On the Epistemology of (In)Justice:
Oppositional Consciousness and Social Critique

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Abstract: In the context of ideal theory, the Rawlsian original position has been a standard method for attempting to determine the nature of justice. This paper explores the epistemology of justice in the context of non-ideal theory, specifically considering the epistemology of consciousness raising. The background concern is that under conditions of broad ideological distortion, it is not clear that reflective equilibrium, even behind a veil of ignorance is sufficient to determine what justice is. Feminist standpoint theory aims to address this problem, but existing standpoint accounts tend to either credit standpoints with unexplained epistemic privilege, or reduce standpoints to mere vantage points that may themselves be ideologically formed. This paper shifts the task to develop an epistemology of injustice by considering the role of counter-publics and social movements in social critique.
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Part I: Background

1. Introduction

In my recent work I have developed a “practice-based” approach to ideology. Social practices and social structures depend on a collection of social meanings – what I call a cultural technē – that provide a “stage-setting” for action and are a constituent part of the local social-regulation system. The cultural technē enables us to coordinate by providing the paths and signals of our practices. An ideology is a cultural technē “gone wrong.” It prevents us from recognizing or creating forms of value, and/or, organizes us in unjust ways. This conception of ideology is functionalist and pejorative. It is not, however, doxastic: an ideology is not a set of beliefs or other attitudes.

Throughout this work I have relied on the idea that some cultural technēs are ideological because they are morally problematic. My task in this paper is to say more about the basis for such normative evaluation. Ideology critique is an important part of efforts to promote social justice, but how is critique warranted?

2. Social Practices

Why start with practices? Let’s consider some examples of social practices to situate the discussion.

Practices: Timing of meals; cuisine; clothing styles; academic lectures.
Interconnected practices = structures: systems of food production & distribution, education, transportation, market exchange/wage labor.

Practices are a site of socially organized agency. More specifically, they produce, distribute, and organize, things taken to have value: artifacts, time, knowledge, status, health, security. They also distribute things of disvalue: toxic waste, menial work, vulnerability. I call these (+ and -) resources or sometimes sources.

Practices are, in some sense, “up to us,” so are a potential site for change. But in order to see how agents are situated in practices, we need more detail.

a. Practices provide a “stage setting” for action

Standardly, practices (such as promising) are defined by a set of rules that are prior to the behavior and states of mind of the participants. (Rawls 1955) Standard examples of this include a move in a game: one cannot score a soccer goal without there being a set of rules that constitute soccer and an occasion in which the game is being played. As Rawls suggests, practices can provide reasons for action, e.g., Jozy Altidore has reason to kick the ball into the goal, rather than throw it, because this is what soccer requires. Commitment to the game, and to his team, also has broader consequences in his life and gives him reason to practice, to travel to certain destinations, to manage his diet, etc. Such actions may be constitutive of

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1 This part of the paper draws substantially on Haslanger (2018).
his identity, who he is. But because most practices are informal and they need not be governed by rules, games are not always the best, examples (Kukla and Lance 2014)).

Our conformity to a practice is not always guided by intentions and done for reasons. When acting intentionally we are capable of representing, in principle, what we are doing or at least undertaking to do. The contrast is “mere behavior,” e.g., sneezing. Much of our behavior, however, is somewhere between the two. Our agency is responsive to the world and each other in ways that are not always accessible to the agent or governed by intentions. What action I perform depends not just on me, but on the social meanings of my milieu: in a foreign culture one’s actions can offend or invite, unintentionally. Lessig (1995, 952) gives the example of putting on a seatbelt in the front seat of a cab in Budapest, thereby insulting the driver. Practices take precedence over your intentions. (Though often excuses are available after the fact.) So practices are not only necessary for (certain kinds of) agency, but behavior in their terms can also be sufficient for enacting a practice. So an explanatory social theory may explicitly debunk self-understandings by re-describing social relations and social practices in terms the participants would reject.

b. Coordination and Social Meaning

Practices are normative. This claim ambiguous. It might mean that the relevant regularities are in fact encouraged or enforced, or it might mean that they are properly or appropriately encouraged or enforced. For the time being, I'll focus on the descriptive normativity that makes a regularity a practice.

Practices provide, among other things, systems of coordination and cooperation. Coordination is not optional for us: “solving problems of coordination with our fellows is our most pressing ecological task.” (Zawidzki 2008, 198) Because of the huge cognitive demands of coordination across highly variable circumstances, humans cannot rely entirely on “preinstalled, competence-specific information” (Sterelny 2012, xi). Instead we rely on social learning, reliable cross-generational transmission, and material and technological resources for building on what came before (Sterelny 2012).

Culture, among other things, defines the terms of coordination for a social group. William Sewell suggests: ‘Culture may be thought of as a network of semiotic relations cast across society...’ (Sewell 2005, 49). Social meanings include:

i. Simple meanings (pink means girl, red means stop);
ii. Narrative tropes (“First comes love, then comes marriage,...”)
iii. Default assumptions (“Marriage is between one man and one woman”); concepts (MARRIAGE, FAMILY, SEX, RACE) and what are taken to be “analytic” truths concerning them;
iv. Heuristics (imitate-the-majority or imitate-the-successful (Hertwig 2013));
v. Familiar patterns of metaphor and metonymy (“Juliet is the sun,” “The pen is mightier than the sword,” (Camp 2006));
vi. Entrenched conceptual homologies (reason : passion :: man : woman (Balkin 1998, Ch. 10; Balkin 1990)).

This notion of culture is introduced as an explanatory device:

The point of conceptualizing culture as a system of symbols and meanings is to disentangle, for

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2 I use the term ‘coordination’ here in the loose and popular sense, not in the technical sense employed in game theory.
the purpose of analysis, the semiotic influences on action from the other sorts of influences –
demographic, geographical, biological, technological, economic, and so on – that they are
necessarily mixed with in any concrete sequence of behavior. (44)

Members of a group take the culture’s concepts, scripts, and meanings to be normative for members of the
group: we begin with the assumption that members will do things the “right way” and feel entitled to
criticize them if they don’t (Zawidzki 2008, 204-5). Joseph Rouse (2006) suggests that practices are
dynamic patterns of action in which performances are mutually responsive:

…the bounds of a practice are identified by the ways in which its constitutive performances bear
upon one another….One performance expresses a response to another, e.g., by correcting it,
rewarding or punishing its performer, drawing inferences from it, translating it, imitating
it…circumventing its effects, and so on. (530)

Thus far, I’ve argued that practices (a) provide a “stage setting” for coordinated action that gives us roles
to occupy, norms to follow, and reasons to act, and (b) do so by drawing on learned, locally transmitted
social meanings that enable mutually responsive or mutually accountable performances.

c. Fragmentation and Agency

How does culture constrain us without undermining our agency? Culture is not a hegemonic system. It is
as fragmented as the multiple practices that coordinate us in different contexts for different purposes.

