that, she admits that her account is influenced by hylomorphic theories of Fine and Koslicki.

two operations are rigid embodiment and variable embodiment. In short, rigid embodiment concerns the constitution of a composite at a time, whereas variable embodiment accounts for actual and possible changes in the constitution of a composite. According to the theory of rigid embodiment, "various objects combined into a whole whose component parts bear certain properties or stand in certain relations to one another" (p.81). On the other hand, variable embodiment "is an operation whereby we may form an object that is manifested as different, more particular, objects at different times or in different counterfactual circumstances" (p.81). [14]

The main focus in Passinsky (2021) is social objects, such as political borders, states and organizations. So, on her account social objects belongs to a more general category that also includes social groups. The main idea behind Passinsky's account is that social objects are created by acts of agreement, decree, declaration, or the like. So, a social object has a normative component to it. To capture this idea, she takes a social object to be a composite of matter and form, where form is to be understood as some normative properties and principles. Furthermore, based on the form that a social object has, it essentially belongs to some specific kind. Take the example of a river which is also a border between two countries. In this case, the border is a social object, where the matter is the river and the form is some political laws, and obligations. Also consider social groups, such as clubs, committees, and teams. On Passinsky's account, these social groups have (at least) some individuals as their matter, and also the form is "normative relations involving conventional morality or political morality, the law, or social norms or rules" (p.18).

Ritchie (2013, 2015, 2020) makes a distinction between an organized social group, such as a football team, and a feature social groups, such as gender groups. She offers a theory of organized social groups as structured wholes. I will elaborate on her view later on. But before that, she gives a survey of existing views about social groups in the literature. She, then, goes on to give a list of intuitive criteria that every plausible theory of social groups must satisfy. In short, her main

[14] Fine thinks his account of social groups is better than other accounts because the argument that his theory describes the metaphysics of composite object better than other theories can be extend to social groups as well.

argument is that none of the existing theories of social groups can capture the desired criteria. Then, she gives her own theory of social groups, in which social groups are structured wholes. She argues that her theory will capture all of the intuitive criteria. I will present these criteria and Ritchie's argument. Later on, I will use the same strategy to argue that feature social groups are structured wholes as well.

3.1 Criteria that a theory of social groups must capture

In Ritchie's view, first, organized social groups can change their members over time. Members can leave a social group or other individuals can become members of a social group. Second, members of social groups can be different in different possible worlds. For instance, a Portuguese soccer player, like Cristiano Ronaldo, could play for the national team Spain instead of Portugal. Third, social groups can exit at one time and cease to exist at some other times. For instance, a new soccer team can begin to exist in a university. Fourth, social groups can exist in some possible worlds, but do not exist in other possible worlds. That is to say that social groups are not necessary. Fifth, social groups are also (or can be) located in space. For example, the members of a chess club meet every week at school. Sixth, social groups can be distinct, while have the same members. For example, all the members of a soccer club decide to form a nature club. In this case, the soccer club and the nature club are distinct, even though they have the same members. That is to say these two social groups are extensionally coincident (or they are coextensive) but not identical.

These criteria are summarized as follows (Ritchie, 2013, p.259):

1. Members–Times. Groups can have different members at different times
2. Members–Worlds. Groups can have different members across worlds
3. Existence–Times. Groups can exist at one time without existing at every time
4. Existence–Worlds. Groups can exist at one world without existing at every world
5. Space. Groups are (or can be) located in space
6. Coincidence. Groups of the same basic kind can be extensionally coincident and non-identical

3.1.1 The existing theories of social groups in the literature

Ritchie (2013) holds that there are four accounts about the nature of social groups: groups as non-singular pluralities, groups as sets, groups as aggregates, groups as fusions. [15]

Ritchie, then, goes on to argue all of these prominent theories of social groups, such as social groups as sets, social groups as aggregates and social groups as fusions only satisfy some of these criteria. More specifically, none of these theories can fully satisfy the sixth criterion, Coincidence, because on all of these theories, the identity of a social group only depends on the identity of its members and nothing more. She argues that the theory of social groups that she puts forward, social groups as structured wholes, which is to say that social groups have both members and structures, is able to satisfy this criterion. Ritchie (2015) gives the following identity condition for organized social groups understood as structured wholes (p.316):

A group G1 and a group G2 are identical if, and only if,

1. For all t(time) and all w (world), the structure of G1 at t at w is identical to the structure of G2 at t at w, and
2. For all t and all w and all x, x occupies node n in the structure of G1 at t at w if, and only if, x occupies n in the structure of G2 at t at w.

