

Culture and Critique

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Abstract:

How do we achieve social justice? How do we change society for the better? Some would argue that we must do it by changing the laws or state institutions. Others that we must do it by changing individual attitudes. I argue that although both of these factors are important and relevant, we must also change culture. What does this mean? Culture, I argue, is a set of social meanings that shapes and filters how we think and act. Problematic networks of social meanings constitute an ideology. Entrenched ideologies are resilient and are barriers to social change, even in the face of legal interventions. I argue that an effective way to change culture is through social movements and contentious politics, and that philosophy has a role to play in promoting such change.

I. Introduction

Oppression and injustice comes in many forms. One distinction worth noting is between oppression that is repressive, that is, forced upon individuals through coercive measures, and oppression that is ideological, that is, enacted unthinkingly or even willingly by the subordinated or privileged.¹ I adopt the term ‘ideological,’ although it is controversial what it means and whether it remains useful.² To get us started, I embrace Stuart Hall’s suggestion that 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

¹ The distinction is not exhaustive. There are forms of injustice or oppression that are neither straightforwardly repressive or ideological, for example some economic oppression. Moreover, the distinction between repressive and ideological oppression tends to focus on the subordinate group and so can obscure the fact that typically the repressive practices imposed on the subordinate are ideologically maintained in and by the dominant. I will be talking generally about ideology that functions to sustain the practices of both the dominant and the subordinate, with attention to the ways in which ideology creates and maintains social fluency in unjust practices.

² The literature on ideology is extensive, and clearly there are many different uses of the term. See, for example, Marx and Engels 1845/1998; Eagleton 1991; Geuss 1981. My use is consistent with one tradition of use, but not all of them.

formation. It has also to do with the processes by which new forms of consciousness, new conceptions of the world, arise, which move the masses of the people into historical action against the prevailing system. (Hall 1996/2006, pp. 24-25)

Chattel slavery in the United States was repressive. Gender oppression is, at least in many contexts, ideological: men and women, even men and women with deep commitments to justice, hardly notice their participation in practices that sustain male privilege and power and even, sometimes, take them to be central to their identities. There are also various sorts of hybrid cases. Racist oppression in the contemporary United States is mostly hybrid: the majority of the racially subordinated participate unwillingly and experience it as repressive and the racially privileged enact it unthinkingly. In hybrid cases ideology plays a role, but the ideology is not hegemonic and coercion is often employed to keep the subordinated in their place (Manne 2016). Rarely, if ever, is ideology thoroughly hegemonic, but it can be dominant in a community so that alternatives are limited and questioning of it is rare; and even in cases where injustice is enforced through repression, ideology functions in the background.

My interest in this paper is the phenomenon of ideological oppression. The first task is to understand the phenomenon. What is ideology and how does it work to maintain oppression? Very broadly, ideology is best understood functionally: ideology functions to stabilize or perpetuate unjust power and domination, and does so through some form of masking or illusion (Geuss 1981; Shelby 2003; Celikates 2006; Haslanger 2015). As a result, ideology critique takes two forms. The epistemic critique of ideology reveals the distortion, occlusion, and misrepresentation of the facts. The moral critique concerns the unjust conditions that such illusions and distortions enable.

Although this characterization of ‘ideology’ offers a fairly broad common ground, there are important differences just under the surface. For example, on some accounts, an ideology is a relatively explicit set of (distorted) claims or beliefs that purport to justify a (morally problematic) social order. On these accounts, the epistemic and justificatory failings can be identified through ordinary epistemic critique. But this approach fails to take into account how, in the social domain, shared beliefs can make themselves true (Haslanger 2012, Ch. 1; Haslanger 2017, Ch. 1). Moreover, in order to promote meaningful change, we need attention to the ways in which the epistemic and moral wrongs are connected. My primary objective in this paper is to illuminate the phenomenon of ideological oppression and argue that efforts to achieve social justice must address culture; so our political efforts (and the normative inquiry that guides them) should not be focused entirely on the possibilities of state action and other policy changes.

Consider, for example, the history of racial desegregation in the United States. The *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decisions in the early 1950s outlawed

racial segregation in public education. The Court determined that separate but equal educational institutions reinforced racial hierarchy, and so were unjust. As is well known, it took over a decade for the decision to be implemented. (Library of Congress 2004). Seven years after the landmark 1954 decision, three states (South Carolina, Alabama, and Mississippi) remained completely segregated. In other states, districts closed the public schools and the state relied on private segregated schools to educate children, rather than implementing desegregation orders. In 1963, when Black students were being prevented from registering at the University of Alabama by Gov. George Wallace and a team of Alabama State Troopers, President Kennedy sent the National Guard to override Wallace.