Ann Swidler (1986) suggests that ‘[c]ulture influences action...by shaping a repertoire or ‘tool kit’ of
habits, skills, and styles...’ (273). So norms and meanings may vary across contexts. When at work, one is
expected to conform to norms about dress and other details of comportment, punctuality and time
management, and hierarchical positions of supervision. Life at home is organized according to different
norms of leisure and domestic labor. In each case, the norms are signaled by architecture, furniture,
calendars and other scheduling instruments, titles, and patterns of interaction. The fragmentation of
agency in different practices provides resources and opportunities for critique: living by different norms in
different contexts allows one to compare them and their consequences.

Moreover, although norms, signals, and background assumptions guide us in any particular social setting,
yet they do not determine how we act; we are not cultural robots. Those who are familiar with the local cultural
technē will, as Sewell claims, “…be capable of using the "grammar" of the semiotic system to make
understandable "utterances." Just as knowing the lexicon and grammar of a language doesn’t determine
what one will say, social fluency constrains and enables the meaning of our actions.

d. Materiality and Resources

Social practices and structures provide, in effect, a topography upon which specific causal factors interact
to produce probabilistic effects; cultural scripts and narratives create valleys in the topography along
which agency easily flows. Although it may be easier to flow in the valley, we have choices to climb the
peaks instead. But how should we understand the social “landscape”? Is it entirely up to us?

What things in the world are is never fully determined by the symbolic net we throw over them –
this also depends on their preexisting physical characteristics, the spatial relations in which they
occur, the relations of power with which they are invested…The world is recalcitrant to our
predications of meaning. (Sewell 2005, 51)

The social landscape is malleable, but not infinitely so. Something becomes a resource when it is regarded as having value (+/-) – whether economic, aesthetic, moral, prudential, spiritual. (Rabbits: pet, food, pelt?) It becomes, thereby, a potential site for coordination. Access to it is something to be managed because access is a source of power or pleasure, etc. Social meanings evolve to enable us to perceive, produce, and organize the resource. If our schemas lead us to interpret some parts of the world as valuable for a particular purpose, but the world does not substantiate such valuing, then the practice becomes harder to sustain on its own terms, e.g., keeping tigers as pets, commodifying water. Coordination is, in part, a social engineering problem; but because practices are structured in relation to a (purported) resource, there is a further epistemic question: is this resource valued aptly?

This is not a simple question: We rely on cultural schemas and symbols not only to interact with each other, but also the world; this changes the world to conform to the schemas we bring to it. This has significant epistemic effects: the schemas we employ to interpret the world are confirmed by the world they have shaped. Thus it becomes difficult to even see that schemas/practices are problematic, for they appear to be warranted, e.g., we allow Nestle to drain local springs in order to bottle water, leaving a less potable public water supply, giving people reason to engage in the practice of drinking bottled water; thus reinforcing the decision to grant water rights to Nestle.

e. Stitching It Together

Here is the conception of practice I propose:

Social practices are patterns of learned behavior that enable us (in the primary instances) to coordinate as members of a group in creating, distributing, managing, maintaining, and eliminating a resource (or multiple resources), due to mutual responsiveness to each other’s behavior and the resource(s) in question, as interpreted through shared meanings/cultural schemas.

→ Schemas give us tools to interpret the value/disvalue of resources (in a context, along some dimension) and to coordinate in their production, maintenance, distribution, elimination, etc.

← Resources are potential sites of value/disvalue that can be shaped and transformed so that they (seem to) warrant and so reinforce the schemas we apply to them.

This explains how culture, material conditions, and agency can create stable loops:
• Culture provides schemas for interpreting and responding to material conditions;
• Agents internalize the schemas as practical orientations in order to coordinate and communicate;
• Practical orientations guide us to act on material conditions and produce/distribute resources in accordance with the schemas,
• This shapes the world to facilitate our coordination and also to fit the schemas.

3. Ideology in Practice

With this conception of practice in hand, we can now locate ideology. Consider Stuart Hall:

[Ideology]…has especially to do with the concepts and the languages of practical thought which stabilize a particular form of power and domination; or which reconcile and accommodate the
mass of the people to their subordinate place in the social formation. (Hall 1996/2006, 24-25)

The “concepts and languages of practical thought” in a social milieu are the public meanings available in the cultural technē. In some cases, the cultural technē is distorted, or otherwise inadequate, and prevents us from coordinating on just terms. In the primary case, an ideology is the cultural technē of an unjust/bad social structure. An ideology can be bad in several ways: (a) because it prevents us from valuing things correctly. (b) because it produces, distributes, and maintains what is valuable unjustly. (The ideology of (neo-liberal) capitalism is bad in both ways.) A social practice can be ideological if the practice itself is bad/unjust. However, often practices (and their social meanings/schemas) can only be evaluated relative to their part in a broader structure. (See Haslanger 2017a.)

Unjust practices and institutions guided or formed by an ideology are ideological formations, e.g., racism, sexism, etc. Such interconnected webs of unjust social practices are connected by a racist technē, e.g., residential segregation, police brutality, biased hiring and wage inequity, educational disadvantage. (See Haslanger 2017b.)

The view I’ve sketched focuses on ideology as the cultural contribution to “practical consciousness” or practical orientation. Explicit ideology (articulated propositions) is both an expression and rationalization of our practical orientation. On the whole, explicit ideologies, as rationalizations of our unjust practices, present our practices in ways that obscure or mystify them and their consequences; this makes them apt targets for critique. But explicit rationalizations are not an essential part of what enables or motivates a practice, and that’s why a critique of such rationalizations is so often ineffective in promoting social change.