Now let's go back to the example of coextensive soccer team and the nature club. Although the soccer team and the nature club share the same members, they have different organizational structure, meaning the relations between individuals are different and they have different purposes (I will elaborate on social structures below). Based on the identity criterion proposed by Ritchie, these two social groups are not identical because they do not have the same structure. In what follows, I will elaborate on what structures of social groups are according to Ritchie.

[15] In what follows, I will present the summary of Ritchie's main argument. For the detailed discussion and also Ritchie's expositions of other theories of social groups see Ritchie (2013, pp.260-267)

3.2 The structuralist account of social groups

As we have seen Ritchie (2015, 2020) makes a distinction between two kinds of social groups: organized social groups and feature social groups. She takes soccer teams and the supreme court as paradigm examples of organized social groups. She then goes on to argue that organized social groups are structured wholes. For explaining what a structure is, Ritchie uses the following metaphor: a structure consists of nodes and edges (more on Ritchie's account of social structures later). On the other hand, racial and gender groups and sexual orientation groups are paradigm examples of feature social groups. The members in all of these groups share some features or partially overlapping clusters of features. In Ritchie's structuralist account of groups, feature groups are nodes in the social structure. As opposed to organized social groups, which are internally structured, Ritchie argues feature social groups are externally structured in virtue of occupying nodes.

In addition to difference in composition of organized social groups and feature social groups, Ritchie (2015) maintains they have different characteristics as well. Organized social groups have some sort of collective intentionality. For instance, they can decide to form a group, and after that they have to make plans and take actions and cooperate. In contrasts, even if there are group plans for feature social groups, their members do not necessarily intend to cooperate according to the group plans. Members of feature group might not even want to belong to a specific social group.

3.2.1 Ritchie's account of social structures

Ritchie's account of social structures is influenced by Haslanger's account of social structures and also the Marxist tradition. She takes structures to be complexes, networks, or Latticeworks of relations (Ritchie, 2020, p.4). As I already stated, she represents structures by using nodes and edges. Nodes are places or positions that objects can occupy, and edges represent the relations between nodes. On Ritchie's account relations in structures have the following characteristics:

1. The relations can be symmetric or asymmetric. It means that two nodes can be related to one another, and this relation can be either one-way in asymmetric relations or two-way in

symmetric relations. In asymmetric relations, one node has a more active role, and the other node has a more passive role.

2. The relations can be hierarchical or non-hierarchical. Authority, privilege, subordination, etc, are considered hierarchical relations, whereas the relation between two defenders in a football team is non-hierarchical.

3. Some relations specify the functional role of positions. For instance, in football the functional role of an attacking midfielder is to create goal scoring opportunities for other forwards.

4. Some relations metaphysically necessitate other relations. For instance, in the structure of a family, the relation of "being a mother of" metaphysically necessitates the existence of the relation "being a child of".

All of these features are related to the notion of a structure in general. Now what makes a structure a social structure? Ritchie's answer is that a social structure is a structure dependent on some social factors. Social factors can include habits, norms, laws, policies, intentions, arrangements, etc. In what follows, I will elaborate on what Ritchie means for social structure to be dependent on social factors.

Ritchie argues the notion of dependence can be cashed out in two ways: causal and non-causal (constitutive). A social structure might be causally dependent on social factors. Causal dependence is defined as follows: "X (being F) is causally dependent on Y if and only if Y (partially) causes X to exist (as F)" (p.6).

