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In these Spinoza Lectures, collectively titled 'Critical Theory and Practice', Sally Haslanger engages with the topic of critical theory and ideology. In the first lecture, Haslanger addresses the ideologically governed nature of social life. She discusses how ideology works through social practices that engage, produce, and reproduce the material world. The lecture examines ways in which ideology is dependent on the objectivity and the materiality of the social world, and the implications of this for social change. The second lecture starts with the observation that our societies and practices are unjust and the proper objects of moral scrutiny and moral criticism. However, certain traditions of ideology critique resist normative, especially moral, commitments. By examining the workings of race and gender ideology, Haslanger challenges the critical tradition of relying entirely on contradiction to ground immanent critique and explores alternative contextualist and naturalist options for social critique.



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CRITICAL THEORY AND PRACTICE

SPINOZA

Sally  
Haslanger

# Critical Theory and Practice

SPINOZA LECTURES

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Sally Haslanger

# **Critical Theory and Practice**

**Sally Haslanger**

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ISBN 978 90 232 5557 4

The Department of Philosophy of the University of Amsterdam presented the Spinoza Lectures by Sally Haslanger in April and May 2015.

Design: Anneke de Bruin, Amsterdam

Cover monument Spinoza: Nicolas Dings, Amsterdam

Photo monument: Truus van Gog, Amsterdam

Printing: Royal Van Gorcum, Postbus 43, 9400 AA Assen

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## PREFACE

In the spring of 2015, I spent three months in Amsterdam as the Spinoza Professor at the University of Amsterdam. It was a delightful time. I had not lived alone for 23 years, and had not lived without children for 21. I was put up in a lovely flat, with a garden, in the museum district. On my second day in town, Beate Roessler, then Chair of the Philosophy Department, had one of her research assistants help me buy a bike. For the next weeks I was provided everything one could ask for, and most importantly, given precious time for reading, writing, thinking. I had 'a room of my own' at a moment when I was feeling an especially keen intellectual yearning. The beauty and history of the city, the brilliance and generosity of my colleagues, the excitement of the student protests, and the friendliness of the staff (especially Ingrid van Beek-Meijer and Loes ten Velden), all moved me deeply. My projects flourished, and so did I.

I was trained as a metaphysician, but over time my research has shifted into feminist and critical race theory. Rather than approaching issues of race and gender from a background in moral or practical philosophy, my interests have been on the theoretical side of things, with a focus on social ontology, social epistemology, and philosophy of language. Being drawn to materialist feminists, e.g., Iris Young and Catharine MacKinnon, I began to read more widely in critical theory.

As I understand critical theory, it is a broad tent, and includes not only the work of the Frankfurt School, but much that is happening within interdisciplinary studies such as critical race theory, feminist theory, queer theory, disability studies, and the like. I don't have or seek a set of criteria for delimiting critical theory; however, I have taken as my starting point a passage from Nancy Fraser:

.....  
To my mind, no one has yet improved on Marx's 1843 definition of critical theory as 'the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age.' What is so appealing about this definition is its straightforwardly political character. It makes no claim to any special epistemological status but, rather, supposes that with respect to justification there is no philosophically interesting difference between a critical theory of society and an uncritical one. However, there is, according to this definition, an important political difference. 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.... Thus, for ex-

ample, if struggles contesting the subordination of women figured among the most significant of a given age, then a critical social theory for that time would aim, among other things, to shed light on the character and basis of such subordination. It would employ categories and explanatory models that revealed rather than occluded relations of male dominance and female subordination. And it would demystify as ideological any rival approaches that obfuscated or rationalized those relations.<sup>1</sup>

So I think of critical theory as asking questions that are important for bringing about social justice in a particular time and place. In keeping with this, I aim to do (roughly) non-ideal theory, embedded in a particular socio-historical moment, with a political aim: to provide us with epistemic tools to combat the injustice in our current situation.

In these lectures I explore two key, but also contested, concepts in critical theory: materiality and ideology. In doing so, I draw heavily on current literature in the social sciences which takes *practices* to be a core constituent of social life. My goal is not to interpret how these concepts have been used, but to consider how they might be reshaped for the purposes at hand, in particular, fighting contemporary forms of sexism, racism, and other forms of social injustice. I also bring to the discussion a commitment to certain moral claims: that racism and sexism, for example, are morally wrong. These are my partisan commitments. They bring with them a philosophical presumption that there are some moral truths, and some moral knowledge. I do not attempt to defend these moral claims in the lectures. They are my starting points. I do, however, attempt to situate them within an understanding of critical theory.

I owe a particular debt to Beate Roessler and Robin Celikates. Beate and Robin not only made my visit possible and were the most gracious hosts one could imagine, but were also inspiring philosophical interlocutors. I am deeply grateful for the opportunities I had to learn from them and take advantage of the wonderful communities they foster. Thanks also to the many other faculty members and students who took the time to come to my talks, engage my ideas, and share their experience and their work. Special thanks too, to Marijn Sax, who helped me buy my trusty bike and prepared this manuscript for publication.

## LECTURE I

# Ideology and Materiality

---

<sup>1</sup> Fraser 1989, p. 113.

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of *ideology* is highly contested and there is no consensus on how, or even whether, it should be used in critical theory. This uncertainty leads to doubts about the possibility of *ideology critique*. Is there any point in keeping these notions? If we really care about justice and changing the world, how do they help?