We are now in a position to motivate a problem with the project of ideology critique. Every society has mechanisms for reproducing itself, e.g., its divisions of labor, its social classes, its norms and practices. Althusser (1971) distinguishes repressive state apparatuses (RSAs) and ideological state apparatuses (ISAs). A crucial difference between an ISA and an RSA is that individuals are hailed – or “interpellated” – into a subject position by an ISA, rather than violently forced into it. It is characteristic of those “good subjects” who respond to the hailing that they take up the norms as binding on themselves, so they don’t need to be coercively managed: “they work all by themselves”! We are “hailed” into practices in a variety of ways, e.g., we are hailed into speaking English by having English spoken to us; we are hailed into the role of student by being sent to school and finding ourselves responding to the teacher as an authority (nudged by coercion); we are hailed into adulthood by having to pay the rent (with threat of coercion in the background). We then develop ways of being and thinking so that we are (more or less) fluent English speakers, fluent students, fluent rent-paying adults. Ideology is not a set of beliefs, though it may produce belief. As Althusser says, “Ideology always exists in an apparatus and its practice or practices. Its existence is material” (Althusser 1971, 259). So, under conditions of ideology there is, by hypothesis, a range of unjust social practices that oppress a group; however, not everyone experiences the oppression as such. As a result, in social movements that seek to undermine oppression, there is a risk that those engaged in the critique illegitimately “impose” their values on others. So how should we proceed?
Part II: Non-Ideal Theory

4. Social Critique

The target of social critique is, in the first instance, a practice or set of social practices. For example, social critique might take aim at the consumption of the flesh of dead animals, the heteronormative construction of families, or the differential sentencing of people of different races for the same crime. But because the practices in question are linked to other practices, policies, and laws, social critique quickly widens to target broad social structures and systems of injustice. Practices of food consumption occur within and are shaped by the imperatives of capitalist food production and distribution; the practice of traditional marriage is an enforcement of compulsory heterosexuality and the sex/gender binary; and sentencing practices are an enforcement of White supremacy. The project of critique is to reveal the systematic nature of injustice as it unfolds in a particular historical context.

As a consequence, the site of critique is the social domain. This includes both individuals and the state. But the primary issues concern what practices we should engage in, what social norms we should embrace, how we should go on, from here, together. Our inquiry is collective, practice-directed and embedded. There are many perfectly acceptable ways to organize social life, so the goal is not to ask what is the best way to do this; the project resists postulating a normatively binding ideal, but does require imagination and hope (Wright 2010; Solnit 2004). The goal is to identify – from an embedded standpoint – ways in which our practices are inadequate so we can do better. Injustice is rampant. Rectification is a priority.

My question for today is what methods are apt for social critique? Can we rely on the standard Rawlsian political epistemology? What else is available? I will begin by sketching two different models of non-ideal theory: the “medical model” and the “applied ideal model.” I’ll then propose that, at least under conditions of ideology, critical social theory provides a better option. But first, let’s start with ideal theory.

5. Ideal Theory

In social/political philosophy, there has been an ongoing debate about the value of ideal theory. The debate tends to focus on two questions:

(i) Should philosophers aim to capture a (universal?) normative ideal towards which we should be aiming in rectifying past and current wrongs?

Note that a commitment to identifying a normative ideal is not, at least on the face of it, the same as a commitment to normative inquiry. Presumably we can determine that doing X is better than doing Y in a particular situation without knowing what the ideal action would be. (Sen 2006, 2009)

(ii) Should philosophical inquiry focus on idealized cases, selecting and abstracting from the concrete phenomena which prompt our inquiry?

3 Although Rawls’ distinction between ideal and non-ideal theory is a starting point for these discussions, the issues have expanded beyond his characterization of the two forms of theory. I am not a Rawls scholar and am not attempting here to provide an interpretation of Rawls or recent Rawlsians. Rather, I am sketching what I take to be some assumptions that play a role in commonly employed methods in social/political philosophy, and elsewhere.
Idealized cases, as I understand them, allow us to consider normative questions a priori, or at least relatively so. We isolate “the essence” of what is good or right by crafting thought experiments that control for empirical variation.

What is involved in idealization? Idealization or abstraction is, to some extent, inevitable in theorizing, for we are looking for patterns. The main issue is how to determine what details are and are not relevant. One kind of idealization at issue in distinguishing ideal from non-ideal theory concerns the role of empirical (sociological, historical, ethnographic) detail. For example, Tim Scanlon considers an objection to the method of reflective equilibrium in normative inquiry: How can reflective equilibrium insure anything more than consistency? The worry is that there is no reason to accept the results of reflective equilibrium unless we can be confident of our starting points or our judgments about what to reject if we encounter an inconsistency. He replies:

> Morality will be in an analogous situation [to astrology] if, but only if, it too has “external commitments” – that is, only if the reasonableness of taking moral judgments seriously depends on claims that go beyond morality itself and lie in, for example, physics, psychology, metaphysics, or the theory of rational choice…Rawls holds that morality, or at least justice, has no controversial empirical or metaphysical presuppositions. (Scanlon 2003, 146)

Of course, idealization comes in degrees and along different dimensions and it may depend on what one considers “controversial empirical or metaphysical presuppositions.” But the methodology under consideration is committed to isolating a domain of normative inquiry within which we can determine what is good, valuable, or just, without empirical (or metaphysical!) investigation.

If one answers both questions in the affirmative, we end up with two connected theses. Following Mikkola (unpublished ms.), they are:

The (normative) priority thesis: We need to know what justice is in order to remedy current injustice.

The distancing thesis: In order to know what justice is, we must abstract away from the messy reality of our lives and understand justice through reflection on idealized cases

As Adam Swift puts it,

> …only by reference to philosophy – abstract, pure, context-free philosophy – can we have an adequate basis for thinking how to promote justice in our current, radically nonideal, circumstances. (2008, 382)

My question is not whether ideal theory is ever legitimate, but rather, what is its role social critique? For our purposes here, I take the social domain to be very broad and to extend beyond what some would count as the “basic structure” of society (though this is usually not well-defined). It includes aspects of...

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4 Scanlon describes a project of “wide reflective equilibrium” that restricts the inquiry to normative considerations and “uncontroversial” non-normative claims. Other conceptions of reflective equilibrium include a broader range of considerations, normative, empirical, metaphysical, etc. (Daniels 1979) Both, however, should be distinguished from a basic norm of rationality that requires us to adjust all of our beliefs with the aim of achieving consistency.

5 Whether the basic structure includes the family is an example of some unclarity. The family is surely one of the main social institutions that distributes burdens and benefits from cooperation, but it is not one that Rawls addressed substantively until pressed by Okin, and is a domain in which we can expect a reasonable plurality of arrangements,
social life that affect all of us, including those that are not in control of the government or other authoritative body. For example, our social domain consists in a heteronormative binary gender regime, a hierarchical racial system of hypodescent, a eugenist biopolitics (Tremain 2017), and a capitalist socio-political-economic order. (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018, 52) And, more specifically, it includes the cultural technēs that are part of and help sustain these structures.