However, Ritchie contends this is not enough. The structure of a synthetically created molecule, which is created in a lab by a group of scientists, arguably is dependent on some social factors, but that does not make the structure of the molecule social. Ritchie thinks a more fine-grained notion of dependence is needed. This notion of dependence is in non-causal (or constitutive) terms. She thinks there are a number of ways to define a constitutive account of dependence. It can be done in terms of grounding, metaphysical necessity, constitution, realization, etc. She does not take a

stand on what the correct way is. Instead, she comes up with a disjunctive view of constitutive dependence (p.6):

> Constitutive Dependence: Structure, S, constitutively depends on social factors just in case:
>
> (i) in defining what it is to be S reference must be made to some social factors or; (ii) social factors are metaphysically necessary for S to exist or; (iii) social factors ground the existence of S (or the fact that S exists).

She thinks any of the criteria above would be enough to make a structure dependent on social factors. Finally, a social structure is "a structure that is constitutively dependent on social factors" (p.6), where the notion of constitutive dependence is defined above.

3.3 Feature social groups as structured wholes

As I already stated, Ritchie makes a distinction between organized social groups, such as sport teams, on one hand; and feature social groups such as gender and race groups on the other hand. Ritchie's theory of organized social groups as structured wholes is along the lines of hylomorphic accounts of social groups. However, it seems that on Ritchie's account, feature social groups do not have the same nature as organized social groups, so they are not hylomorphic compounds, at least according to Ritchie's account. Passinsky's hylomorphic theory of social objects also only concerns organized social groups and excludes social groups such as gender and race. In this section, I will use resources from Ritchie and Passinsky to advance a hylomorphic theory of feature social groups.

First, as we saw, Ritchie claims that feature social groups lack internal structures, as opposed to organized social groups. Instead, feature social groups are externally structured in virtue of occupying nodes in the social structure.

I will show that feature social groups have more or less the same nature as organized social groups. I will start with the assumption that feature social groups, such as *women* and *men* can be viewed as concrete material objects as well. The reason being that these social groups are also located in space and time. They are located in space in virtue of their members being located in

space. And also with regards to time, some philosophers, such as Haslanger (2000), believe that it is conceivable, and also perhaps socially and politically beneficial that some day social groups, such as *men* and *women* cease to exist.

Also consider again the problem of coextensive but non-identical organized social groups. A problem along these lines can be developed for feature social groups as well. Consider the following example. In a community, there are two gender groups *men* and *women*. Both men and women in this community have the same race, say, *Black*. So there are two gender groups and one race group in this community. Suppose all the men leave this community for some reason. As a result, women who are also *Black* remain in this community. Now, it seems that there is one gender group, i.e., *women*, and one race group, i.e., *Black*. The problem of coextensive but non-identical social groups arises. There are two distinct feature social group, namely, the feature groups *women* and the race group *Black*. What's more, they have exactly the same members. So, just like organized social groups, a viable theory of social groups should be able to solve this problem too. I will show that a similar strategy used by Ritchie before, can be used here as well.

As we have seen, Ritchie claims that feature social groups are externally structured in virtue of occupying nodes in the social structure. It follows from this, that feature social groups also have structures but these structures are external to them. Perhaps an analogy might help in understating this claim better. Lewis (1983) proposes a distinction between intrinsic or internal properties, and extrinsic or external properties (pp. 355-356). An object has some property intrinsically independent of its surrounding environment. On the other hand, an object has some property extrinsically in virtue of the its surrounding environment. For example, an object has a mass intrinsically, but has weight extrinsically, in virtue of the relation it has with gravity.

Using this analogy, we can say that a feature social group lacks internal structure, but has a structure externally in virtue of the relations it has to other feature social groups. Recently, Griffith (2020) has proposed an account of race structure very similar to Ritchie's. Griffith defines a race structure as follows:

> S is a race structure iff: S is a social structure (i.e., an abstract form of a system whose instantiation is a product of social factors) such that (1) S's positions are races R1, …, Rn; (2) R1, …, Rn are defined in terms of their unique functional roles in S; (3) the functional role of race Ri is individuated by the norms and expectations applied to Ri's occupants and the forms of compliance expected of Ri's occupants; (4) Ri restricts its occupants to individuals with certain morphologies and ancestries. (Griffith, 2020, p.1923)

Although, here, Griffith proposes a race structure, something along the similar lines can be developed for gender as well. Here, we also see the idea that a race group, such as, *Black*, is externally structured in virtue of having relations to other race groups, such as *White*, *Asian*, etc.