Even with the implementation of the desegregation orders, the aims of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision have not been realized. White flight from urban areas is one explanation. For example, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1977) reported on February 15, 1977 that ‘segregation had actually increased since 1954’ and ‘true desegregation could be achieved in urban areas only if students were bused between cities and suburbs.’ Some argue that now sixty years after *Brown*, not only is education separate and unequal, but resegregation is occurring, especially since the late 1990s when judges began releasing hundreds of districts from court-enforced integration (Civil Rights Project, 2012). For example,

Freed from court oversight, Tuscaloosa’s schools have seemed to move backwards in time. The citywide integrated high school is gone, replaced by three smaller schools. Central [High School] retains the name of the old powerhouse, but nothing more. A struggling school serving the city’s poorest part of town, it is 99 percent black...Predominantly white neighborhoods adjacent to Central have been gerrymandered into the attendance zones of other, whiter schools. (Hannah-Jones 2014)

In districts released from desegregation orders, 53% percent of Black students now attend ‘apartheid schools,’ with less than 1% White students. (Hannah-Jones 2014). Many of these schools are failing. For example, Michael Brown (the target of the 2014 police shooting in Ferguson, Missouri) graduated Normandy High School just before his death. Notably,

The state’s 2014 assessment report on Normandy’s schools was spectacularly bleak: Zero points awarded for academic achievement in English. Zero for math, for social studies, for science. Zero for students headed to college. Zero for attendance. Zero for the percent of students who graduate. Its total score: 10 out of 140. (Hannah-Jones 2014)

There are, no doubt, multiple factors – legal, economic, historical, cultural, psychological – relevant to explaining the phenomenon of racial segregation and the educational achievement gap in the United States. *Brown v. Board of Education* was clearly an important step in the civil rights movement, but at this point in time, the idea that racism is going to be dismantled by state action is no longer credible.³

No doubt, some of the police officers, sheriffs, judges, medical practitioners, and members of juries who violate citizens' rights are, as individuals, sexist, racist, and classist. There are also serious problems with the laws that govern the American educational system and women's reproductive lives. However, at the heart of these patterns is a structure of social relations that is ideologically sustained in spite of legislative, judicial, and individual efforts to change it. The kind of enduring social injustice that the above examples capture is maintained at least in part by collective epistemic failings. There is a sense in which individuals in the grip of an ideology fail to appreciate what they are doing or what's wrong with it, and so are often unmotivated, if not resistant, to change. Judicial and legislative decisions can make a difference by motivating people to become aware of and care about ways they interact with others they might otherwise ignore (Lessig 1995, Appiah 2010), but entrenched social meanings can override such efforts. If state action is insufficient, then what are our other options to promote broad social change?

II. Culture

Within mainstream moral philosophy, normative analysis seems to focus on either individuals or the state. Culture is almost entirely left out of the picture.⁴ Of course there are different understandings of culture, and whether the notion of culture is useful is contested (Sewell 2005). It is no longer plausible to claim that the world is composed of 'societies' with their own 'cultures' (Sewell 2005, p. 57; Phillips 2006, 2007). Nevertheless, it is useful to retain the notion of culture as an analytical tool. Drawing on recent social science research, William Sewell argues that

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

³ This is just one example of many. A further source of doubt about state action concerns mistrust of law enforcement. Consider the multiple incidents that have given rise to Black Lives Matter; also the violation of the rights of poor pregnant women of color (Paltrow and Flavin 2013).

⁴ There are important exceptions to this outside of or in response to the mainstream, especially in work on gender, race, and other social identities, for example, Okin 1989; Mills 1997, 1998; Young 1990; Alcoff 2006; Cudd 2006; Fricker 2007; Chambers 2008; Anderson 2010; Medina 2013. Exceptions within a narrowly construed liberal mainstream are rare, as Chambers (2008) convincingly demonstrates.

sequence of behavior. (Sewell 2005, p. 44)

On Sewell's view, culture is a dimension of human practices:

...human practice, in all social contexts or institutional spheres, is structured simultaneously both by meanings and by other aspects of the environment in which they occur – by, for example, power relations or spatiality or resource distributions. Culture is...the semiotic dimension of human social practice in general. I further assume that these dimensions [for example, economic, political, demographic, social, demographic] of practice mutually shape and constrain each other but also that they are relatively autonomous from each other. (Sewell 2005, p. 48)

On this view, culture is 'relatively autonomous' because symbolic systems cast a wide net over social relations and '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' (48; also Balkin 1998, Ch. 2).