6. “Non-ideal Theory”

One set of legitimate questions in social theory starts with injustice. It might be a local question, e.g., how should we reform the educational system in Boston to root out racism; or it might be very broad, e.g., how can we make global food production and distribution more just? To answer, we need to understand the complexity of the situation to diagnose the problem. Empirical research is required. But ideal theory distances itself from empirical research. So what is the relationship between empirical inquiry, moral inquiry, and social critique?

In a number of works, Tommie Shelby has offered a criticism of the “medical model” of social change and offered an alternative. In a critique of Anderson (2010), he says:

On [the medical] model, the persistent cries of injustice and other grievances of members of society are conceived as symptoms (like headaches, fatigue, and insomnia) to be treated by empirically grounded interventions, which are conceived as potential cures for social ills. The justice doctor, concerned about the health of the polity, attempts to discover the “underlying causes of the complaints” ([Anderson 2010] p. 4 ), which may differ, perhaps radically, from what those who initially raised the complaints believe is the proper diagnosis. After careful empirical analysis and social experiments, the linchpin of the social problem is identified and actions are taken to remove it, with the hope that the troubling symptoms eventually fade away and the patient is healed. (Shelby 2014, 256)

According to this “social engineering” approach, technocrats nudge individuals to act in ways that, as judged by experts, further the common good.

Shelby offers several criticisms of the medical model (2016, 2):

1) Status Quo Bias: “…policymakers working within the medical model treat the background structure of society as given and focus only on alleviating the burdens of the disadvantaged.” The aim is targeted fixes.

2) Dowgraded agency: “the technocratic reasoning of the medical model marginalizes the political agency of those it aims to help.” The oppressed are “passive victims in need of assistance” and resistance is often interpreted as pathology.

3) Unjust-advantage blindspot: “…focusing on the problems of the disadvantaged can divert attention from or obscure the numerous ways in which the advantaged unfairly benefit from an unjust social structure.” The relationality of oppression is obscured.
Paul Taylor (2017) mentions another concern in the background of Shelby’s discussion: on the medical model “the normative and political-theoretic dimensions of the problem too easily drop out, giving way to putatively dispositive appeals to the empirical.”

Shelby recommends an alternative to the medical model: a “systemic-injustice framework”. Drawing on Rawls, he takes the basic structure to be the primary site of justice and explicitly places reciprocity at the normative center (2016, 20-22). This allows him to correct for the problems (1-3) just mentioned. Crucial for our purposes, the normative theory Shelby purportedly relies on is explicit and defended independently of the particular problem of ghetto poverty. Shelby takes this to be necessary:

In fact, nonideal theory logically depends on ideal theory, and the aims of nonideal theory give ideal theory its practical significance. (2016, 11)

We cannot develop a philosophically adequate theory of how to respond to social injustice without first knowing what makes a social scheme unjust. (2016, 13)

The task is to apply the principles discovered through ideal theory to the imperfect world we live in. This suggests a division of labor in seeking social justice: philosophers provide normative requirements, social scientists provide empirical facts, and policy makers— with help from both— adjust regulations (and such) to change the facts to fit the normative requirements. On this view, the focus on unjust conditions and corrective justice are what make the philosophical project one of non-ideal theory. In short, non-ideal theory is applied ideal theory.

The two models sketched so far—the medical model (MM) and the applied ideal theory (AIT) model—differ along several dimensions:

- **What kind of social phenomena does critique address?** Particular practices or broad structures?
- **What is the normative basis for critique?** (At least implicitly) the maximization of informed preference satisfaction or a fundamental value such as reciprocity?
- **Who is epistemically authoritative in determining the basis for critique and acceptable interventions?** “Technocrats” or philosophers, i.e., ideal theorists?

I agree with Shelby’s criticisms of the medical model. However, I am unsatisfied with the applied ideal theory model as an alternative.

First, it is unclear how, using the methods of AIT, we identify and describe the target of critique. AIT seems to presuppose a sharp fact-value distinction and a separation between descriptive and normative inquiry. “Value free” social science does not give us the resources to analyze broad systems of domination. The project of critical social theory is to reveal morally significant facts that call for rectification.

Second, to what extent does ideal theory provide the normative resources for social critique? Are the priority thesis and distancing thesis plausible for embedded normative inquiry under conditions of injustice? Given the multi-dimensional and contingent nature of systematic

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6 This is in keeping with the Rawlsian idea that ideal theory assumes full compliance and non-ideal theory is theory that does not make this assumption.
injustice, a normative diagnosis must be responsive the particularities of the injustice we face and the values in place.

Third, does the AIT suffer a version of the problem of downgraded agency? Does it sufficiently recognize the agency of the oppressed as theorizers of their own oppression? At least standard versions of AIT rely on philosophers to set out the aims and methods of intervention; insofar as this normative work occurs without direct participation of the oppressed, it fails as a prefigurative politics.

In this part of the paper, I will focus on the first concern and will begin to discuss the second; in the third part, I will elaborate further on the second and third.

7. Empirical Social Science and Emancipatory Social Science

In his response to the (MM), Shelby is keen to bring explicit normative inquiry into the discussion of ghetto poverty. He suggests that “…many of the sharp political clashes [such as what is an apt intervention] over ghetto poverty turn, I will show, on disagreements over values, not facts.” (2016, 4) At the same time, however, he argues that one of (MM)’s crucial flaws is that it fails to address the systematic and structural nature of injustice; the “systematic-injustice” framework he employs is apt only if we reframe the problem of ghetto poverty to understand it as a structural problem.

But a structural analyses of the sort Shelby offers doesn’t emerge from simple observations of empirical regularities in the social domain. Rather, structural analyses of this sort are methodologically committed to uncovering and explaining systematic and durable forms of injustice. And such structural analyses are highly contested (Armour 2016). To maintain that ghetto poverty is a structural problem, rather than a problem of individual wrongdoing, is not simply a disagreement about values rather than facts. Values play a crucial role in the empirical work of identifying, describing, and diagnosing the facts that call for intervention.

For decades, feminist theorists (and others) have argued that value-laden inquiry is not only inevitable, but more insightful and objective than purportedly value-free inquiry (Anderson 1995). For example, medical research depends on a robust commitment to a conception of human health. (Consider the scientific category of PATHOGEN.) Making values explicit and including them as criteria of adequacy serves the goal of objectivity. As discussed in Part I, ideology functions to create social reality, so under conditions of ideology, simply cataloging truths is not enough. So we cannot take empirical regularities at face value to reveal the nature of the phenomenon.

