The normal, the natural and the good: Generics and ideology

The Normal, the Natural and the Good: Generics and Ideology[1]

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1. Introduction

The idea of "what's normal" has two importantly different uses. On one hand, "what's normal" is a

statistical concept: what's normal is what is statistically probable. On the other hand, "what's normal," is

a normative concept. What's normal is how things "ought" to be, or how things are when circumstances

are favorable.[2] The normative sense of 'normal,' can be linked to the historical concept of essence.

Things manifest their nature or essence under normal conditions; in other conditions they emerge

deformed: a normal pregnancy will result in a normal offspring. Widespread environmental toxins could

have the effect that most pregnancies were not normal and that the majority of offspring were deformed.

In such a case the statistically normal is not, in the normative sense, normal. It is crucial, on this

understanding, that what's natural is not inevitable. Accidents happen; the natural course of things can be

disrupted. But what's normal, in the normative sense, is presumed to be how things should be; they are

favorable for things to manifest what they truly are. What's abnormal or unnatural is to be avoided.

Moreover, the normatively normal is invoked to back social norms: women *ought* to stay home with their

babies because it is in the nature of things, or in the nature of things when circumstances are favorable.

The thought seems to be that we ought to make it possible for things to manifest their natures rather than

be deformed. (Haslanger 2012, Ch. 1) As Louise Antony puts it: "So while our natures don't quite tell us

what we have to do, they do tell us what we have to do to be happy." (Antony 2000, 9)

The background assumptions connecting these ideas of natures, norms, and normality promote

confusion. For example, what's statistically normal for a kind is often interpreted as what is due to the

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[1] This paper draws heavily on my earlier work, especially Haslanger 2012, Ch 17. Special thanks to Elizabeth Harman, Justin Khoo, and Stephen Yablo for discussions related to this work.

[2] Note that "under normal conditions," does not mean "under the most common conditions." For example, see Pettit 1999.

nature of that kind, even if the statistically normal is caused by unfavorable or socially manipulated circumstances; and what's due to the nature of the kind is often judged to be good or worth protecting (what *ought to be*) even if we are in a position to improve on what's natural. But what's "normal" is not always natural, and what's natural is not always best.

Interestingly, the confusions just sketched are reinforced by the fact that we use generics to state all three sorts of claims: statistical regularities, claims about natures, and claims about norms. Consider:

1) Boys don't cry.

2) Women are more nurturing than men.

3) Friends don't let friends drive drunk.

4) Librarians are punctilious.

Each could be a statement about a statistical regularity, about the nature of the kind(s), or it could express a norm about how members of the kind(s) ought to be. This suggests that attention to the use of generics will be helpful in understanding how the confusions occur and have problematic effects.

In previous work (Haslanger 2012, Ch 17; Langton et al. 2012), I've argued that in many contexts the utterance of a generic pragmatically implicates a claim about the kind or kinds in question. For example, saying that 'Women are more nurturing than men," usually implicates that there is something *about what it is to be a women* and *about what it is to be a man* that explains their supposed differential capacities to nurture. Considering a different case above, in saying 'Friends don't let friends drive drunk," one usually implicates that there is something *about what it is to be a friend*, that entails that one stops friends from drunk driving; 'librarians are punctilious,' likewise, implicates that there is something about how librarians *are,* i.e., *about what it is to be a librarian* that requires this. If this is correct, then an utterance of a generic will normally add to the common ground of the conversation a claim about a feature's naturalness, aptness or goodness *for the kind.*

In this paper I want to consider the idea that in contexts where it is assumed that what's natural or good (at least for good things) is how things should be, that is, where such assumptions are part of the common ground, then the utterance of a generic enables a short inference to the normative conclusion,

giving the generic a kind of normative force. If things ought to express their natures, and the utterance of statements such as "Boys don't cry" implicates that, by nature, boys don't cry, then it follows that boys ought not to cry and we should reinforce boys' nature not to cry so they are not "deformed." Because the language of 'nature' might seem awkward for social kinds, then the point can be stated in terms of essence, or *what it is to be*. (It is noteworthy that there is a use of 'the nature of X' where it does not presuppose that the nature is *natural* as opposed to non-natural or social, e.g., 'the nature of justice,' or 'the nature of love.') If it is part of the common ground that we should promote and support kinds of things that are good, such as friends and librarians, and what it is to be a thing of that kind requires exemplifying a certain feature, then we ought to promote what it takes to have that feature. So if it is a shared assumption that one ought behave in ways that manifest friendship to one's friends, and part of *what it is to be a friend* is to prevent friends from driving drunk, then the normative conclusion follows: one ought not let friends drive drunk.

There is no question that generics are slippery, and their contribution to the common ground of a conversation is highly context-sensitive.   This slipperiness, I believe, is an important factor in reinforcing schemas and stereotypes and aid in the perpetuation of ideology. In what follows, I will review the argument that the utterance of a generic claim ordinarily permits one to infer that the fact in question obtains by virtue of something about nature of the kind so described. I will then turn to consider how this account can accommodate normative generics, arguing that an account in terms of implicature is, for some purposes, preferable to one that postulates polysemy (Leslie "Real Men").   On my view, what generics convey is highly sensitive to context. But this sensitivity is dangerous, for different parties to a conversation may not realize how the common ground is being altered once generics are accepted. For example, where there are common background assumptions about the correspondence between what's normal, what's natural, and what's good for a kind of thing, generics allow us to slide from claims about how things tend to be, to the belief that they are just as they should be.   Resistance is thereby unmotivated, perhaps even unthinkable. In the examples I'm most interested in, however, this implication is unwarranted.

