What are Social Groups? Their Metaphysics and How to Classify Them

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**Preliminaries and motivation**

* Ritchie on two kinds of social groups
  + Organized groups
  + Feature groups
* Haslanger’s definition of social construction
  + *X is socially constructed constitutively as an F* iff X is of a kind or sort F such that in defining what it is to be F we must make reference to social factors.
* Focus on *kinds* of groups
* Profiling a given group-kind K

**Four profiles for a kind K**

Example: K1: Groups of street musicians

Example: K2: Tufts faculty committees, such as the Tenure and Promotion committee

* Construction profile
  + Group g comes to exist at time t0 in world w
  + Group g exists at time t>t0 in w
  + Stage s constitutes g at t in w
  + Criterion of identity
    - *Given K-groups g1 and g2, and given that s1 constitutes g1 at t1 in w1, and s2 constitutes g2 at t2 in w2. Then, a minimal requirement to guarantee that g1=g2 is that s1 and s2 …*
* Extra essentials profile
  + Essential properties of K-groups, in addition to construction profile
  + Typically abilities, rights, obligations, etc.
* Anchor profile
  + The facts or parts of the world that set up kinds to have the essential properties they do
* Accident profile
  + Accidental properties of actual groups of kind K

Implications

* The project of social metaphysics
* Classifying groups
* Designing better groups

**Profile template for group kind K**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **1. “Construction” profile** | | **3. “Anchor” profile** |
| a. Coming to exist | A new K-group comes to exist at *t* in *w* if and only if… | a. The fact **A new K-group comes to exist at *t* in *w* if and only if such-and-such.** is anchored by the following facts… |
| b. Continuing to exist | Given a K-group *g* that came to exist at *t0* in world *w* and a time *t>t0.* Then, *g* exists at *t* in *w* if and only if… | b. The fact **Given a K-group etc., then g exists at *t* in *w* if and only if such-and-such.** is anchored by the following facts… |
| c. Constitution | Given a K-group *g* and a time *t* and world *w*. Then, stage *s* constitutes *g* in *w* at *t* if and only if… | c. The fact **Given a K-group etc., then stage *s* constitutes *g* in *w* at *t* if and only if such-and-such.** is anchored by the following facts… |
| d. Criterion of identity | Given K-groups *g1* and *g2*, and given that *s1* constitutes *g1* in *w1*, and *s2* constitutes *g2* in *w2*. Then, a minimal requirement to guarantee that *g1*=*g2* is that *s1* and *s2* stand in relation… | d. The fact **Given K-groups *g1* and *g2* etc., a minimal requirement to guarantee that *g1*=*g2* is that *s1* and *s2* stand in such-and-such relation.** is anchored by the following facts… |
| **2. “Extra essentials” profile** | |  |
| e. For group as a whole | Any K-group *g,* has the following extra essential properties E1–En (i.e., in addition to those captured in the construction profile)…  E.g.: It is essential to *g* that it has the following right / obligation / ability under the following conditions… | e. For each property Ei in {E1,…,En}:  The fact **For any K-group *g,* it is essential to *g* that it has Ei (i.e., such-and-such a right / obligation / ability / etc. under such-and-such conditions).** is anchored by the following facts… |
| f. Applying equally to all members | Given a K-group *g* and a person *m* who is a member of g, *m* has the following extra essential properties F1–Fn…  E.g.: It is essential to *g* that *m* have the following right/obligation/ability under the following conditions (that do not distinguish *m* from others in the group)… | f. For each property Fi in {F1,…,Fn}:  The fact **Given a K-group *g* and person *m* etc., it is essential to *g* that *m* have Fi (i.e., such-and-such a right / obligation / ability / etc. under such-and-such conditions).** is anchored by the following facts… |
| g. Applying differentially to group members | Given a K-group *g* and a person *m* who is a member of g, *m* has the following extra essential properties G1–Gn…  Example:  It is essential to *g* that *m* have the following right/obligation/ability under the following conditions (that distinguish *m* from others in the group)… | g. For each property Gi in {G1,…,Gn}:  The fact **Given a K-group *g* and person *m* etc., it is essential to *g* that *m* have Gi (i.e., such-and-such a right / obligation / ability / etc. under such-and-such conditions).** is anchored by the following facts… |
| **4. “Accident” profile** | |  |
|  | h. All (or most or certain) groups of kind K actually have the following accidental properties… | i. The anchors for such-and-such a property of K-groups have the following causes or other accidental properties… |

**Tabulating elements of the construction profile for K2**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Kind K2: Faculty committee *g* | A. *g* comes to exist at *t0* | B. *g* exists at *t* | C. *s* constitutes *g* at *t* | D. Criterial relation R s.t. R(*s1*,*s2*)→*g1*=*g2* |
| 1. Intrinsic properties of stages of *g* | No | →+ Yes (s&d) | →+ Yes (s&d) | →+ Yes (s&d) |
| 2. Attitudes of people in stages of *g* | No | →+ Yes (s&d) | →+ Yes (s&d) | →+ Yes (s&d) |
| 3. Actions of people in stages of *g* | No | →+ Yes (s&d) | →+ Yes (s&d) | →+ Yes (s&d) |
| 4. Collective attitudes of *g* | No | →+ No | →+ No | →+ No |
| 5. Actions of *g* | No | →+ No | →+ No | →+ No |
| 6. Self-identifying of people in stages of *g* | No | →+ No | →+ No | →+ No |
| 7. Spatial positions of stages | No | →+ No | →+ No | →+ No |
| 8. Attitudes of other people | Yes (s&d) | →+ Yes (s&d) | →+ Yes (d) | →+ Yes (d) |
| 9. Actions of other people | Yes (s&d) | →+ Yes (d) | →+ Yes (d) | →+ Yes (d) |
| 10. Non-individualistic physical factors | Yes (s&d) | →+ Yes (s&d) | →+ Yes (s&d) | →+ Yes (s&d) |
| 11. Norms regarding *g* | No | →+ No | →+ No | →+ No |
| 12. Stages of *g* playing causal role | No | →+ No | →+ No | →+ No |
| 13. Intrinsic properties of originating event of *g* | Yes (s&d) | →+ Nothing more | →+ Nothing more | →+ Yes (s&d) |
| 14. Object dependent properties of originating event of *g* | Yes (s) | →+ Nothing more | →+ Nothing more | →+ Yes (s&d) |

The cells indicate whether a given kind of property is part of a given component of the construction profile, and whether what is included is the property manifested synchronically (marked “s”), diachronically (marked “d”), or both (marked “s&d”).

In columns B, C, and D, the notation “→+” in the cells is to remind us that the earlier columns are included in the later ones. The factors listed in column C, for instance, are the additional ones in virtue of which *s* constitutes *g* at *t,* but only once it is given that *g* exists at *t,* which involves the factors listed in columns A and B.