Emancipatory, or critical, social science embraces its value-ladenness. It arises from resistance and is driven by a commitment to justice. Of course, as Eric Olin Wright points out:

- It is not enough to show that people suffer in the world in which we live or that there are enormous inequalities in the extent to which people live flourishing lives. A scientific emancipatory theory must show that the explanation for this suffering and inequality lies in specific properties of institutions and social structures. The first task of emancipatory social science, therefore, is the diagnosis and critique of the causal processes that generate these harms. (Wright 2010, 11)
Just as medicine is undertaken in the service of human health, critical social science is undertaken in the
service of justice. Likewise, we learn more about what health is, and what justice is, by doing value-
inform ed empirical work.

8. Articulated Systems of Domination

In their review of Shelby’s book, Michael Dawson and Emily Katzenstein (2019) argue that Shelby’s
normative recommendations for alleviating ghetto poverty are inadequate because he is insufficiently
attentive to the complexity of the phenomenon. As they see it, Shelby opts for statist economic solutions,
e.g., an expansion of the welfare state, that are implausible given historical trends, and that neglect
gendered dimensions of injustice. Rather than go into the details of their critique of Shelby, I’m interested
here in their proposal that an emancipatory social theory for our historical moment requires attention to
articulated systems of domination. Elaborating this idea allows us to see more clearly the role of social
theory in critique and why ideal theory is inadequate as our normative starting point.

Dawson and Katzenstein introduce the notion of articulated systems of domination – or regimes of
articulation – in order to theorize the contingent interdependence between different forms of oppression,
specifically patriarchy, White supremacy, and capitalism.

…We propose a framework of mutually articulated systems of domination. We contend that these
systems develop semi-autonomous logics. While white supremacy and patriarchy often are
functional for capitalist economies, for example, they can also come into conflict with the logics of
capital and generate tensions, crises, and contradictions. (2019, 13)

They don’t elaborate on what exactly is involved in an “articulation,” but they do give examples. “Racial
hierarchies have been mobilized in order to secure entry to markets, redistribute property—both by legal
means and by means of extralegal violence—and maximize profitability in capitalist markets.” (2019, 13-
14) And the market for misogyny has empowered Black men in the context of hip hop at the expense of
Black women.

But what does it mean to suggest that the systems, while interdependent, “develop semi-autonomous
logics”? One way to spell this out draws on the conception of practice that I introduced in Part I. Recall:
The notion of culture is introduced as an explanatory device:

The point of conceptualizing culture as a system of symbols and meanings is to disentangle, for
the purpose of analysis, the semiotic influences on action from the other sorts of influences –
demographic, geographical, biological, technological, economic, and so on – that they are
necessarily mixed with in any concrete sequence of behavior. (Sewell 2005, 44)

I drew on this conception of culture in sketching the role of a cultural techné in social practices. These
multiple “influences” also play a role in systems, e.g., a health care system, or a transportation system, will
have political, biological, economic, technological, and semiotic (etc.) dimensions that are relevant to
explaining how it works and how it reproduces itself. For example, a healthcare system will have to deal
with the costs of care, the political management of insurance (Obamacare?), the social norms of
caregiving, the cultural meaning of disease, the environmental circumstances that exacerbate or reduce
risk. Systems also interact with each other along these various axes, e.g., the current economic pressures on
both a health care system and a transportation system derive from neo-liberal capitalism. At the same
time, neo-liberal capitalism isn’t just a regulatory scheme, but also has political, technological, and semiotic dimensions. (Fraser and Jaeggi 2018, 52):

For simplicity, let’s consider society as a broad social order with a variety of subsystems that manage and sustain different aspects of social life: health, food provision, housing, reproduction, political association, economic production… Each of these subsystems will shape and be shaped by different factors – Sewell’s “influences” – that, in many cases, extend across the systems. Climate, geography, biology, history, are some broad factors; the dominant cultural technē is also a factor. The social meanings of the racially marked body, [the gendered body, the disabled body…], are part of a cultural technē that plays a role in all of the subsystems. So there is a sense in which our economic and political systems are what they are because the system is realized – enacted – by practices that are partly constituted by these [racist, sexist, ableist…] meanings.

Sewell argues that “these dimensions of practice mutually shape and constrain each other but also that they are relatively autonomous from each other.” (2005, 48) This is echoed in Dawson and Katzenstein’s idea of “semi-autonomous logics.” There are predictable patterns in the economy, in the evolution of political parties, and in other subsystems; the subsystems affect each other, but there is a kind of internal integrity that sustains each system as such. This is also true of the cultural technē. Sewell mentions two relevant features to the semi-autonomy of culture: (i) no matter how powerful the economic structure is in determining social evolution, its influence depends on how its “taken up,” interpreted, or enacted by agents. The cultural technē supplies the tools for uptake. (ii) “The meaning of a symbol always transcends any particular context, because the symbol is freighted with its usages in a multitude of other instances of social practice.” (2005, 48) Social meanings are not locked into their role in a particular system, but allow for redefinition in response to other contexts, systems, institutions. (2005, 49)

One way of putting Dawson and Katzenstein’s point is that social orders are more than just economic or political structures; they are a set of multiple interlocking systems, each governed by its own, historically specific and culturally rich, dynamics. Injustice takes different forms depending on the “regime of articulation” and the values it relies on and produces.

Haslanger

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9. Applied Ideal Theory and the Embeddedness of Critique

I argued in the previous section that separating normative theory from empirical explanation – the “distancing thesis” – is not promising for critique. In order to identify the how unjust systems work, we need to do emancipatory, i.e., value laden, social science. But what about the “priority thesis”? Should (and must!) critique be guided by ideals identified a priori? Not if value is path-dependent. Plausibly, what’s valuable depends, inter alia, on what is available to value. Jack Balkin makes this point vividly:

Values are not so much what humans have as what they do and feel. Human beings possess an inexhaustible drive to evaluate, to pronounce what is good and bad, beautiful and ugly, advantageous and disadvantageous. Without culture, human values are inchoate and indeterminate; through culture they become differentiated, articulated, and refined. (Balkin 1998, 27-28)

To develop this idea, Balkin relies on examples of aesthetic value: the creation of different sorts of musical instruments and the different configurations of sound enables us to cultivate different ways of hearing and appreciating music. Over time, the cultural articulation of value involves both a refinement of old values and a creation of new ones (1998, 28). This line of thought also applies to moral value.