2. Generics

What is being claimed when someone says, 'Birds fly," or "Ducks lay eggs"? Not *all* birds fly. And not *all* ducks lay eggs (only the females do). Is the claim intentionally vague? Is it elliptical for a different claim? In fact, generalizations that omit quantifiers such as 'some,' 'all,' or 'many' fall into the linguistic category of generics, and generics call for a quite different analysis than ordinary quantified statements. Plausibly, generics are statements about kinds rather than individuals. (Leslie 2008, 21).[3] We are not abbreviating an enumeration of cases, but are saying something about the group as an open-ended class.

In considering generics, we might ask: what is the *meaning* of a generic? Or, we might ask, what are generics typically used to say? The study of meaning is semantics. The study of what we say – including the speech act and its effect on communication - is pragmatics. I propose that attention to the pragmatics of typical generics will illuminate ways in which they can be seriously misleading. It is not my goal in this paper to offer a full-blown theory of generics. My efforts are much more modest. I'm interested in how the utterance of generics in certain circumstances can contribute to the formation and perpetuation of ideology and the social structures that the ideology supports. Sarah-Jane Leslie characterizes the sort of project I have in mind: the issue is not "the truth-conditions of generics, but rather with the effects of generic language on social cognition" (Leslie "Carving," 1).[4] Because social cognition is crucial in creating and sustaining social practices and the social world more broadly, accounts

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[3] Note that this is a different claim from one saying that the generic is about the kind, e.g., dodos are extinct. See Leslie 2008, 5, fn3. Generics seem to be concerned with open-ended generalizations. Enumerative generalizations and open-ended generalizations differ in ways that matter for confirmation and induction: 'this coin in my pocket is silver' doesn't inductively confirm 'all coins in my pocket are silver' because it doesn't lend credibility to the untested cases. In addition, there are a number of issues concerning the use of bare plurals that deserve consideration (Carlson 1977). In some cases, bare plurals seem to have existential rather than generalizing force, e.g., 'he grew tomatoes in that plot,' or 'flour moths have invaded my kitchen.' I will only be considering the generic bare plural.

[4] By selecting this quote from Leslie, I don't mean to suggest that she is only ever concerned with social cognition rather than, say, semantics. Leslie is engaged in a broad range of projects that span philosophy of language, linguistics, psychology, and social theory. Our projects overlap, but do not entirely coincide. On the "conceptually based approach" to generics, see also Prasada et al 2013.

of social cognition are key elements of critical social theory. The tools we will need to get started are the notion of a generic, a generic essence, and the common ground of a conversation.

a. Kinds of Generics

The first hypothesis I'd like us to consider is that with generics of the form Ks are F ('tigers have stripes'), a K is F ('a tiger is ferocious'), or K_1s are more G than K_2s ('tigers are more dangerous than cheetahs') there is normally an implication that the connection between the Ks and F or G holds primarily by virtue of some important fact about the Ks *as such*, or by virtue of *what it is to be a K*.[5] For simplicity I will focus on bare plural non-comparatives such as 'birds fly,' 'women are nurturing,' ' boys don't cry," rather than statements that explicitly compare kinds or groups.[6]

> As mentioned above, generics of the form Ks are F cannot be understood as elliptical quantifications, for in contrast to quantifications,

> > [Generics'] truth conditions seem to be enormously complex. Why, for example, is 'birds lay eggs' true, while 'birds are female' is false? It is, after all, only the female birds that lay eggs. And why is 'mosquitoes carry the West Nile virus' true, and 'books are paperbacks' false given that less than one percent of mosquitoes carry the virus while over eighty percent of books are paperbacks? Such puzzling examples abound. (Leslie, "Original Sin" 2)

Although there is no consensus on the best account of generics, Sarah-Jane Leslie (2008) suggests convincingly that generics are the expression of a very primitive "default mode of generalizing," that picks up on significant or striking properties and links them to a psychologically salient kind. Very roughly, the idea is that we have a very basic capacity to sort the world into kinds of things that seem to

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[5] I'm actually not sure whether it is better to consider it an implication or a presupposition. I'm willing to adjust my account to accommodate evidence for either. My goal in this paper is programmatic and I am aware that much more work needs to be done on the details.

[6] There is important research comparing the use of bare plural generics and those beginning with an indefinite article. Characteristic or principled generics can be expressed in either form, but statistical generics may be expressed using a bare plural, but not a singular indefinite form. (See Prasada et al. 2013, 406)

behave in similar ways and generics highlight striking or important features that members of these kinds exhibit.

On Leslie's view, there are four kinds of cases (2008, 43; "Hillary Clinton"):

- *Characteristic generics:* How can we accommodate cases such as 'birds lay eggs' or even 'bees lay eggs' if the majority of the kind don't lay eggs, and cases such as 'police officers fight crime' even if there is no crime in their district? Leslie proposes that we have background knowledge that

  > ...provides an outline of information to be gathered about a new kind; characteristic dimensions provide a learner with an informational template. When a value is found for a characteristic dimension of a kind, it is hereby generalized to the kind by the basic generalization mechanism, and so the generic that predicates that property of the kind is accepted. Ducks, being an animal kind, has reproduction as a characteristic dimension, so the inductive learner looks for a value to fill the dimension; even limited experience will deliver *laying eggs* as the appropriate value, and so the property is generalized to the kind and 'ducks lay eggs' is accepted as true. (Leslie 2008, 32-3)

  In the case of artifacts, institutions, and social kinds, the template has us look for information about the function or purpose of the kind and this explains the truth of statements such as 'police officers fight crime' (Leslie 2008, 43).

- *Striking property generics:* How can we accommodate such cases as 'mosquitoes carry the West Nile virus,' even though only a small fraction do? In such cases, she maintains, "The sentence attributes harmful, dangerous, or appalling properties to the kind. More generally, if the property in question is the sort of property of which one would be well served to be forewarned, even if there were only a small chance of encountering it, then generic attributions of the property are intuitively true" (Leslie 2008, 15).