The difference between organized social groups and feature social groups is that we intentionally form organized social groups, but it seems that feature social groups are not intended to be created. An analogy between material objects might help here too. Organized social groups could be understood as artifactual objects, such as chairs. We intentionally make chairs for some purposes. On the other hand, feature social groups could be understood as natural objects, such as trees. Usually, we do not have any intention to create feature social groups, nevertheless, they have come into existence themselves, perhaps by some by-products of humans' actions.

So, I conclude that a feature social group is also a structured whole. It has some individuals as its matter, and also an external structure as its form. Now, I will turn to some worries about this argument.

One worry is that if we allow social groups to have external structures, then some organized social groups will have both an internal structure and an external structure. For example, a soccer team is a part of a bigger organized group, such as the national league. Now, the question is which one of them is the form of the social group? A criticism along these lines has also been raised by Epstein (2019). Epstein contends the distinction that Ritchie draws between feature and organized social groups hinges on what is meant by "feature". More specifically, Epstein asks whether "fea-

ture" also includes external properties, such as the property of occupying a certain node in a social structure. If it does include external properties, then all organized social groups will also be feature social groups. If it does not, then it seems that Ritchie would have to leave out feature social groups from her categorization, because according to most theories of gender and race, members of these groups possess external properties.

Here, I suggest that Ritchie, like Passinsky which in turn is influenced by Koslicki's theory of hylomorphism, can appeal to the notions of kindhood and essence to solve this problem. Before I turn to this solution, it's worth noting that although Ritchie does not explicitly use the tools of kind and essence, she sets some constraints and desideratum for an ontology of social groups, which closely resembles the use of the notion of kindhood on Koslicki's account. Ritchie holds that an ontology of social groups must meet the following constraint, which she calls "Goldilocks Constraint":

> An ontology of social groups should include social groups that are common sensical and that figure in explanations and should not overgenerate social groups. (Ritchie, 2020, p.2)

Also, as we have seen in section 2, one of the motivations that Koslicki appeals to the notion of kindhood in her theory is to give a restricted account of composition, and also she uses this notion in explanations. So we can see that Ritchie and Koslicki have similar aims in their minds.

Now, I will turn to the solution, to the worry, that Ritchie could offer by appealing to kind and essence. It goes as follows. The structures of social groups are essentially related to the kind they belong to. The internal structure of a organized social group is essentially related to the kind it belongs to, whereas the external structure of a feature social group is essentially related to the kind it belongs to. This means that an organized social group, such as a football team could have other structures, such as external structures, e.g., the structure of the national league. However, those structures are not essential to the *kind* of the football team. On the other hand, a feature social

group, such a *women* lacks any internal structure and has an external structure, which is associated to the kind it belongs to. This is how I suggest to mark the difference between organized social groups and feature social groups.

4 Social structural explanations

4.1 Social group membership and Haslanger's social structural explanations.

As I have shown in the last section, we can understand both an organized social group, such as a soccer team, and a feature social group, such as women, as a structured whole (or a hylomorphic compound). In this way, members of a social groups are its parts.[16] Therefore, the structure of a social group constrains its members. Like the example of the car, the structure of a social group imposes some roles on the members of a social group. Take the philosophy department at CEU as a structured social group. I am a member of this social group. The structure of this social group has given me the role "student". A variety of norms, expectations, functions, etc., are imposed on me as a student. For instance, I have to pass a certain number of credits (60) to be able to graduate. I could not take, say, 50 credits; otherwise I would not graduate. I have to submit my thesis on May, 30. However, I would prefer to work more on it and submit it later. But this is not possible for me. As we can see, being a member of CEU philosophy department constrains the space of my agency and actions. This notion of constraint exactly corresponds to the idea of social constraint that Haslanger has in mind, and I introduced in section 1.