To elaborate, Sewell borrows Ann Swidler's (1986) suggestion that '[c]ulture influences action not [only?] by providing the ultimate values toward which action is oriented, but by shaping a repertoire or 'tool kit' of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct 'strategies of action' (p. 273). These are shared tools that enable us to interpret and coordinate with each other, and provide a context for developing social identities. And yet, as Jack Balkin (1998) emphasizes, the tools 'are not necessarily designed for a single purpose but have multiple purposes and are often the source of new purposes. They are not simply means to an end but the means of developing and articulating our ends' (p. 24). Balkin borrows Levi-Strauss's notion of *bricoleur*, the 'odd-job man' who uses whatever tools are available in new and unexpected ways, for our relationship to culture (24; see also Taylor 2016, p. 2). We should not assume that the culture is coherent, or that those who employ the tools have shared ends or act in solidarity with each other. Culture is also a site of contestation and disruption (Sewell 2005, 50). In fact, culture is 'continually put at risk in practice and therefore subject to transformation' (Sewell 2005, 52). Because of this risk, meanings that sustain the status quo are managed and sometimes enforced:

The typical cultural strategy of dominant actors and institutions is not so much to establish uniformity as it is to organize difference. They are constantly engaged in efforts not only to normalize or homogenize but also to hierarchize, encapsulate, exclude, criminalize, hegemonize, or marginalize practices and populations that diverge from the sanctioned ideal. (Sewell 2005, p. 56)

Both Swidler and Sewell stress the role of culture in explanation. Some rely on the 'culture of poverty' to explain entrenched economic disadvantage (Swidler 1986, p. 275),

suggesting the poor have ‘bad values.’ But, Swidler shows, the poor want many of the same things that everyone else wants: friendships, love, stable jobs, high incomes. Culture matters in a different way: it provides resources for agency. One needs to gain the skills to navigate (both interpret and employ) the social meanings that partly constitute the dominant practices. So, Sewell argues, ‘even if an action were almost entirely determined by, say, overwhelming disparities in economic resources, those disparities would still have to be rendered meaningful in action according to a semiotic logic’ (Sewell 2005, p. 46). We might add, that even if the state were to intervene in an attempt to improve the economic or political position of the subordinated, the interventions would have some social meaning or other that would affect how agents would respond to them and integrate them into current practices (or not).⁵ This is clear, for example, from the history of racial segregation I sketched above.

Paul Taylor’s (2016) work highlights the ways that social meanings not only constrain what’s considered possible or intelligible, but also perception.

...race belongs to the manifold of social reality, and helps structure our experience, our immediate experience, of the world. Often enough, we directly perceive racial phenomena: we just see race, the way we just see home runs and rude gestures. Because of this, the differential modes of treatment that mark the boundaries between racial populations can be reliably written...by the affectively and symbolically loaded workings of immediate experience. Black people *look* dangerous, or unreliable, or like bad credit risks... (p. 22) (Also Siegel 2011; Alcoff 2000.)

Although in the literature on social imaginaries, critical aesthetics, and culture often describe the ways in which meanings constitute our subjective perspective on the world, it is important to keep in mind that the social meanings aren’t ideas, in the sense of private psychological phenomena. (See also Small 2014 on skill.) Thought, perception, emotion, and other psychological states depend on a public ‘field of preexisting meanings’ (Taylor 2016, p. 44); this ‘field’ shapes and conditions our experience and agency, and provides a kind of palette of psychological content.⁶

Following this line of thought, culture is a network of social meanings, tools, scripts, schemas, heuristics, principles, and the like that we draw on in action, and that

⁵ Work on the social imaginary is also relevant here. See (Gatens 1996, Fricker 2007; Medina 2013).

⁶ The idea that linguistic meanings are not private psychological entities is familiar in philosophy of language since Frege; parallel arguments show that social meanings are not private psychological entities either.

gives shape to our practices.⁷ To emphasize the tool-like and skill-like aspect of culture, (and also to avoid confusion with competing uses of the term ‘culture’), I will use the term ‘*cultural technē*’ for this sense of culture.⁸ It is sometimes useful to think of the dominant network of meanings in the singular (a group’s cultural technē), and sometimes it is useful to think of cultural technēs in the plural, for example, as potentially competing or task oriented. In considering the cultural tools that shape a particular practice, I usually use the term ‘schema’.

It is crucial to note, however, is that a cultural technē is one part of a system that functions (not always successfully!) to regulate our interactions in a domain, and cannot be understood apart from its role in that system. Other parts of the system include *resources* – things such as material objects, time, knowledge, and the like – taken to have value (or disvalue), and the *psychological capacities* of humans and other non-human animals to be responsive to and learn from each other (Sewell 1992; Zawidzki 2013; McGeer 2007). This has several important consequences.

i) A cultural technē, is not just a random collection meanings, but is a frame for socially meaningful action.⁹ Cultural technēs have a function: they enable us to coordinate by providing the paths and signals that structure our practices. For example, traffic management is not just a matter of passing laws, but finding ways to inculcate public norms, meanings, and skills in drivers. Practices organize us in a variety of ways: on their basis we establish and affirm relationships and identities; we distribute power, resources, knowledge; we criticize and praise each other.

ii) Explanations drawing on culture, or a cultural technē, are not just drawing on public meanings or their internalization in individuals, but are referencing this system that provides tools for us to coordinate in managing resources; the system is explanatorily useful because it is stable and resilient. This is due to the looping effects of culture and resources (Hacking 1995; Sewell 1992, Mallon 2003), that is, the interdependence between the different parts of the system.