Leslie goes on to suggest that in order for these generics to be true, being a member of the kind must be a reasonably good predictor of the striking property, and members that don't have the property must be disposed, under the right circumstances, to have it (Leslie 2008, 41).

- *Statistical generics:* How can we accommodate ordinary generics such as 'cars have radios,' 'barns are red,' and 'tigers have stripes'? Leslie proposes that if it is a case where neither of the other options applies, and there are no positive counterinstances (it is not the case that the tigers who don't have stripes have bold pink spots), then the generic is true if almost all of the kind (tigers) has the attributed property (stripes) (Leslie 2008, 43).

More recently, Leslie has added another category:

- *Normative generics:* "It has long been noted that some generics such as "boys don't cry" or "a woman puts family before her career" do not seem to express any kind of inductive generalization about the empirical world, but instead have a certain kind of normative force." (Leslie "Hillary Clinton," 2) In fact, it seems perfectly consistent to believe both that "boys don't cry" and that "boys cry." Leslie proposes that in cases of this kind, we should postulate lexical polysemy in the subject position. If 'boys' might be understood either as either normatively loaded: "those who exemplify the ideals associated with being a boy," or as flat "those who satisfy the ordinary conditions for being a boy," then there is no contradiction (Leslie "Hillary Clinton," 5).

Leslie's account of generics is controversial (and also more complicated than I have suggested here), but for my purposes, it is not necessary to accept her account in full detail, for my emphasis will be on pragmatics; rather than asking what generics *mean,* or under what conditions they are *true*, we are asking: what do we use generic statements to say? The point to take from Leslie is that generics are a distinctive kind of statement that should not be treated as ordinary quantified statements, and that they draw heavily on background knowledge and patterns of inference to highlight a significant property (either characteristic, striking, common, or ideal) of a kind.

b. Essences, Natures, and Coincidences

The notion of essence has a complicated and sometimes problematic history. Within the Aristotelian tradition, each member of a "genuine" kind, e.g., an individual tiger, has an essence which consists of a set of qualities that explains the characteristic behavior of that tiger and other things of that kind and is necessary for the individual to be what it is.[7] All members of the kind *tiger* have the *tiger essence* though they may fail to fully exhibit it due to interfering circumstances. The generic essence of the kind *human being* is what individual human beings have essentially that makes them human and explains their distinctive human behavior. Some Aristotelians claim that each individual has its own unique essence, an *objectual essence*, that individuates it from others of the same kind. However, the fundamental notion of essence within this tradition is of a type or kind. When we ask what it is to be a human being, or an artichoke, we are looking for the nature of *human beings* or *artichokes*. And the essentialist project is, at its core, explanatory: Why does this individual thing behave as it does? Because it is the kind of thing it is; this behavior is normal/natural/right for things of that kind.

This notion of generic essence can be extended beyond Aristotelian kinds. We can consider the essence of a type or kind that individuals instantiate only accidentally, e.g., we can ask not only what it is to be a human being, but also what it is to be a mother, to be a citizen of the United States, or to be just. It might be that there is something it is *to be a mother,* an essence of motherhood, if you will, even if no one is essentially a mother. This is a generic essence of the kind (or type) mothers: that in virtue of which someone is (or is not) a member of the kind. Again, the project is explanatory: Why did Martha rush to comfort Aiesha? Because Martha is her mother. One hardly needs to add: "And mothers protect and care for their children." It is assumed that we all know that to be a mother is to be a caregiver to one's children (even if not all mothers are).

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[7] By a "genuine kind" here I mean, following the Aristotelian tradition, kinds that are such that individual members are essentially members. *Human being* is arguably a genuine kind because I could not exist and be other than human (or so it seems). *Mother* is not a genuine kind because I could exist and not be a mother. In what follows, I will use the term 'kind' or 'type' without assuming that "genuine" kinds are Aristotelian kinds in the sense just described.

Following Kit Fine (1994) and Fabrice Correia (2006), it is useful to consider essentialist statements as making a claim about the ground of certain facts in natures. On this approach, G is part of the generic essence of F, just in case:

Fs are G by virtue of the nature of F-ing.

G-ing is something Fs do by virtue of what it is to be an F.

It is true in virtue of what it is to F, that Fs are G.

It is important to emphasize that in the sense intended here, the generic essence of F is not to be understood simply in terms of what is entailed by being F. Generalizations of this sort are functioning as explanatory claims, allowing that there are different forms of explanation that might be relevant (formal, causal, material, teleological).[8] The psychological research on generics supports such a link to explanation. For example, Prasada et al (2013) suggest that:

Generics reflect the three perspectives we can take when thinking and reasoning about kinds of things. We can focus on the formal dimension by attending to principled connections. In doing so, we notice certain formal explanatory relations as well as the basis for certain normative and statistical expectations. Alternatively, we can focus on the material dimension by attending to the material constitution of the instances and thus their causal dispositions to behave in one or another manner in appropriate circumstances. Finally, we may adopt a perspective where we do not attend to either the formal or material characteristics of instances of a kind, but simply note the statistical connections that exist between instances of the kind and various properties." (418)

Essences are invoked as part of an explanatory project that assumes that some properties are prior (metaphysically, epistemically) to others (Fine 1994). Moreover, if we grant that natures may not always be fully realized, statements of generic essence may not even support true universal generalizations, much

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[8] My invocation of "essence" may seem inapt, given some understandings of essence as necessary features of individuals and/or kinds. I am drawing, I hope obviously, on an Aristotelian notion of essences as serving primarily an explanatory function, though not restricting myself to Aristotelian kinds. More needs to be said (below) about statistical generics that don't implicate claims about generic essence.

less necessary generalizations. Even if Fs are by nature G, it may not be that every case of F is a case of G, for there may be interfering conditions; Fs, however, are typically G, due to what it is to be F.