We concretize our indeterminate value of justice by creating human institutions and practices that attempt to enforce it and exemplify it….Hence the institutions that people construct to exemplify justice may be different in different eras and different lands. …[It follows that] human beings can also generate ever new examples of injustice and oppression through their cultural constructions. In different times and places, human beings find new ways to work evils on their fellow creatures, and to create monuments to brutality and repulsiveness. (1998, 30-31)

Insofar as ideal theory abstracts away from the particular social context in which values are articulated and aims to provide an alternative – ideal – for all times and places, it is the wrong tool for social critique. A cultural technē is an evolving specification of our “inchoate and indeterminate” drive to evaluate in response to our material (biological, geographical, economic) conditions. To suppose that we can articulate an ideal that is not conditioned by our cultural technē and, even if we could, that it could speak to us, is implausible. This does not leave critique without normative resources. Social critique can, at the very least, draw on our inchoate and indeterminate sense of justice – and what more is our idea of reciprocity? – and its articulation in other contexts to construct and demand a better alternative to the current practices. (Kymlicka 2002, 2-4; Dworkin 1977, 179-183) The fragmentation of our social practices and relative autonomy of our social systems “generate tensions, crises, and contradictions” can prompt reflection and reconfiguration of our normative resources.

In summary, we live in vast social orders that manage most aspects of our lives, social orders that are unjust along multiple dimensions and demand our complicity. How might we undertake critique? Two dominant approaches are the “medical model” and the “applied ideal theory” model. I have agreed with Shelby that the (MM) is inadequate, and argued further that the (AIT) depends on an untenable distinction between empirical social science and a priori normative theory. Emancipatory social science is necessary in order to locate the “articulated” target of critique and to identify the levers for change. And the values that guide critique are to be discovered, invented, and contested on the ground, in experience, in disrupting old social orders and building new ones collectively.

Haslanger

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Part III: The Epistemology of Consciousness Raising

10. The Challenges of Ideology Critique

In Part I, I argued that social practices and social structures depend on a collection of social meanings that provide a “stage-setting” for action and are a constituent part of the local social-regulation system. In Part II, I argued that an ideal theory – defined by the priority thesis and the distancing thesis – is inadequate for social critique. The kind of ideal theory I’m criticizing is committed to an untenable divide between empirical and normative inquiry. The practices and structures that are the target of critique are not fully transparent to us; our social science must provide a “diagnosis and critique of the causal processes that generate [suffering and inequality]” (Wright, quoted above). And given that our values are given content and materialized within social practices, the distancing thesis deprives us of concrete resources for critique.

Recall, however, that we are considering the task of critique under conditions of ideology. The practices and structures that are the target of critique are, by hypothesis, organized by a cultural technē that prevents us – at least in some cases – from aptly recognizing what is of value/disvalue, and organizes us in ways that are oppressive. But not everyone experiences the oppression as such. So how should we undertake critique? Ideal theory seems either unnecessary or impotent; non-ideal theory seems too bound to existing frameworks of value.

If we know what is just and unjust, then the proper target of ideology critique simply follows: we should disrupt the cultural technē that prevents us from valuing things aptly and disrupt those social structures that produce injustice. However, because we are theorizing from within an ideological cultural technē, we cannot assume we have this knowledge. Ideology works by recruiting both the dominant and the subordinate to enact unjust practices without being coerced to do so; it does so by masking and distorting features of the world that matter. Recognizing this, Robin Celikates (2016) points to three challenges an account of ideology critique must address. Here are two that are relevant for our purposes:

i) Normative challenge: what makes an ideology problematic? Are there objective moral truths by reference to which we can judge a social arrangement defective or unjust? If not, then on what basis do we undertake critique?

ii) Methodological or epistemological challenge: from what standpoint does the critic speak? Traditionally critical theory is embedded in a social movement and aims to articulate the interests and demands of the oppressed. But then the question is “which insights of which agents – given that they usually do not constitute a homogeneous category – the critical theorist articulates.” (4)

11. Methodological preliminaries

Obviously, it is not possible to fully address both challenges just described. So to begin, I will focus the task.

• What counts as ideology is a matter of the injustice of its effects and the (bad) values it promotes/embodies. I assume that there are truths about what is just, good, and valuable.7 The claim

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7 I leave open the meta-ethical view about the nature of moral facts.
that there are *some* moral truths cannot be avoided by those engaged in justified political resistance.

- The site of ideology critique is the *social domain*. This includes both individuals and the state. But the primary issues concern what practices we should engage in, what social norms we should embrace, how we should go on, from here, together. Our inquiry is practice-directed and embedded.

- An individual can be treated unjustly *qua* individual. But within the social domain individuals are vulnerable to perpetrating or suffering injustice by virtue of their social positions. The aim is to improve our social practices and social structures to eliminate this *positional vulnerability*.

- As social critics, we should distinguish the *justification problem* from the *illumination problem* (how do we get others to recognize their oppression and join our movement?) In critical theory they are often joined because critical theory should be emancipatory. But they need not be.

- We should also distinguish the *justification problem* from the *political problem*. The justification problem concerns the whether we have a justified complaint against the current social order, i.e., that some practice or set of practices is harmful or unjust. The political problem is what we, collectively, should do about it (and how to decide). Rarely can all *pro tanto* political complaints be adequately addressed; solutions to collective action problems distribute, but do not eliminate, benefits and burdens. Also, power matters. Danielle Allen reminds us:

  …the phrase "the common good" generally ignores the differential distribution of losses and benefits throughout a citizenry that result from collective action, and manages the problem of loss in politics (or, the defeat of a citizen's interests in the public sphere) simply by asking citizens to bear up in moments of disappointment. (Allen 2001, 858)

- There are many ways to organize social life, so the goal is not to ask what is the *best* way to do this; the project is *anti-utopian*, but does require imagination and hope (Solnit 2004). Rather, we seek to identify the failures of our current system an promote change for the better.

- We do not need to *know what justice is* or have a complete moral theory to engage in social critique. We can begin with knowledge of (an) injustice. (Injustice may not be a proper kind. And modal knowledge of what makes something an injustice is not essential to remedy instances of it.)

- Objective values need not be ahistorical or acontextual. They may be path-dependent. What's valuable depends, inter alia, on what is available to value. (See §9.)