⁷ It is important that on this account, culture does not consist simply in sets of ‘associations.’ To associate x with y is compatible with many different relations between x and y (x is similar to y, or x is the opposite of y, for example). Thanks to Susanna Siegel.

⁸ More should be said here to differentiate kinds of tools. In the case of ideology, cultural tools both enable and limit our cognitive capacities. But many tools don’t have this limiting effect. Does that render the metaphor useless? Thanks to Robin Celikates and John Bengson for calling this to my attention.

⁹ It is compatible with this view that the cultural technē supervenes on attitudes, but it doesn’t follow that it can be identified with a set of attitudes or is (wholly) composed of attitudes. Consider an analogous phenomenon at a level down: mental states supervene on brain states, but it doesn’t follow that they can be identified with a set of brain states or are even (wholly) composed of brain states. Moreover, explanation in terms of mental states cannot be reduced to explanation in terms of brain states; neither can explanation in terms of social phenomena be reduced to explanation in terms of attitudes.

Schematically, the loop includes a cultural *technē* that is public and available to various parties to the coordination; we internalize these tools and engage in the practices that they structure; the practices organize us in relation to resources, that is, they provide schemas for producing, distributing, accessing, and otherwise managing resources, that is, things taken to have (+/-) value; the world then conforms to the *technē* (more or less), and the *technē* seems to be mirroring the world rather than producing it.

This is not to say that there is a closed loop. Because there are Phillips-head screwdrivers, we have Phillips-head screws; and we have Phillips-head screws, because there are Phillips-head screwdrivers. One calls for the other. But screws and screwdrivers can be used in non-intended ways; one can turn a screw with other tools, when necessary; and toolmakers invent new and improved tools, for example, the hexalobular- or star-head is replacing the Phillips-head for some uses. As we've seen before, meanings are indeterminate and transposable; human capacities and will are variable. Also, importantly, the world pushes back.

What things in the world mean 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, their economic value, and, of course, the different symbolic meanings that may have been attributed to them by other actors. The world is recalcitrant to our predications of meaning. (Sewell 2005, p. 51; also Schroeter and Schroeter 2015, pp. 434ff)

So the system is noisy and imperfect, and an effective *technē* must have multiple back-up options and allow for evolution in response to material conditions. But looping creates an illusion of justification or inevitability.

For example, the Interstate highway system in the United States was constructed largely to serve the interests of affluent whites (Rehm 2016). Those in power relied on a cultural *technē* offering inadequate and distorting tools for interpreting the landscape and communities that inhabited it, for example, thriving Black communities were considered 'blighted' and were razed or bisected. Decisions to produce and distribute resources (transportation, access to opportunity, noise, pollution, safety) disadvantaged poor Blacks, and the material reality of the effects made the disadvantage appear inevitable or justified, and so reinforces the cultural *technē*. The point is not that the cultural *technē* is 'the cause' of the injustice, but that it is a component in a social system that tends to reproduce itself (Pettit 1996); explanations in terms of such systematic interdependencies can be understood as structural explanations (Garfinkel 1981; Haslanger 2017).

iii) A cultural *technē* not only informs and structures our practices, but also gives rise to different forms of subjectivity and frames our identities (Gatens 1996, viii). As Balkin puts it:

The tools of understanding work by becoming part of my apparatus of understanding, which is to say they work by becoming part of me. Cultural software is not just something that we use to understand and evaluate the world; it is also part of us. Indeed, human beings do not become persons until they enter into culture and become imbued with some form of cultural software. To exist as a person is to exist as a person who has cultural software, who is, in part, her cultural software. (Balkin 1998, p. 23)

Our capacity for meaningful agency is central to who we are. Intentional action draws on conceptual resources for framing what we are doing and why (Hacking 1986), but not all action can be deliberately considered. Living together requires social fluency, skills for interpretation, interaction, and coordination that we exercise ‘unthinkingly.’ In a social world structured by practices, performing what the practices require of us is just what we do, it becomes who we are (see also Hayward 2013). Some level of responsiveness to others and capacities for interpretation and learning are plausibly innate; but this capacity for learning is oriented towards mastering the local cultural *technē* (Zawidski 2013).