Ordinary English speakers don't often use the term 'essence,' and although the term 'nature,' as in 'a dog's nature,' is more common, we seem to find other ways of speaking about natures. Consider, claims such as, 'fish swim' or 'lilacs bloom in spring.' A speaker uttering the former would seem to be suggesting that there is an important connection between being a fish and being able to swim, that the ability is somehow grounded in what it is to be a fish; similarly for lilacs and their blooming season. It appears, now, that there is a close connection between the kind of generalization we find in at least some generics (F-ing is a characteristic dimension of Ks; F-ing is striking and Ks are disposed to F; being a K is a good predictor for being F) and claims concerning generic essence. We will return to consider this connection shortly.

c. Common Ground

In order for us to communicate, we must take certain things for granted as background to our conversation, i.e., we must presuppose certain things as *common ground* (Stalnaker 2002, 701; see also Stalnaker 1998; Lewis 1979). Stalnaker suggests that "to presuppose a proposition in the pragmatic sense is to take its truth for granted, and to assume that others involved in the context do the same….Presuppositions are propositions implicitly *supposed* before the relevant linguistic business is transacted" (2002, 279-80). In the simplest case the common ground consists of the shared beliefs of the parties to the conversation; the belief may be wholly tacit, however, "presuppositions are probably best viewed as complex dispositions which are manifested in linguistic behavior" (Stalnaker 1970, 279). In the more complex cases the common ground can involve something less than full belief, e.g., assumption, pretense, presumption (Stalnaker 2002, 704) and also desire and other attitudes (Langton 2012).

The common ground of a conversation is constantly changing, for as one party to the conversation speaks, the other(s) will at least adjust their beliefs to include the fact that the first party spoke. Typically other beliefs will change as well. For example, if you invite me to lunch and I reply,

"Sorry, I have to pick up my daughter from work," you would plausibly conclude that I have a daughter and that she has a job of some sort. Conversation conveys information by means other than by what is explicitly stated.

One way inexplicit communication occurs is through *implicature,* another through *presupposition accommodation*. The idea is that in ordinary conversations in which we judge each other to be competent and cooperative, we aim to achieve and maintain equilibrium in the common ground, to share presuppositions at least for the purposes of the conversation.[9] For example, if it is clear from my utterance that I am presupposing something then, unless you have reason to suspect my sincerity or credibility, you can legitimately infer the proposition I presuppose; moreover, I can assume that the common ground has adjusted to include my presupposition, unless you indicate otherwise. In conversation, we rely on general maxims that govern the common ground, but what constitutes the common ground is also always up for clarification and renegotiation. For example, if, after hearing my comment about my daughter, my interlocutor might reply, "But I thought your daughter was only twelve years old," indicating hesitation to accept the proposition that my daughter has a job into the common ground. Should this occur, we need to backtrack and repair. I might correct the assumption that she is only twelve and report that she is eighteen; or I might clarify, "You're right, she is volunteering at the Science Museum over the summer." At that point, the common ground may be further updated with new beliefs about my daughter's interests, opportunities and such. Similarly, the updating and correction of the common ground happens through implicature. If I write a letter of recommendation to graduate school for a student in my class and spend most of the letter expressing enthusiasm about his handwriting, you may infer that I do not think well of him as a philosopher (Grice 1961). Often we say more by what we don't say than by what we do.

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[9] It is a difficult and contested matter how to distinguish what enters the common ground through implicature and what enters through presupposition. For my purposes, little hinges on this; what matters is that the common ground can be updated in ways that are not explicit and need not even be noticed by the audience or speaker. I will use the model of implicature to account for the examples we're looking at, but it may be that they are better handled differently.

Whenever something said in conversation introduces a new element into the common ground, the interlocutor has the option of blocking the move. Lewis uses the metaphor of "scorekeeping in a language game" to capture the dynamic process of updating. Negation is one device for blocking. Even if a statement made in conversation is literally true, one can deny the statement as a way to block what the statement conveys (either the implicature, or the presupposition); this is known as metalinguistic negation (Horn 1985).[10] A standard example is, "He's not meeting a woman, he's meeting his wife!" In short, one may reject a statement as untrue, or reject its implications, or both. When an utterance pragmatically implicates a falsehood, metalinguistic denial blocks that falsehood from entering the common ground.

It is worth emphasizing that the updating of the common ground is not a matter of what is *semantically* presupposed or implied by the proposition expressed by the speaker. Rather, common ground is a *pragmatic* notion that concerns what is presupposed by the speaker or what is implicated, given certain conversational maxims, by her utterance. Updating of the common ground is a dynamic process that depends on the particular conversation; however, there is considerable social pressure on those who want to communicate smoothly with others to conform their attitudes to the common ground of those around them.

d. Generics and Implication

Generics seem to be a heterogeneous class of statements that have a similar surface appearance. (Consider Leslie's four very different kinds: characteristic, striking property, statistical, normative.) On Leslie's view, generics express generalizations of different sorts. Considering normative generics, she accounts for the fact that 'boys don't cry,' and 'boys cry,' are compatible by postulating different semantic values for 'boys' in the two occurrences. The term 'boys' may have as its semantic value either ideal boys, or the set of ordinary boys. Thus, considering only the set of ideal boys, the generalization is true, even if it is false when considering all boys. Although Leslie's account draws on exceptionally

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[10] I recommend Horn 1985 (esp. §2) for a full discussion of metalinguistic negation with examples of some interest to feminists, e.g., "She's not a lady, she's a woman!" or "She's not an uppity broad, she's a strong, vibrant woman!"

interesting research concerning dual character concepts (Knobe et al 2011, 2013) and has fruitful

applications beyond what I am considering here (Leslie "Hillary Clinton"), it would be preferable to have

a more unified account of generics that did not require such lexical complexity, at least from a Gricean

point of view.