So, I conclude that a hylomorphic theory of social group can be considered a good foundation for Haslanger's account of social structural explanations, since the main idea behind Haslanger's account of social structural explanation, i.e., social constraints can nicely be captured by a hylomorphic theory of social groups. Proponents of hylomorphic accounts of social groups have argued for the plausibility of this account in a number ways. The point that this theory of social group is compatible with Haslanger's account of social structural explanations can be considered another point in favor of this framework.

In what follows, I will use the hylomorphic theory of social group to clarify and improve

[16] For a similar account of group membership, see Strohmaier (2018).

Haslanger's account. Later on in this section, I will turn to Ross' causal account of social structural explanations.

4.2 Explanations by constraint

Appealing to the notion of constraint to explain is not a new approach. Some theories of explanations in science and mathematics use the notion of constraint to explain some phenomena. Consider the following example (Lange, 2018, p.15):

> Why does Mother fail every time she tries to distribute exactly 23 strawberries evenly among her 3 children without cutting any (strawberries—or children!)? Because 23 cannot be divided evenly into whole numbers by 3.

Lange claims that this is a non-causal explanation, because here the explanatory power does not stem from specifying the causes. Rather, the mother fails to divide the strawberries because 23 cannot be divided evenly by 3, and that is a mathematical fact. The mathematical laws give rise to some constraints, and by appealing to these constraints, we can offer explanations. Lange contends these kinds of constraints, and therefore explanations based on them are present in science as well. In science the constraints stem from fundamental laws, such as the law of conservation of energy.

Similarly, Both Haslanger and Ross (described below) appeal to the idea of social structures as constraints to give their accounts of social structural explanation.

4.3 A non-causal account of social structural explanations

In this section, I will use the account of social group membership in terms hylomorphism that I developed earlier, to clarify and highlight Haslanger's non-causal account of social structural explanations. In this way I also make a connection between social groups and social structural explanations.

First a reminder of the account I developed earlier. Members of a social group are parts of that social group. In other words, there is a part-whole relation between a member of social group and the social group. Furthermore, this part-whole relation is to be understood in terms of hylomorphic accounts of social groups. The structure of the social group (or its form) constrains the

members of the social group. In this vein, a social structural explanation explain some phenomenon by appealing to the constraining feature of social group membership. This also captures the idea of explanation by social constraint, because this notion of constraint is built in the notion of social group membership. However, contra Ross, the nature of this constraint is not causal. This is a mereological constraint, as Haslanger also emphasizes.

Now, let's go back to Ross' challenges and clarify things. Since social groups are structured wholes, then we can say that the whole on Haslanger account is a social group, which has a structure and members. A social group influences its members by using its structure. Furthermore, this influence is in the shape of mereological constraint: the constraint is a feature of the part-whole relations. This can be an answer to Ross' first challenge.

Ross' second challenge was that how we should identify the whole that matters for explanations. I think this challenge consists of two parts: a metaphysical part and the epistemic part. The metaphysical part is that what the wholes and individuals that are parts of the wholes are. And the epistemic part is that how we can identify this whole.

The answer to the metaphysical part of the challenge is obvious. The whole that matters in explanation is a relevant social group, which has some members as its parts. This social group is unified and has boundaries, so there is no metaphysical challenge for that. The epistemic problem, however, seems to be more of an empirical problem. Social scientists can ascertain which social group is pertinent to the explanation by empirical inquiries. Sometimes finding the relevant social group is easy, sometimes it's not. But a problem very similar to this also exists in causal explanations. In causal explanations, we know there is a cause and effect. But it is certainly not the case that it's always easy to find the relevant cause(s). As a matter of the fact, part of the task of scientists is to find the relevant causes.

Now, I will turn to Ross' causal account and compare it to Haslanger's account.

4.4 A causal view of social structures as constraints

Ross (2023) argues for a causal account of structural explanations. She contends social structures by playing a causal role can act as constraints. She relies on Dretske's distinction between structuring and triggering causes.