The social basis of identity is relevant to the resilience of social structures. We can object to the practices and resist a particular framing of our (and others’) action, but to do so meaningfully we must draw on other practices and framings. Effective social change must not only provide incentives for acting differently, for example, through law or policy, but must replace the problematic practices, and the meanings that partly constitute them, with alternative meanings that have some continuity with the prior meanings so we can project ourselves into the new practices and new form of life (cf. Lessig 1995).¹⁰ Although state action can provide both incentives for change, and new hermeneutic resources (as in the now classic example of ‘sexual harassment’ (Fricker 2007)), culture is made materially real and experiences as such due to the systematic looping discussed above. So state action can appear (and be!) not only unwarranted, but deeply destructive of who ‘we’ are, as George Wallace clearly expressed in 1963, in his first inaugural speech as Governor of Alabama:¹¹

It is very appropriate that from this cradle of the Confederacy, this very heart of the great Anglo-Saxon Southland, that today we sound the drum for freedom as have our generations of forebears before us time and again down through history. Let us rise to the call for freedom-loving blood that is in us and send our answer to the tyranny that clanks its chains upon the South. In the name of the greatest

¹⁰ A similar point is relevant to scientific change and scientific revolution, as Thomas Kuhn (1970, Ch. 12) argues. ‘In the science, the testing situation never consists...simply in the comparison of a single paradigm with nature. Instead, testing occurs as part of the competition between two rival paradigms for the allegiance of the scientific community.’ (p. 145)

¹¹ <http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/cdm/singleitem/collection/voices/id/2952/rec/5>

people that have ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny, and I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.

III. Ideology Critique

Let's return now to the idea of ideological oppression. Ideology, on my view, is a cultural technē gone wrong, a cultural technē that organizes us in ways that are unjust, and/or in ways that skew our understanding of what is valuable. This is partly an epistemic problem: the resources we have for experiencing, interpreting, and understanding the world prevent us from appreciating what's morally relevant. In the current political context, we might put the point this way: ideology prevents us from knowing what and who matters. It is also a political problem: the practices guided by the cultural technē systematically disadvantage some groups and constitute unjust structures. I suggested at the start that in order to promote meaningful social change under conditions of ideological oppression we must understand the connection between the epistemic and the political dimensions of injustice. In contexts of ideological oppression, the cultural resources are inadequate to recognize the injustice for what it is. The problem is not that the individuals who participate in the injustice, that is, who either suffer from, perform, or are complicit in it, are stupid or ignorant; even epistemic responsibility within the available cultural technē is insufficient to appreciate the wrongs in question. Moreover, because the cultural technē not only informs cognition but also agency and sense of self, participation in injustice appears called for, and moral critique misfires.

So what is the task of ideology critique, and how can it be accomplished? Put simply, the task is to challenge, disrupt, and replace those aspects of the cultural technē that mask or occlude what's valuable and prevent us from organizing ourselves in ways that are more just.

However, it is important to emphasize again that ideology is not the cause of all injustice. As Robin Celikates emphasizes:

In addition to ideology there are of course a whole number of other factors that can play an important role [in creating and sustaining injustice], from selectively applied repression via coordination and cooperation problems in the face of massive power asymmetries to the 'pathologies' and paradoxes of collective action. (Celikates 2016, 20)

What we are looking for is a kind of epistemic critique that is bound up with political critique, because the political injustice is bound up with the epistemic failures.

Celikates (2016) points to three challenges an account of ideology critique must address:

i) *Normative or criterial challenge*: what makes an ideology problematic? And 'is there a

single feature or set of (systematically related) features that makes them problematic?’ (p. 3) Do we need ideal theory to answer this question? And, if so, what ideal theory should we rely on?

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 (Fraser 1989, Haslanger 2012). But then the question is ‘which insights of which agents – given that they usually do not constitute a homogeneous category – the critical theorist articulates and whether, and if so, how, can she gain some critical distance with regards to the agents in question.’ (p. 4)

iii) *Explanatory challenge*: at what level does ‘ideology’ function and how does it achieve its effects? There are multiple reasons to avoid the idea that ideology functions as a total system governing society as a whole, but if we instead take culture to be a kind of toolkit, a cultural technē, then what is the proper object of critique, especially because tools are transposable and can be useful for unexpected purposes?¹² ‘What exactly holds the rather broad conglomeration of partly psychological, partly social mechanisms – from implicit biases via stereotypes to looping effects – together and makes them into elements of one ideology?’ (p. 4) The usefulness and (just/unjust) effects of a particular tool will depend on context and the other tools available, that is, the harms will be extrinsic to the tool. Are there some tools that are intrinsically problematic?