My own approach is to consider the use of generics in a broader range of contexts and to take

some of the differences Leslie points to as a function of what is in the common ground. Psychological

research on human tendencies to essentialize from an early age supports the idea that we all hold

substantive assumptions about kinds and essence (Gelman 2003). I suggest that these assumptions are, by

default, part of the common ground of conversation. In particular, I propose that the following

propositions play a role (See also Haslanger 2012, Ch. 1):

Essentialist Assumption: Robust (meaningful?) regularities are not accidental. They are due to the natures

of things.[11]

Normative Assumption: Things should express their natures and under normal circumstances they will.

Abnormal circumstances are not good and should be avoided or changed.

If these assumptions are default elements of the common ground, then we can explain some phenomena

Leslie points to in a different way.[12] For example, suppose that someone says:

Birds fly.

Given a background essentialism, we are likely to conclude: Birds are a kind of thing that flies. It is part

of their nature to fly. Given the normative assumption, we are likely to conclude further: Birds that don't

fly are anomalous. Either circumstances aren't normal (the bird has a broken wing that should be

repaired), or it is a weird/defective kind of bird.

More specifically, one can express the generalization using a quantified statement such as

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[11]I wonder if in some contexts we might also want to include: Only genuine kinds have natures? (See fn. 7 above.)
This may help explain why we are sometimes tempted to infer from a generalization such as: 'Good housekeepers
are (typically) women,' to a claim that seems to have essentialist implications: 'Women are good housekeepers.'
See Haslanger, in press.

[12] This proposal goes considerably beyond what I suggest in Haslanger 2012, Ch 17.

All [most/some] Fs are G.

One can also use a generic:

Fs are G.

An F is (a) G.

In choosing a generic, the focus of the generalization is on the kind rather than the members: one is saying *of a kind of thing (Fs),* that its members are, or are disposed to be G (or to G) *by virtue of being of the F-kind*. This suggests a robust regularity between F and G and, by virtue of *Essentialist Assumption,* that being G is somehow rooted in what it is to be an F: G-ing is what Fs do (or are disposed to do) by virtue of the nature/essence of Fness; the source of the G-ness is in being (an) F.[13] At least in some contexts, this implicates further, by virtue of the *Normative Assumption*, that it is right and good for Fs to be G, and Fs that are not G are defective.

This suggests that it is not necessary to rely on semantics to explain the force of characteristic, striking property or normative generics. Given the usefulness and universality of the default mode of generalizing that Leslie describes, if one asserts that Fs are G, then it is implicated (or presumed) that under "normal" circumstances it is something about being an F that makes an F a G, that Fs *as such* are disposed to be G.[14] This is a pragmatic implicature and can normally be defeated or canceled; and, depending on the context and what is already part of the common ground, the implicature may not even get off the ground. However, in conversations where we credit our interlocutor with the ability to recognize this default inference, we take their utterance of, say, 'Birds fly,' to introduce into the common ground the further generic essential 'Birds fly by virtue of what it is to be a bird,' or 'Birds, as such, fly.' The kind in question might also be a social kind, e.g., 'Librarians are punctilious,' 'Lawyers are verbally aggressive.'

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[13] On what it is to be a "source" of truth see Fine 1994.

[14] More should be said about why it is plausible that this presupposition or implicature is added to the common ground. Relevant support includes (i) further arguments for the value of the default mode of generalization and its connection to generics, (ii) further arguments concerning the relation between generics and inductive inference, (iii) the application of Gricean maxims of relevance and quantity, and (iv) the idea that the grammatically simpler a statement, the more paradigmatic the phenomenon described is implicated to be (Levinson 2000).

But what about statistical generics? How do they affect the common ground? Do they license the same inferences? Consider utterances of:

5) Cars have radios.

6) Barns are red.

7) Dogs don't eat pinecones.

In such cases, it is plausible that the utterance does not implicate that cars, barns and dogs have a generic essence involving radios, redness and pine cones, respectively.   Why not? What distinguishes these cases from the others? A first thought is that in normal conversations it is already part of the common ground that radios are not necessary for cars to function, barns are red simply by tradition in certain parts of the United States, and even though dogs will eat just about anything, pine cones are inedible. The shared background assumptions about the natures of the kinds in question prevent the implicature. But often the point of communication is to change the common ground, and to do so by contradicting what is already assumed. For example, I tell my family when I won't be home for dinner – sometimes simply by implication, e.g., "I'm going to the theater tonight." – because there is a default assumption that I will be sharing the table with them.

Another hypothesis is that the implicature depends on the point or purpose of making the claims in question. Consider 'Cars have radios.' Suppose my neighborhood has lost electrical power because of a storm (let's assume also that internet and cell reception has been disrupted). It is important to hear a weather report to prepare for what's to come. Someone might usefully point out, "Cars have radios." The purpose of this claim is not explanatory. It doesn't matter why cars have radios, and no intrinsic connection between cars and radios is required in order for the claim to be apt. Similarly, when would it make sense to assert that barns are red? Perhaps a foreigner is traveling in the Midwestern United States and wants to know how to distinguish a barn from a farmhouse. One defeasible clue is that barns in that region are (typically?) red. Again, the conversational project is not explanatory. Given that claims of generic essence are efforts to offer an explanation in terms of significant features of the kind in question, when an explanation is not being called for, there is no implicature.