### 12. Methodological/Epistemic challenge

Celikates' methodological challenge situates us at a skeptical moment: If we, ourselves, may be in the grip of an ideology, how can we judge what is emancipatory? He addresses these challenges by treating ideology critique as a “second-order project.” On his view, ideologies are those practices that “block the development and/or exercise of the reflexive and critical capacities” of the agents in question. He says:

…ideology critique can be understood as second-order critique: If ideologies hide the possibility of criticizing (and transforming) these very ideologies and the problematic first-order phenomena they mask, then the first aim of the critique of ideology has to be to identify these blockades of critique and to work towards their dissolution. In this respect, ideology critique can be seen as taking a procedural turn: Its task is not so much to replace a mistaken or distorted view of social reality with
one that is correct (as Althusser implies), or to develop a substantial vision of how society should be organized (as mainstream political philosophy does); rather, its task is to make it possible for agents to ask these questions and collectively look for answers to them themselves. (2016, 17)

Because critical theory, on his view, is not relying on values other than the epistemic value of developing “reflexive and critical capacities” in a community, it needn’t take a stand on the substantive values at issue in the context. The critic’s primary goal should be to open space for resistant voices to be heard and allow the community to determine its own collective values and the social practices to further them.

I am sympathetic with aspects of Celikates’ proceduralism, and with the fallibility of any such process. (See also Celikates 2018.) Note, however:

- Ideology prevents us from engaging in just and worthy practices by shaping our agency (and the social world). In other words, every practice has an epistemic element: it depends on an orientation that selects the information that is apt and cultivates a set of cognitive, affective, and agential responses. How do we distinguish changing first-order practices – and their component orientations – from “second-order” epistemic interventions?

- Are “critical capacities” sufficient? Can epistemic practices be ideological? How should we adjudicate which forms of critique, are warranted?

- As Celikates suggests, a crucial commitment of critical theory is to listen to first person (and first-person plural) knowledge claims of the oppressed. This commitment is partly grounded in epistemic humility: we should listen to those directly affected by the practices in question because they are likely to have better access to morally relevant facts. However, sometimes it is a claim of epistemic entitlement by those who are members of such oppositional groups. Why aren’t the critical theorists included among those articulating the critique and demanding first-order solutions?

13. Oppositional Consciousness, A Case Study - Combahee River Collective (1977/1983)\(^8\)

In 1974 a group of Black women started meeting in response to their experiences both in everyday life and in the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) and the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM). Their frustration had roots in their situation: “the political realization that comes from the seemingly personal experiences of individual Black women’s lives,” (my italics) and also the failures of both the CRM and the WLM to give them the tools to develop a response: “there was no way of conceptualizing what was so apparent to us, what we knew was really happening.” (1977/1983, 33) Through a process of consciousness raising, they explored the cultural and political dimensions of their experience, and developed new terms and concepts:

We discovered that all of us, because we were “smart,” had also been considered “ugly,” i.e., “smart-ugly.” “Smart-ugly” crystallized the way in which most of us had been forced to develop our intellects at great cost to our “social” lives.” (1977/1983, 34)

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\(^8\) Many examples could be given. I use this example because it is one of the classic cases in feminist theory. Mansbridge and Morris (2001) provide a collection of case studies involving a variety of social groups in different contexts. For a more recent example see Schmidt (2019).
Through CR, they reached the “shared belief that Black Women are inherently valuable, that our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else’s but because of our need as human persons for autonomy…” and “to be recognized as human, levelly human, is enough.” (1977/1983, 33-34)

The group that persisted through 1977 – when the statement was written – decided that CR was not enough. They developed a study group, and decided to promote their cause through writing, publishing, lecturing, and other activist organizing. They conclude,

We believe in collective process and a non-hierarchical distribution of power within our own group and in our vision of a revolutionary society. We are committed to a continual examination of our politics as they develop through criticism and self-criticism as an essential aspect of our practice. (1977/1983, 37)

Jane Mansbridge (2001) uses the term ‘oppositional consciousness’ to capture a particular kind of response to oppression. She suggests (drawing on Foucault) that oppositional consciousness in liberation movements (cf. social responsibility movements)\(^9\) requires:

…a gut refusal to be subordinated rooted somewhere in every human being…To form an effective basis for collective action, gut refusals need cognitive and emotional organizing. They need an injustice frame…They need an apparatus involving both reason and emotion... (2001, 4)

Iris Young calls this a “desiring negation”:

Desire…creates the distance, the negation, that opens the space for criticism of what is. This critical distance does not occur on the basis of some previously discovered rational ideas of the good and the just. On the contrary, the ideas of the good and the just arise from the desiring negation that action brings to what is given. (1990, 6)

Each social reality presents its own unrealized possibilities, experienced as lacks and desires. Norms and ideals arise from the yearning that is an expression of freedom: it does not have to be this way, it could be otherwise. (1990, 6)

Drawing on empirical case studies, Mansbridge, et al argue that “To form an effective basis for collective action, gut refusals need cognitive and emotional organizing. They need an injustice frame.” (2001, 4) This occurs in stages. But a

…full-fledged oppositional consciousness includes identifying a specific dominant group as causing and in some way benefiting from those injustices. It also includes seeing certain actions of the dominant group as forming a "system" of some kind that advances the interests of the dominant group. Finally, it can include a host of other ideas, beliefs, and feelings that provide coherence, explanation, and moral condemnation. (2001, 5)

This process relies on the availability of certain cultural resources, e.g.,

…An existing oppositional culture provides ideas, rituals, and long-standing patterns of interaction that overt political struggle can refine and develop to create a more mature oppositional

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\(^9\) Mansbridge distinguishes liberation movements, “equality based special issue movements,” such as the pro-choice movement, and social responsibility movements, such as the antinuclear movement or animal rights movement (2001, 8-9)
Oppositional consciousness arises and can be justified in a variety of ways. The process I am exploring is only one example. It involves a desiring negation, moves to a complaint, and results in a pro tanto moral claim. I draw here on Anderson’s pragmatist moral epistemology (2014, 2015). Although the bullets are listed in an order that might be taken to be temporal, they may occur in a different order.

- Identify a moral “gut refusal” to one’s circumstances.\textsuperscript{10} Whining is an indication of displeasure, but does not rise to the level of a legitimate complaint against others. How do we transform whining into complaining?

- This “gut refusal” does not provide direct or infallible access to moral truth. (i) In humans, it is mediated by the cultural technē. (ii) Individuals and groups can be grossly mistaken about whether they are being treated badly or unfairly. (Note that unfairness is a comparative notion, so one condition on a plausible claim of unfairness is adequate knowledge of the circumstances of others to make the comparison.) Social animals are capable of recognizing suffering and caring about it (Gruen 2014). In good cases, we are exercising our epistemic capacities adequately and gaining moral knowledge. However, some conditions prevent us from exercising these capacities well. It is the task of a naturalized moral epistemology to discover the conditions when our gut refusals are reliable.