Celikates address 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. This addresses the *normative* challenge: non-ideologically driven community is in a legitimate position, then, to determine its own collective values and the social practices to express and further them. He responds to the *methodological* challenge by pointing out that cultures are never fully hegemonic, but always in fact include oppositional voices whose points of view offer resources for the critical interrogation of dominant practices. The critic’s goal should to open or maintain space for the multiple voices to be heard. Finally, we can meet the *explanatory* challenge, by drawing on an account of structural explanation that points to the systematic interdependence of culture and material conditions in particular practices, institutions, and structures.

I am sympathetic to the strategies Celikates sketches to address the methodological and explanatory strategies. I am less satisfied with his second-order approach to the normative challenge, however, and think that the critical theorist has resources, to offer a more morally substantive critique. I will argue that because critical theory is embedded in a social movement, there is an important link between the normative and methodological challenges.

¹² Thanks also to Kenny Easwaran who has pressed me on this issue several times.

IV. Value

Note that in responding to the normative challenge, critical theorists are, to say the least, extremely wary of relying on ideal theory. Why should we hesitate to rely on ideal theory to critique culture and unjust social practices? The problem isn't just a knee-jerk cultural relativism. Rather, it emerges from an appreciation of the very notion of culture we have been discussing. Culture shapes what we value and our reasons for action. The point is not just that culture shapes what we *take to be value*, that is, our beliefs about value, but *what is valuable*. In other words, at least some value is path-dependent.

Values are not so much what people 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, refined. (Balkin 1998, pp. 27-8)

Cuisine, art, religion, are perfect examples. Our cultural technē highlights some elements from the booming, buzzing, confusion of life (for example, sounds). We then develop disciplined ways of attending to and creating them (for example, music); this offers opportunities to create new things to attend to (for example, orchestras, electric guitars). Attending to these new things enhances and extends our appreciation, our valuing, our values, what is valuable.

Cultural software allows human beings to articulate and concretize their values, to put flesh on the bones of their...inchoate urge to value and evaluate. Through cultural software our brute sense of the beautiful is transformed into the many varieties of aesthetic judgment, some of which come into being and fade away at different points in history. Through culture software the inchoate sense of good and bad is transformed into the many varieties of moral and practical judgment, and the many virtues and vices are articulated and differentiated. (Balkin 1998, pp. 17)

For example, White Supremacy teaches us to be selective in what we notice, what we respond to, what we value. Just as the promisor, worshipper, or chef ignores certain desires or considerations and takes this to be required by their practice, the police academy trains the officer to ignore (or interpretively skew) certain behaviors, for example, all too often the cries of the Black person or the poor woman in labor (Platrow and Flavin 2013). They are not what matters; the local cultural technē produces 'blinders' that filter and shape experience. As Paul Taylor argues, '[m]odern visual experience is constituted in part by the possibilities for seeing, and for not seeing, the members of the different races. Race-thinking is an integral part of modernity's screen of signs, and

discovering what this screen screens out is the key to understanding black invisibility' (Taylor 2016, p. 48). If racism is embedded broadly in our cultural technē then it is partly constitutive of social practices that give people (what they take to be) reasons to act in racist or racially segregating ways. This may include where to live, what music to listen to, what to wear, how to celebrate holidays or vacation, whom to frisk, when to pull a gun, and so on. The practices in question create a topology of social space, channel resources, and may become entrenched through commitment to roles and identities.

Valuing is a human practice; but so is reasoning. Reasoning is learned through socialization, along with the selectivity of experience and other cognitive mechanisms (Laden 2012). It too involves tutored, guided, responses to things and people around us. Not all reasoning is deductive, and non-deductive reasoning can be legitimate (Brandom 2000). Academic disciplines teach different ways of thinking and reasoning, for example, scientific reasoning, philosophical reasoning, economic reasoning. Learning practical and moral reasoning are important human tasks and happen through culture (and philosophy classes).

So the question of cultural critique is pressing. If value is not only appreciated through social practices but also created through them, then how can one understand or appreciate the values 'from the outside,' so to speak, that is, without engaging in the practices that they structure? And if one cannot appreciate the values in question, what epistemic standing does one have to critique them, and the practices in which they are embedded?

Celikates suggests a way around this problem: the critical theorist should not aim to critique the first-order values directly, but should consider whether the values in question are the product of community's epistemically responsible practices of reflection and internal critique. I agree that this is important, but I've just argued that forms of reflection and methods of critique are also constructed and prioritized within a culture, so they do not provide a neutral ground. And it is not obvious that free critical reflection is sufficient to undermine an entrenched ideology. Plausibly, at least some norms of logic and rationality are universal, so sometimes arguments can be shown to be defective by these norms; and sometimes norms thought to be universally binding on all rational agents are not, and we can challenge them. But universal norms of rationality will only in rare cases be sufficient to adjudicate between different forms of life (though we could also expand our understanding of rationality). If our option is to turn to standards of reasoned debate that are culturally specific, however, we will face many of the same problems that arise when we invoke values that are culturally specific.