Consider, however, 'Dogs don't eat pine cones.' Suppose I am planning to decorate my home for the winter holiday and will be having houseguests who are bringing their puppy. I'm not sure what sorts of decorations would be good, knowing that the dog could try to eat anything. My friend suggests, "Dogs don't eat pinecones," thinking that pinecones would be a good decorative option. In this case, there seems to be no implicature with respect to the nature or essence of dogs. As in the previous two cases, no explanation; no implicature. But suppose we are hiking in a pine forest and come across a starving stray dog. My companion asks, "Why is she so emaciated?" One might (somewhat rudely?) reply, "Dogs don't eat pine cones." Here I'm tempted to think that there is an implicature that dogs, as such, don't eat pinecones; dogs just aren't that sort of thing. This suggests that when generics are asserted to provide an explanation of a phenomenon, they (defeasibly) implicate that there is an explanatorily robust relationship between the kind and the property indicated. Because there are different sorts of explanation that might be called for (Prasada et al 2013), the generic may implicate a specific kind of relation that is relevant to the particular form of explanation.

My (rough) proposal, then, is that the *Essentialist* and *Normative Assumptions* are default parts of the common ground. When a conversation calls for an explanation and a generic is asserted, the conclusions they license are implicated. (*When* a conversation "calls for" an explanation is a difficult question I will not undertake to answer here.) If a generic is asserted when there isn't a demand for explanation, or when there is an attempt to block an implicature generated by the essentialist and/or normative assumptions, it functions simply as a statistical generic and there are no essentialist or normative implicatures. This suggests a hypothesis (that I will not be in a position to defend fully here): the multiple types of generics can be explained by postulating one basic type (perhaps statistical?) of generic, and accounting for the different uses of generics in terms of implicatures due to the prevalence of the *Essentialist* and *Normative Assumptions* in the common ground of conversation.

e. Rejecting Generics

Leslie argues that we should avoid using generics (Leslie "Carving"). Given that on her view the *Essentialist* and *Normative Assumptions* are built into the semantics of the generics, this is understandable. However, I'm tempted to think that the problem lies in entrenchment of the *Essentialist* and *Normative Assumptions* in the common ground. These assumptions play a role in daily life, even in contexts where we do not rely on generics. For example, the thought that homosexuality is uncommon is taken as evidence that it is unnatural and wrong. The effort to reveal that homosexuality is *not* uncommon is, correlatively, an effort to demonstrate that it is neither unnatural nor wrong. We should, of course, be careful to note that the use of generics can reinforce beliefs about norms and essence. But the best solution may be to confront the *Essentialist* and *Normative Assumptions* directly, rather than avoiding generics.

I'm also tempted to think that the apt use of statistical generics is sometimes important in blocking the problematic implicatures. Suppose I am at a sporting match and my young son is injured. He comes to the sidelines crying. The coach yells at him, "Stop it! Boys don't cry." The coach implicates that it is unnatural and wrong for boys to cry. It would be reasonable for me to block what the coach is saying to him by replying, "No, boys *do* cry!" If Leslie is right, then 'Boys don't cry' is a normative generic that means *Real/ideal boys don't cry.* However, in my reply, I appear to be contradicting the coach. What am I saying? Am I saying that Real/ideal boys do cry? Does my resistance commit me to gendered natures?

An interesting fact about generics is that the negation of a generic does not work like the negation of a quantificational statement. The negation of 'all birds fly,' is 'some birds don't fly.' The negation of 'ducks lay eggs,' is not 'some ducks don't lay eggs,' for of course 'ducks lay eggs' is compatible with 'some ducks (male ducks!) don't lay eggs.' When I claim 'Boys *do* cry!' in rejecting the coach's claim, I am not claiming that either some or all *real/ideal boys* cry, for I may reject the whole idea that there are gendered ideals for humans. Rather, I suggest, I am challenging the statistical generic, the purported genuine regularity that generates the essentialist and normative implicatures. I'm urging the coach to look

around and see all the boys who cry. How could it be so natural and right for boys to be tough, as he suggests, if the regularity he asserts is patently false. Leslie is keen to capture a *semantic* compatibility of 'Boys cry,' and 'Boys don't cry.' But this undermines my chance to contradict the coach. On my view, instead, there is a fact that directly refutes the coach's claim – the statistical generalization – and whose assertion in the conversation blocks the implicatures that he takes to follow. Moreover, I can assert that fact to undermine him, without taking any stand on whether boys have natures, or what such natures might be.

f. Stealth Accommodation

The fact that a proposition can be added to the common ground of a conversation without being explicitly articulated is significant, for that means false propositions may slip in without being noticed (Haslanger 2012, Ch 17; Langton et al 2012). For example, suppose a Chair of Department is asked about how a new junior colleague is adjusting to life in the department and he replies, "Well, she has never missed a class because of her baby." The implicature here, plausibly, is that there is some appropriate amount of time that an employee should be spending with her child, and the colleague has overstepped that limit (even if she has managed to do what's absolutely required). More vaguely, perhaps, there seems to be a further implicature that a woman's having a baby is in tension with meeting the demands of the job, or that women with babies tend to be unreliable in fulfilling their responsibilities.

Because these unstated propositions enter the common ground only by implicature, the speaker can dodge responsibility if challenged. Suppose the hearer does not want to accept the propositions into the common ground and says, "Are you kidding! She works harder than anyone else in the department." The Chair could reply, "I don't deny that. I said she has never missed a class, and she has never missed any meetings that I know of. She must have good arrangements for childcare that have allowed her to fulfill her responsibilities." But if the Chair's comment is allowed to stand uncontested, then there remains an unspoken understanding that mothers don't make the best employees. There is reason to think that this proposition is already part of a cultural common ground, so the comment may simply be

acknowledging that purported fact and attempting to offer further evidence for it (Corell et al 2007;

Bernard et al 2007-8).

Because implicature and presupposition accommodation offer "stealth" options for altering the

common ground, they are important mechanisms by which we come to share background assumptions

and by which cultural frameworks of meaning can be imposed and extended, without effort or opportunity

for contestation. These stealth accommodations affect our thinking and speaking and, of course, our

action. We are in a position to affect the world and make it conform to how we think it should be. If the

world does not conform to our normative expectations, we are entitled, by our own lights, to regard it as

defective and change it. This is ideology at its most powerful.