- Test the reaction against the experience of others: Articulate the concern to others within the same (affected) social group; the process from here forward is collective. Create counter-publics where the subordinated can complain to each other without being “corrected” by members of the dominant group. Consider: Is the problem individual or social? Is it a positional vulnerability? Are people treating

\textsuperscript{10} Note that this gut refusal can also be experienced as a “a yes that vibrates to cosmic harmonies” (Fanon 1952/2008, 2)
you badly because of particular features of your behavior or personality, or because you are a member of the group in question.\(^1\)

- This process involves shifting *orientations* to notice facts that have been occluded – empirical facts, morally relevant facts, facts about possibilities. Shifts in orientations can be prompted by the idiosyncratic conceptions of individuals, by existing oppositional cultures (#MeToo), or by the alternative orientations gained by participation in different practices.\(^12\)

- Individuals within the group can sometimes rely on existing identities, but in other cases new “identities” are called for (Mansbridge, 9). The shared identities (Black feminist, queer) allow for a cultivation of trust, new language, shared interests, etc. Patterns can then become more visible, new hermeneutic resources developed (“smart-ugly,” “misogyny”).

- The “testing” process – at this stage and later stages – should involve forms of *bias reduction* and *consideration of epistemic injustice* of all sorts. There is compelling empirical evidence that: “Standing in a position of superior power over others tends to bias the moral sentiments of the powerful, in at least three ways: it reduces their compassion, activates their arrogance, and leads them to objectify subordinates.” (Anderson 2014, 7)

- **Develop a hypothesis** about the source of the problem. Who/What is responsible for the problem? Is the coordination system faulty – how do the different articulated systems generate the problem(s) and what are the options for (cultural, political, material…) change. {See also Mansbridge 2001, 5}

- **Test the hypothesis.** Is it empirically adequate? Is the hypothesis the best explanation of the phenomenon? Draw on critical social science; revise the hypothesis, as needed. (Cf. Neo-Nazis, Anti-Vaxers) This process is holistic rather than foundationalist, fallible, and the justification is externalist.

  - It is important to emphasize that this testing is not foundationalist – it relies on an emancipatory social science that is value-laden. The values, however, are incorporated into a comprehensive reflective equilibrium that includes not only normative considerations, but includes (even controversial, but empirically adequate) empirical, metaphysical, epistemological, considerations as well. (Antony 1993, 2018)\(^13\)

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\(^1\) It isn’t obvious that warrant for the claim that emerges from one’s reaction requires affirmation from others, especially under conditions of ideology. It certainly won’t meet with universal affirmation amongst the group affected. So a question arises: whose reactions can one trust to judge the legitimacy of one’s claim? In later stages of developing and testing a hypothesis to explain the refusal, one should seek an explanation of why some members of the group share the reaction and why others don’t. This hypothesis should be tested as well. The possibility remains that one may be right, but not have affirmation from others in the same or similar position. In such cases, moving forward politically will be hard. Thanks to Marie Guillot for comments on this point.

\(^12\) On shifting orientations, see Haslanger (forthcoming). In some crucial cases, shifting orientations involves seeing oneself as positioned within a structure – so one has a kind of dual perspective from within the practice and outside of it. Many standpoint theorists have pointed to the “duality” that provides a basis for critique. For example, DuBois on “double consciousness”; Fanon (1952/2008, 181) on “subjectivity in the interrogative” (Drabinski 2019); Collins on being an “outsider within”; Lugones on “world traveling”; Anzaldúa on “mestizo” identity; Mills on “Herrenvolk ethics”.

\(^13\) I take epistemic foundationalism to be inadequate in any inquiry. This is why there is no bright line between empirical science and normative inquiry (Quine 1953/1980). Holistic justification is our best alternative. See Longino (1990); Anderson (1995; 2002; 2004).
• Articulate a claim challenging the practice, e.g., this (part of the) practice is unjust, oppressive, harmful, or wrongful.
  o An articulation of a claim is also partly a political matter and draws on resources in the oppositional culture.

**Political stages (no guarantees!)**

♦ Suggest proposals for corrective procedures and practices. (Where possible, corrective practices should be tested in counter-publics.)

♦ If deliberation concerning the claims and proposals is unsuccessful, resort to non-deliberative interventions, “from petitioning, publicity campaigns, theatrical performances, candlelight vigils, litigation, and political campaigns to street demonstrations, boycotts, teach-ins, sit-ins, picketing, strikes, and building occupations.” (Anderson 2014, 9)

♦ Even if a proposal is met with agreement in the public sphere, this is not the end of the story. We must ask, as Anderson suggests: “[i] Does acting on the new judgments solve the problem as originally diagnosed? …[ii]) Does it do so with acceptable side effects? An affirmative answer to both questions amounts to a successful test of the new judgment in an experiment in living.” (2014, 5-6)

♦ Repeat as needed.

On this view, an oppositional consciousness is warranted insofar as it moves from a “gut refusal” to a moral claim (at the transition to politics) through a collective examination of shared experience that is guided by sound epistemic norms. What norms are “sound” is not simply a matter of what the dominant culture recommends, but should be guided by best practices of social psychology, empirical investigation, and the lived experience of those in the subordinate group. The resulting claim is made on behalf of a social group and warranted through their collective efforts.

An oppositional moral claim is not, simply by virtue of being the result of such a process, dispositive. Rather, it is a move in a process of contentious politics that deserves consideration in collective deliberation in the political domain. However, contra Celikates, such progress is not merely epistemic. The critic makes a legitimate moral demand, even if it fails to result in social change for the better.

15. **Conclusion: The Normative Basis for Contentious Politics**

So how do we gain normative standing to critique culture? Recall that under conditions of ideology there is, by hypothesis, a range of social practices that oppress a group; however, some do not experience them as oppressive. Critique sometimes targets practices that constitute value for the practitioners.

I've argued, however, that an important form of social critique begins amongst those affected as a resistance to the practice that they are being asked to perform. Resistance arises from their knowledge that even if the practice constitutes some sort of value, it is harming them in ways that are morally problematic. They reject the ideology that makes the injustice appear harmless and articulate a moral claim against those who maintain the practice.

It may be that the values the resistant rely on when making claims of being harmed are at odds with what others engaged in the practice value. But that does not delegitimize their claims. Social practices are
cooperative enterprises, and if parties to the cooperation have reason to think that they are being treated unjustly, or their values being undermined, there is a pro tanto reason for all parties involved to reconsider the practice. Insisting on terms of cooperation in the face of the non-consent of the opposition is coercive, and is a pro tanto wrong. This is the normative basis for contentious politics.


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