V. Non-Ideal Moral Epistemology

Let's reconsider the *normative* challenge to ideology critique. There are two prongs to Celikates' challenge: first, is there some way to specify the particular kind of wrong that

is common to all and only cases of ideology? Second, is there a way to specify the wrong (or wrongs) without simply invoking ideal theory?

What is the wrong that occurs in cases of ideological oppression? Celikates says that it is an epistemic wrong, a wrong concerning the systematic blocking of reflection and critique. But we should ask: How unified must ideology critique be to constitute a legitimate level of analysis? On my view, ideology critique is a critique of the cultural *technē* in terms of its contribution to a morally problematic system of social organization. Isn't this sufficient unity to count ideology critique as distinctive form of normative engagement? There are multiple ways in which social practices and structures can be oppressive: Some cultural *technēs* are morally problematic because they prevent us from appreciating the many ways in which things are valuable. Some because they promote illegitimately inegalitarian distributions of resources.¹³ Some undermine autonomy. Some promote systematic violence against denigrated groups, and so on. The demand that ideology critique must be normatively unified is not obviously warranted.

However, we are still left with the question: where do we stand to critique culture? Ideal theory seems to have a place in considering certain abstract questions about justice, equality, moral responsibility, and such. But how can ideal theory begin to engage culture and the historically specific social formations that culture makes possible, from the armchair? And how can it avoid normative overreach?

On the view I've sketched, whether a cultural *technē* is ideological is to be determined in terms of the injustice of its effects and the values it promotes (or not). This assumes that there is a fact of the matter about what is just and unjust, good, and valuable. I endorse the presupposition that there are moral truths (/facts), for example, that slavery and genocide are morally wrong, that rape is morally wrong, that men *and women* have a right to bodily integrity. Moreover, the presupposition that there are *some* moral truths cannot be avoided by those engaged in justified political resistance.¹⁴ To claim that a critique of dominant practices is ideological is, itself, a claim about the epistemic and moral credentials of that critique; it is not just a claim that the critique rests on different, but equally good, values. Not every cultural *technē* is ideological.

If we have moral knowledge, 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. But can we have moral knowledge? Can we have knowledge sufficient make moral judgements about culture?

¹³ The cultural *technēs* that flourish within unregulated capitalism happen to do both. See, for example, Anderson (1993) on value pluralism and the ethical limitations of the market. Also, Satz 2010.

¹⁴ I am not committing myself here to a meta-ethical view about the nature of moral truths or facts. What I say here is compatible with a robust moral realism, a quietist or deflationary moral realism, moral constructivism, and some forms of moral anti-realism. However, I intend it to be incompatible with moral nihilism and moral relativism.

And if so, how?

The shift to moral epistemology is important, but stated in a way that can be misleading. It is not necessary to *know what justice is*, or have a complete moral theory, to engage in critique. It may be sufficient to know that this *particular* practice, or structure, is unjust (Balkin 1998, p. 120, Sen 2006). Sometimes I can know that a moral wrong or injustice is being done *to me* or *to us*. Like other knowledge, moral knowledge is situated (Anderson 2015). A crucial part of the project of critical theory is to listen to first person (especially first person plural) knowledge claims. Nancy Fraser's characterization of critical theory makes this clear: 'A critical social theory frames its research program and conceptual framework with an eye to the aims and activities of those oppositional social movements with which it has a partisan, though not uncritical identification...' (Fraser 1989, p. 113) I take this commitment to be grounded, at least in part, 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. But sometimes it is a claim of epistemic entitlement on the part of theorists *who are also members* of such oppositional groups. Critical theorists are part of the struggle, not standing outside of it, looking in.

Much of the discussion of cultural critique situates such critique as cross-cultural (e.g. Okin 1999). I suggest, however, that we take the paradigm of critique to occur *within* a culture. I am a member of the heteronormative, patriarchal, racist, ableist, classist, society that I critique. I have first-person knowledge of some of the harms and wrongs that the culture produces, and I object to these wrongs. I also have indirect knowledge, through testimony and witnessing, of wrongs to members of other subordinated groups (Jones 1999). The harms to them are linked to harms to me, and as a critical social theorist I am committed to a unified social movement – or at least to work in coalition – to change the culture (Reagon 1983). This is not a movement to change someone else's culture. It is a movement to change *my* culture and *our* culture. Sometimes oppositional social movements cross cultures, for example, transnational feminism. In such cases the critical social theorist should be allied with those who have situated knowledge of the cultural harms, and resists claiming moral knowledge from a neutral standpoint, that is, knowledge ungrounded in situated social, moral, cultural knowledge (Khader 2011).