3. Ideology and Normality

a. Ideology

There is much disagreement over the nature of ideology, yet in the most basic sense ideologies are

representations of social life that serve in some way to undergird social practices.[15] There is an important

sense in which social structures are not imposed upon us, for they are constituted by our everyday choices

and behaviors. We enact structures, and something about how we represent the world is both a

constitutive part of that enactment and keeps it going.[16] Ideology in this broad sense—sometimes referred

to as the descriptive sense—is pervasive and unavoidable. The term 'ideology' is also sometimes used in

a narrower and pejorative sense to refer to representations of the relevant sort that are somehow

misguided, e.g., by being contrary to the real interests of an agent or group of agents. As I will be using

the term, however, ideology is the background cognitive and affective frame that gives actions and

reactions meaning within a social system and contributes to its survival. We cannot live together without

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[15] Especially useful discussions of the notion of ideology include: Geuss 1981; Fields 1982; Silbey 1998; and Shelby 2003.

[16] Although there is much controversy over the question whether "ideology" or the Foucauldian notion of "discourse" is better suited to the role described here, the controversies are not directly relevant to my purposes. Moreover, there seems to be a core notion shared by both. See Purvis and Hunt 1993.

ideologies to guide us. Although some ideologies are pernicious and partly constitute unjust social structures, improved ideologies are crucial in order to achieve social justice.

I have argued elsewhere that it is not useful to think of ideology as a set of beliefs, understood as discrete and determinate propositional attitudes, though an ideology may include such attitudes (Haslanger 2012, Ch 15). In addition to beliefs, the ideology that undergirds social practices must include more primitive dispositions, habits, conceptual frameworks, and a broader range of attitudes than just belief. (See also Langton 2012; Haslanger 2013.) On the model I favor, ideology is best understood in terms of *schemas*. Psychologists use the term 'schema' to refer to cognitive structures that provide us with heuristics for processing and storing information; these are typically tacit. Schemas consist in concepts and shared background beliefs that make certain phenomena salient, thus affecting attention; they shape memory by selecting from an experience those aspects that fit the schema; they influence information gathering by disposing us to pre-select what is important and what isn't; they have a significant effect on inference patterns and decisions because they bias what information we process and what predictions we make. (Hollander and Howard 2000, 342-44) Although schemas are often described in narrowly cognitive terms, they also integrate emotional and motivational components. (See, e.g., Gendler 2008.) Sociologists and anthropologists use the term 'schema' somewhat differently, emphasizing the ways in which cultures store information in narratives, conceptual dichotomies, shared background assumptions, "common sense," and the like. (Sewell 1992, Howard 1994) A plausible account of schemas, and social cognition more generally, recognizes that it is no accident that there is a parallel between individual cognitive structures and collective cultural structures.

A useful model for understanding the social world takes social practices to be behavior in accordance with collective schemas in response to resources. (Haslanger 2012, Ch 15, Ch 17) Resources are things of all sorts – human, nonhuman, animate, or not – "that can be used to enhance or maintain power" (Sewell 1992, 20). In social reality, schemas and resources are both causally and constitutively interdependent. Consider food, let's say, corn, for example. An ear of corn can be viewed as something to eat, as a commodity to be sold, as a religious symbol. In other words, we can apply different schemas

to the object, and the schemas frame our consciousness of the object. The different schemas not only offer modes of interpretation, but license different ways of interacting with the corn. Actions based on these different schemas have an effect on the ear of corn, e.g., it might be cooked for food, or the kernels removed to be shipped, or dried and hung in a prominent place to be worshipped. The effects of our actions then influence the schema. If the corn sells for a good price, its value is enhanced and the farmer may seek ways to grow it more efficiently, possibly investing in new and different varieties.

Practices depend on shared schemas, but they require individuals to enact and re-enact them. "…social structures, while they confront us as external and coercive, do not exist apart from our collective actions and thoughts as we apply *schemas* to make sense of the world and deploy *resources* to affect people and things." (Silbey & Ewick 1998, 41 my italics). This dependence on reiterated human action also allows for revisions of both the schemas and the resources, making individuals potential agents of social change. A corn blight or drought will affect our practices involving corn because the resource will become scarce; environmental or food activism can bring about a change in the schemas for corn that call for and license different actions. Sometimes we have to act differently in order to think differently. Sometimes we have to think differently in order to act differently.

When ideologies become hegemonic, their effects blend into and, in an important sense, become part of, the "natural" world, so we no longer see them as social. Hegemonic ideology and the structures it constitutes are extremely hard to change. Because the primary medium of social life is language – it forms the basis for intentional action, shared meaning, and collective organization – attention to the ambiguities and slippages between different linguistic forms is useful in explaining how ideas become entrenched and social practices seem natural and inevitable.

To summarize briefly, schemas and resources together constitute practices, and patterns of interdependent practices constitute structures. Cultural schemas—dispositions, interpretations, experiences, beliefs and the like—are an important part of the common ground we rely on to communicate; they are also, I maintain, a form of ideology. On this view, ideology is not just a set of

background beliefs that purport to justify social structures: ideology in the form of schemas partly constitutes the structures.

b. "Normality" and Looping Effects

Let's return to the issue of normality. As mentioned above, the idea of what's normal may be statistical or normative: what tends to be or what ought to be. Given the *Essentialist* and *Normative Assumptions,* these two senses of 'normal' reinforce each other: what's statistically normal is taken to be evidence of how things are by nature, and so ought to be. But what ought to be is also taken to be evidence of how things are, by nature, and so what the statistical regularities should be (assuming things are normal, good, right); if they aren't that way, we should make them so. The *Essentialist Assumption* gives the statistically normal a metaphysical ground. The *Normative Assumption* takes the metaphysical ground and insists that we, and the world, conform to it.