Dretske (1997) argues that there are different levels of explanations and they correspond to the distinction between triggering causes and structuring causes. Consider there is a cause C, and an effect E. If we ask why E occurs, we can answer C causes E. This is the triggering cause. But, suppose now we ask a different question: what causes [C causes E]? The answer to this question is the structuring cause. Dretske (1997) puts it as follows himself:

> In looking for the cause of a process, we are sometimes looking for the triggering event: what causes the C which caused the M. At other times we are looking for the event or events that shaped or structured the process: what caused C to cause M rather than something else. The first type of cause, the triggering cause, causes the process to occur now. The second type of cause, the structuring cause, is responsible for its being this process, one having M as its product, that occurs now…There is a clear difference between explaining why, on the one hand, Clyde stood up then and explaining, on the other hand, why what he did then was stand up (why he stood up then). He stood up then because that was when the queen entered, or when he saw the queen enter, the room. He stood up then as a gesture of respect. The difference between citing the triggering cause of a process (the cause of the C which causes M) and what I have been calling its structuring cause (the cause of C's causing M) reflects this difference. (pp.42-43)

So the main idea behind Dretske's distinction between triggering and structuring causes is that the structuring causes limit different possibilities of the final outcome.

Applying this idea to social structural explanations, Ross gives an account of social structural explanations, which is based on an interventionist account of causal explanations. Ross argues that social structures are causes that constrain and guide the final effects. Ross claims that these are not the only causes. Besides social structures, there are individualistic causes that are due to individuals' agencies like their beliefs, desires, etc. These two causes are interdependent and they both play important roles in giving rise to some effects.

In what follows, I will raise some worries to Ross' account. These worries are not insurmountable. They can be seen as some tentative challenges that Ross' account might face. As I already said, Ross holds structural causes and individuals' causes interact to give rise to some phenomenon. Now, what is the nature of this interaction? My worry is as follows: which of these causes are more influential in determining what phenomenon occurs? Naturally, there are two possible options for Ross. She could say in some cases individuals' causes are more influential in determining the outcome. In that case, a question arises as to the importance of social structural explanations: if individuals' causes are more influential, then why are social structural explanations explanatory at all?

Alternatively, Ross could say that there are some cases where the social structures (as structuring causes) are more influential in determining the outcome. In fact there are some cases where Ross claims that the social structure is the main cause of an event. Consider the following example by Ross.

> Jason has a factory job that starts at 6am and he commutes via a city bus. He takes the first available morning bus and manages the 45-minute commute to arrive on time. As Jason is poor, he lacks financial and other resources that would allow for alternative travel options. After financial changes, the city implements cutbacks which eliminate Jason's bus route. The early route he usually takes is discontinued and there are no other routes to get him to work on time. After the manager states that no other shifts are available, Jason cannot arrive on time, and he loses his job. (p.67)

In this example, Ross holds that the main cause that Jason loses his job is the social structure, bus transit availability. So the cause that Jason does not go to work anymore is the social structure. But, what about the individuals' causes, namely, Jason's boss' decision to fire Jason? It seems that this is a cause too, and what's more, both of these causes are sufficient for Jason not going to work. If that's the case, then Ross' account has the potential to fall prey to causal overdetermination. The idea of causal over determination can be described by Schaffer (2003)'s example. Suppose two rocks shatter a window at once. Now, even throwing one rock is sufficient for the shattering of the window. In this case, when there are two sufficient causes, there is a causal overdetermination.

There are various kinds of overdetermination and some think all of them are problematic for example, Bernstein (2016). Others think there are some kinds that are not problematic, for example Schaffer (2003); Sider (2003). As I said, my aim here is not to raise a serious objection to Ross' account, and I do not mean to claim that Ross' account always leads to overdetermination. I only aim at showing that Ross's account, at least according to this example that she gives, has the potential to face causal overdetermination.

On the other hand, Haslanger's account does not face such a problem. On Haslanger's account, social structures and individuals' agencies are not two interacting and competing causes in determining the outcome. Individuals' agencies such as their beliefs, desire, actions, decisions, etc., are always the only causes that determine the outcome. Social structures only non-causally influence individual's agencies. This non-causal influence can be understood in terms of the constraining feature of social group membership. Social groups create some roles for their members to play. In this way, they constrain and shape their agencies.