This approach assumes that human beings are capable of recognizing at least very basic (and serious?) forms of good and bad, justice and injustice; and under good enough conditions, the method they have for doing so is fairly reliable. At least in some cases, it is not just an accident that our justified moral beliefs are true and constitute knowledge (Setiya 2013, Ch. 4).

I suggest that there are two sources of moral knowledge. On one hand, we can draw on knowledge we have by virtue of being human (or better: by being a social animal) under good-enough conditions. Humans (and some other non-human animals) are capable of recognizing suffering and have it matter (Gruen 2014). In such cases, we

are exercising our epistemic capacities adequately and gaining moral knowledge. We are social animals, and these epistemic capacities come with the sort of being we are, even if we are almost always in conditions that prevent us from exercising them well. This is compatible with individuals and even whole societies being grossly mistaken about what's right and wrong and leaves room for disagreement about the conditions under which we are adept at exercising our capacities to judge the moral facts.

On the other hand, we can draw on knowledge we have by virtue of being a participant in a particular form of life. Participation in social practices provides us with first-person moral knowledge and also knowledge through testimony from trustworthy others. However, our claims of moral harm are fallible; I can learn that my justified belief is false. Moreover, moral knowledge is not 'immediate.' In many cases, I don't just experience the harm. It may take work to know or even to believe that I've been harmed; it may take consciousness raising, participation in counter-publics, critical reflection, even theory (MacKinnon 1989, Ch. 5). In fact, one way critical theory contributes to oppositional social movements is to provide context, language, and empirical research, to articulate the nature and scope of the injustice involved in oppression.

So how do we gain normative standing to critique culture? Recall that under conditions of ideological oppression there is, by hypothesis, a range of unjust social practices that oppress a group; however, the oppression is not experienced as such, either by those who are subordinated or by those who are privileged by the practices (or both). As a result, in social movements that seek to undermine ideological oppression, there is a risk that those engaged in the critique are illegitimately imposing their values on others. This is especially the case when the practices that are the target of critique are ones that constitute value for the practitioners.

I've argued, however, that an important form of social critique begins amongst the practitioners 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. 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. Practices are cooperative enterprises, and if parties to the cooperation have reason to think that they are being treated unjustly, or that values they care about are being undermined, there is reason – at the very least – for all parties involved to reconsider the practice. It may be too much to ask for the consent of all those engaged in the practice, but insisting on terms of cooperation in the face of non-consent is coercive, and is a *pro tanto* wrong. (See also Shapiro 2001; 2003). This is the normative basis for contentious politics (Tilly and Tarrow 2007). The paradigm case of contentious politics is the social movement.

VI. Conclusion: Social Movements

Under conditions of ideological oppression there is a range of unjust social practices that oppress a group; however, the oppression is not experienced as such, either by those who are subordinated or by those who are privileged by the practices (or both). This is the result of a cultural technē that frames the possibilities for thought and action so that certain morally relevant facts are eclipsed and others distorted (sometimes, but not always, through no fault of those fluent in the technē). However, a cultural technē is not a rigid frame, but a set of tools made ready for use in certain ways, and not everyone uses the tools in the same way or finds them fitting for the jobs they need done. So in cases of ideological oppression there will be some who are able to gain knowledge of morally relevant facts that are for many inaccessible or unavailable; this is knowledge that the practices are morally problematic. Under good circumstances (with critical inquiry, support, and so on) they recognize that a different cultural technē will be more just and, ideally, will be better for all. This gives them reason to resist the practices and demand change. The resistance is just the beginning, however, for in order to achieve justice there must be a resolution of the conflict on terms that all can endorse. (Note that this is only a necessary, not sufficient condition, for the new terms of coordination must also be just.)

Resistance may be made by individuals, but there are many reasons that it is best undertaken as a collective enterprise. There is greater credibility when many judge a practice to be harmful or unjust. The resistance of a few is easily ignored, silenced, or eliminated. The viability of an alternative form of collective action is more plausible if it has been tried. This is why resistance takes the form of social movements. Changing social practices is not just a matter of changing our own behavior, but changing the cultural technē, that is, the social meanings with which we act, so that new forms of coordination, new productions and distributions of resources, new values, forms of life, can emerge.

Returning to some of the examples, how should we interpret contemporary social movements? There is no doubt that it is important to gain the support of (and train) elites so that you can convince lawyers to take your case to the Supreme Court, and lobbying legislators to pass new laws. And laws and other state action are often effective in incentivizing more just and less harmful behavior (Lessig 1995; Thaler and Sunstein 2009). However, social movements seek cultural change, for example, a reorganization of our society around different values, a restructuring of our practices so that we are positioned to recognize the value of new or different kinds of thing and coordinate on just terms. We need new tools in our cultural technē. Critical theory, including philosophy, can and should make important contributions to these efforts.

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