Combined, these two assumptions provide an excellent ideology to reinforce the status quo: if the social world is a certain way (statistically), it must be due to nature, so good and right, and we shouldn't attempt to change it. This observation about the ideological naturalizing of the social world is not new: if Fs are G by nature, then Fs being G is just "how things are" or inevitable, and should be accommodated. It is valuable, however, to recognize how common linguistic phenomena – the mere utterance of a generic – can reinforce this assumption.

The *Normative Assumption* takes the ideology a step further: Fs being G by nature isn't just how things are, it is how things should be. It is (normatively) normal. We who seek the good should help Fs be G, should regard Fs that are not G as defective and in need of correction. This is key, of course, to marginalization. In a milieu dominated by white people, a black person is not normal. If the outlier is not normal, then they are not as they should be (they are, or the circumstances are, unnatural) and there is need of correction. If correction is unsuccessful, then they are presumably defective and appropriately marginalized. Substitute for 'black person' in the argument any non-dominant group descriptor. The world doesn't always reinforce our judgments of what's natural and right with perfect regularities, but

that poses no challenge to an ideology that includes the *Normative Assumption*. Rather, the world's imperfections provide us opportunities to set nature on its proper path.

Together, the *Essentialist* and *Normative Assumptions* not only reinforce the status quo and legitimate our enforcement of it, but also imbue the world with social meaning. The natural order seems to magically conform to how we think things should work, to what makes sense to us. For example, because mothers are the ones who give birth, it only makes sense that they would have special capacities to nurture infants. And given that they are so nurturing, it makes sense that women wouldn't like the intensely competitive world of business and industry. And lo and behold, we see that the world supports these beliefs. Of course there are women who are not mothers, who don't have nurturing tendencies and who function well in competitive environments, but they are not "normal." And we should not encourage them. And even if they appear to be effective competitors, their nature may overcome these "unnatural" inclinations at any time, so we should be cautious to include them fully in this world. The struggle that mothers in fact have in the workplace just proves that our sense of what's right and good is correct. It makes sense that a working mother's life is difficult; if it were otherwise, it would be unnatural.

The relationship between schemas (our cultured responses) and resources (what we are responding to) in the constitution of social structures is, in general, loopy.[17] Resources are formed to trigger dispositions (schemas) that are manifested in ways that, in turn, utilize and shape the resources. I considered the example of corn, above. Cuisine, more generally, provides good examples. In a less-globalized world than ours, food crops were grown to support the local cuisine and the local tastes and culinary techniques evolved in ways that took advantage of the crops. In more complex social contexts we can watch consumer taste develop so that certain products become "must haves" in a particular milieu. Trends in cuisine can become trends in production which, in turn, affect trends in labor, and this affects schemas of class and taste, etc. The reliance on, say, wheat in a particular cuisine may seem inevitable, natural, "given." Wheat is what is available; wheat just is what we eat. But the wheat is available

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[17] See Hacking 1999.

because of the impact of schemas on resources that establish farming practices, food distribution, etc. Given the stability of such structures, culinary taste conforms. In this context quinoa, or soy, or spelt tastes bad and has a funny texture too; so who would want to plant it? "Hegemony colonizes consciousness" (Silbey 1998, 289).

However, hegemony also colonizes the world. It doesn't just affect what's in our heads; it affects what exists, what regularities are to be found, what types of things there are, and so even what natures are manifested in the world. The material world reinforces our tutored dispositions: QWERTY keyboards reinforce our QWERTY dispositions, but our entrenched QWERTY dispositions are responsible for the ongoing production of QWERTY keyboards. Racial classification reinforces racial segregation, which reinforces racial identity, which reinforces racial classification. Social structures, good or bad, constitute our lived reality; they also affect how the world evolves, and what there is and isn't in it.

4. Conclusion

The term 'normal' has a statistical use, and a normative use. The slide between these two uses is ideologically significant, and is embedded in the common ground of conversation due to very basic assumptions about natures and essences that humans develop in the process of cognitive maturation. In short, we tend to assume (a) that robust statistical regularities are due to the nature of things, and (b) that it is good and right that things behave in accordance with their natures, i.e., that there is something wrong with the unnatural. These are what I've called the *Essentialist* and *Normative Assumptions*. However, it turns out that we aren't very good at distinguishing robust statistical regularities from local, accidental ones; it isn't true that robust statistical regularities must be due to the nature of things; and it is not always good and right for things to behave in accordance with their natures. However, when these assumptions (a) and (b) are shared in an unarticulated common ground, our conversations, particularly those involving generics, easily reinforce them and it is difficult to challenge them. Hegemony is just normal, and what's normal is inevitable, natural, good.

These false appearances are reinforced due to the "loopiness" of social structures: we respond to the world that has been shaped, in many instances, to trigger those very responses, without being conscious of the shaping; so our responses seem to be called for by the way the world is. Or, if the world as we encounter it fails to live up to what's right and good, it must be because circumstances are abnormal and change is called for. So we shape the world to call for the responses we take to be apt. Birds fly and women are nurturing. Boys don't cry and friends don't let friends drive drunk. In purporting just to capture the facts, these generics import an explanation, implicate that the source of the truth of these claims lies in what birds and women *are*. Implicatures and presuppositions of this sort become part of the common ground, often in ways that are hard to notice and hard to combat, and they become the background for our conversations and our practices. Once the assumption of natures has been inserted into the cultural common ground, it is extremely difficult and disruptive to dislodge it, for our social world is shaped by it and mirrors it back. We can try to expose the false assumptions or, perhaps better, break the mirror.

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