**David Papineau**

**Philosophy of Biology**

**6AANA050/7AAN2057**

**Semester 1 2021-22**

**Strand Building S -2.8 Mondays 1600-1700**

**Lecture 10**

**Race . . . (cont)**

**Are minimal races biologically significant?**

Do these mixed ancestries rule out the idea of human subspecies? Not necessarily. There’s nothing to say a species or subspecies can’t start as a hybrid, and then become distinctive because of reproductive isolation.

Lewontin showed that only about 5% of human genetic diversity is due to variation between traditional races: *African, Caucasian, American, East Asian, Oceanic*.

More recently others (Edwards, Sesardic, Spencer) have come back and argued that if you focus on the way traits are *correlated* within subgroups, we get something like traditional races.

Much is made of how the HGDP (Human Genome Diversity Panel) recovered the traditional groupings *African, Caucasian, American, East Asian, Oceanic* when they asked the computer to sort humans in the five groups (K=5) that maximize the within-group similarities. Hochman (J Phil 2013) comes back and says these results are insignificant.

At this stage it’s not clear what the issue is. Some quick points:

* It’s not clear how far these differences are due to selection operating on reproductively isolated populations, as opposed to simply differing ancestral origins.
* The differences don’t show sharp discontinuities, suggesting that even if selective pressures have played a role, they might just be due to graded environmental conditions, rather than any reproductive isolation.
* We might have scientifically recovered a bit of common sense, but that doesn’t show we’ve recovered anything worth calling *subspecies*. The between-group variation remains small.
* There’s nothing special (beyond recovering a bit of common sense) about setting K=5. We could get similar but not so familiar divisions at finer or coarser grains.
* And why anyway are we so fixed on subspecies defined *genetically*? That suggests that the defenders of the significant subspecies idea are hankering for something like essentialist races.

**Sex and Gender**

We’re going to discuss and compare *biological sex across species*, *human biological sex*, *human gender*, and *gender identity*, among other issues.

**Biological Sex Across Species**

Nearly all organisms mix DNA when they reproduce (probably to help deal with parasites).

Why have two types of gametes? Once we have fertilization/zygotes, one strategy is to produce many cheap gametes, in the hope of getting lucky once. But then it will be advantageous to make high-end gametes, being sure of fertilization, to ensure viability.

This gives a viable *cross-species* notion of *female/male* (it’s not penis/vagina, which is in fact reversed in a few insect species). It’s ovum/sperm (resource-rich vs zillions) from ovaries/testes. Various consequences *tend to* follow: females tend to be selective, males promiscuous, males competitive (stronger, ornamented), females in many species more given to incubation and parental care. (But note seahorses and pipefish, in which “males” ie sperm-producers incubate the eggs and most of these traits are reversed.)

If female/male are good natural kinds, what kinds of kinds are they? We have species and other biological taxa as historical kinds. But not all female/males have a common origin. We can view them as a sort of *functional kinds* akin to *aerial insectivores*. Their similarities derive from similar selective pressures.

**Human Biological Sex**

Humans differentiated by XX/XY chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal and external genitalia and reproductive organs.

Until c 7 weeks embryos have bipotential gonads. Part of Y chromosome directs development of testes in males around 8 weeks, which then release hormones (androgens) which produce further sexual differentiation, up to and after puberty.

It’s a complicated process that does not always proceed as above. *Androgen insensitivity syndrome* (AIS) can lead XY people to develop female characteristics, while *congenital adrenal hyperplasia* (CAH) can have the reverse upshot.

What kind of kinds are *human females/males*? They stand to the cross-species functional kind *female/male* as say *swallows* stand to *aerial insectivore*. (Do females/males all have common ancestors qua females/males? Maybe, for males anyway.)

**Gender**

*Gender* is the term used to refer to the social roles associated with biological sex. We can think of these as *social* kinds, involving a range of gender-specific behaviours, occupations, attitudes, etc.

Many social kinds are historical kinds, where people adopt common characteristics because they have *copied* them from prior models. (Roman Catholics, goths, Japanese women, . . . Ian Hacking is very interesting on ‘looping kinds’, suggesting that categories like *multiple personality disorder* or *ADHD* influence people to conform to them.)

This copying model is one account of gender as a kind. But it is in tension with the idea that there is one common *woman* gender that applies across all societies and periods.

Perhaps that’s right, but another model is that gender is a sort of *functional kind*, produced (not by natural selection as in biology) but by differential male power exerted in favour of male interests. This promises to account for the similarities observed in gender role across human societies. (Theodore Bach has some interesting papers on this.)

It also reinforces the idea that gender roles should be resisted/could be reconfigured/are a matter of choice.

**Gender Identity**

But what of ‘gender identity’? Is that a matter of choice?

Note that along with a division into (a) biological sex + assigned gender, humans are differentiated by (b) sexual orientation (towards, females, males, or both) and (c) gender self-identification.

Even if we stick to binary categories, these three distinctions dissociate in every way (thus giving eight categories).

It’s not clear sexual orientation or gender self-identification are matters of *choice*. In many cases they seem to be fixed at an early age. It is possible they involve some of the same developmental mechanisms that are responsible for biological sex.

Note in this connection that sexual orientation is typically towards biological sex, not gender.

**Gender and Ethnicity**

Still, even if biological sex (orientation, self-identity) are not *just* social categories, that leaves it open what distinctive *social* roles (if any) should *attach* to those biological categories in the future.

Sally Haslanger draws an interesting analogy:

Sex : Gender :: Race : Ethnicity

Last week we talked about race as a biological reality, and race as a social construction. ‘Ethnicity’ roughly refers to the socially constructed element of race, shorn of any discriminatory or oppressive dimension.

Think of an ethnicity as involving an awareness of a common heritage of language, cultural achievements, religious history, and social practices.

Ethnicities may often be assigned on the basis on minimal biological race, but surely we don’t want to eliminate them on those grounds. Similarly, even if *some* kind of gender roles remain attached to biological sex, they needn’t necessarily be rejected for that reason.

**Transitioning**

How close is this analogy between sex/gender and race/ethnicity?

Many of us are sympathetic to people who wish to transition to a new gender.

But when, a couple of years ago, it turned out that Rachel Dolezal, who had no African ancestors, was passing as an African-American, she was widely condemned and subject to ridicule.

Rebecca Tuvel challenges this asymmetry. (Many were outraged that an uninvolved person should so much as raise the issue. But surely we all need an informed understanding of gender and ethnicity.)

Let us assume that the question is transitioning to a new gender/ethnicity, not sex/race. (Maybe that latter would be the ideal, but it’s not clear it’s biologically possible.)

What arguments might show that there’s an asymmetry and that Tuvel is wrong? Some possible answers:

(1) Some people can effectively be born with “gender dysphoria” (I’m in the wrong body), but not with the feeling of being similarly mis-raced. (*But* (a) is gender transitioning only legitimate for such early-onset dysphoria? and (b) is it obvious a child brought up by an adopted race won’t feel similarly?)

(2) You can’t *become* an indigenous American, say, just by *deciding* to be one. (*But* how different in this respect is the sex/gender case?)

(3) If you’re an indigenous American, say, you will have suffered a lifetime of

discrimination and related experiences, which won’t be shared by someone who chooses to opt into your identity. (*But* how different in this respect is the sex/gender case?)