An example could further illuminate this view.[17] A couple have just had a baby, and they have formed a family. After the birth of their child, the mother decides to quit her job to raise her child. The mother has decided to quit her job and give up her financial independence against her will.

[17]This example is inspired by Haslanger's own example (Haslanger, 2016, p.122).

Now, what explains this phenomenon? Haslanger explains this phenomenon by appealing to the structure of hetero-normative family[18], and how it can be constraining for the mother. On the view I proposed, this family is a social group, which has both a structure and some individuals as members. The social group imposes some roles to its members. And this is in virtue of this membership that individuals' agencies are constrained and shaped. The mother quits her job because she has to, due to her membership in the social group, i.e., the family. Now, the important thing is that the social structure of this social group does not play a causal role. It plays a mereological role in the constitution of the social group. The only cause that determines the mother quitting her job is her own action and decision (which in turn is shaped by her being a member of this family).

I will end this section by saying that although I have raised some objections to Ross' account, there is still space for her account in addition to Haslanger's account.

As Ross also notes, the kind of social structures she works with are things like social policies. She also claims that this kind of social structures are external to the main process. I will interpret this claim as follows: this kind of social structure that Ross works with is external to a collection of people. In contrast, as I already stated, the kind of social structure Haslanger works with is the networks of relations between some individuals. This kind of social structure is internal to a group of individuals.

Now, the fact that a social structure is external to a group of individuals does not lead to the conclusion that that social structure cannot play a constitutive role in the composition of social groups. As we have seen feature social groups have their structures external to them, but still those structures play a constitutive role in the composition of those social groups.

However, it all depends on if we want to consider a collection of individuals that a social policy applies to, a social group. Social groups are always mentioned by their paradigm examples, such as

[18] A family consisting of a man and a woman, and their children.

sports teams, organizations, women, etc. So, a collection of individuals that a social policy applies to, might not be among the *kinds* of social groups that philosophers and social scientists agree on. I will not take a stand on this issue. If that is the case, then this collection of individuals are not to be considered a social group. And, the external social structure, i.e., the social policy, which applies to them, plays a causal role and partakes in causal explanations, as Ross argues.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have sought to argue that Haslanger's account of social structural explanations is built on a theory of social groups. My first aim was to identify this theory of social group based on the important features of Haslanger's account of social structural explanations. My second aim was to use this theory of social groups to clarify and improve Haslanger's account.

In section 1, I showed that why Haslanger thinks there is a need for social structural explanations in addition to individualistic explanations. I also extracted the most important feature of Haslanger's account, which was the notion of social constraint in terms of parthood relations (or mereology).

In section 2, I focused on investigating which mereological theory of composite material objects has the potential to capture Haslanger's idea of social constraint. I divided the theories into two groups: theories based on the principle of unrestricted composition; and theories based on the principle of restricted composition. I showed the problems that are usually attributed to the principle of unrestricted composition and the theories based on that. I also argued, that theories based on the principle of unrestricted composition are not bale to capture the Haslanger's idea of social constraint. However, I showed that hylomorphic theories, especially Koslicki's theory has the potential to capture Haslanger's idea of social constraint.

In section 3, I turned to hylomorphic theories of social groups. My main aim was to provide a framework to apply the notion of mereological constraint in Koslicki's account to social groups. I argued that Ritchie's account with more additional features from Passinsky's account can provide this framework. I also argued that social a feature group such as *women* can be understood as a structured whole, which has their structures externally.

In section 4, I argued that the idea of social constraint in Haslanger's account of social structural explanations can be understood as the constraining feature of social group membership in the

hylomorphic framework. It follows that a hylomorphic theory of social groups can be viewed as the foundation for Haslanger's account of social structural explanations. This can be considered a point in favor of theories of social groups based on the hylomorphic framework. I also use the hylomorphic framework to clarify some problems and highlight the non-causal aspect of Haslanger's account.

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