I think the concept of ideology is indispensable. However, there are two lines of criticism I would like to take up and respond to in these lectures. To situate my arguments, it is important to know that I am a materialist feminist and I take materialist feminism to constitute a form of critical theory. This means that I do not enter debates about social justice from a neutral point of view or from the vantage point of an abstract rational agent. I begin with a commitment to certain social movements that involve normative beliefs: sexism is wrong, racism is wrong, our current social institutions are unjust in many ways.<sup>1</sup> I am committed to the broad project of ending oppression in all its forms. That's the feminist part. The materialist part is more difficult to capture, but as a first attempt (I'll say more later), the idea is that the social world is a material world, and social injustice is, in part, a matter of material deprivations and material harms. They include economic injustice and exploitation, but also systematic violence (domestic violence, sexual violence, police brutality), marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism.<sup>2</sup> These harms are not just symbolic, though they are meaningful. The starting points for materialist feminism are these material injustices.

However, if ideology is relevant to material injustice, we need a clear idea about how it is related to the materiality of social life (Lecture 1) and the moral/political evaluation of social structures (Lecture 2). On my view, the core notion is that of a social practice: social practices rely on ideology to organize us in relation to the material world, and do so in ways that create structures of domination and sub-

<sup>1</sup> In this, I take my cue from Nancy Fraser (1989, 113). I have also discussed this conception of critical theory in the introduction to Haslanger 2012. As Marx says, 'Nothing prevents us, therefore, from lining our criticism with a criticism of politics, from taking sides in politics, i.e., from entering into real struggles and identifying ourselves with them. This does not mean that we shall confront the world with new doctrinaire principles and proclaim: Here is the truth, on your knees before it! It means that we shall develop for the world new principles from the existing principles of the world' (Marx 1843).

<sup>2</sup> Young 1990.



ordination. How social practices connect ideology to the materiality of our lives is the first question to consider.

## THE CRITIQUE OF IDEOLOGY (NOT 'IDEOLOGY CRITIQUE')

Let us begin with a rough conception of ideology. Stuart Hall suggests 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 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. These questions are at stake in a range of social struggles.<sup>3</sup>  
.....

The challenge of a theory of ideology is, first, to understand how we, collectively, enact social structures. This is a question about how members of society develop kinds of practical orientations or outlooks that enable them to coordinate their behavior. The more specific and more pressing question is how, without being coerced, we come to enact oppressive social structures. Surely, most of us are not knowingly and intentionally dominating others or allowing ourselves to be dominated. Yet this happens nonetheless.<sup>4</sup> A rather straightforward example is the division of labor in the household, i.e., women's 'second shift'<sup>5</sup>; even those who are conscientiously egalitarian in their politics live in ways that burden women

3 Hall 1996/2006, pp. 24–25.

4 Terminological choice: We can use the term 'ideology,' generally, for forms of practical thought that support social formations generally; or we can use 'ideology' only for those that support structures of subordination and domination. In these lectures I will use the term in the latter, pejorative, sense, for our concern is how we all become agents of injustice.

5 Hochschild 2003.

with housework, childcare, eldercare, care of the sick and disabled that far exceeds their fair share. Another example, of course, is the regular enactment and tolerance of racial privilege. Why do we continue to live these ways?

There are several sets of questions we might be asking when we undertake a theory of ideology. (i) How do we come to have shared outlooks or 'practical consciousness' – what is the causal mechanism by which we coordinate our attitudes? And how do our shared attitudes come to have a particular content, e.g., why do the wealthy tend to share a political orientation? Why are some groups more likely to be homophobic? (ii) Why do we consistently act in ways that frustrate our own self-interest? Why do we act in ways that result in injustices we abhor? And not just a few of us, and now and then, but pretty much all of us all the time? What is going wrong? Two sorts of answers to these questions have been attributed to Marx: economic determinism, and what I will call 'ideology as illusion.'

## Economic Determinism

Economic determinism is the view that all social phenomena can be causally explained (ultimately) in terms of economic forces. This is sometimes taken to be the core commitment of a materialist theory. One might rely on economic determinism to answer our questions about ideology: we are (somehow) caused by the economic structure of our social milieu to have attitudes that result in unjust and self-defeating behavior. Passages in Marx such as this are suggestive:

.....  
The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.<sup>6</sup>  
.....

This sounds like bad social psychology. It is also generally agreed that taken at face value, this is not a fair representation of Marx's view; the idea that relations of production *condition* (but don't determine) consciousness is the more plausible

6 Marx 1859/1977.



interpretation. We may be embedded in social structures, but we are not robots that lack autonomy. Moreover, it would be self-defeating for those seeking emancipation to accept a theory of ideology that precludes emancipation through social critique. If our attitudes are determined to support the status quo, then the only hope for social change would lie in factors that are outside of our agency.

Contemporary materialists have adjusted their commitment, e.g.,

.....  
I understand a materialist account as one that considers phenomena of 'consciousness' – e.g., intellectual production, broad social attitudes and beliefs, cultural myths, symbols, images, etc. – as rooted in real social relationships. This should not imply 'reducing' such phenomena of consciousness to social structures and social relationships, nor does it even mean that the phenomena of consciousness cannot be treated as having a logic of their own. Nor should it mean that phenomena like attitudes and cultural definitions cannot enter as elements into the explanation of a particular structure of social relationships, though I would claim that they can never be the sole explanation. This requirement mainly calls for a methodological priority to concrete social institutions and practices along with the material conditions in which they take place.<sup>7</sup>  
.....

So assuming that we are genuine agents acting with some degree of rational self-interest, economic determinism fails and the problem of ideology remains.

## Ideology as Illusion

An alternative Marxian strategy has been to focus on the epistemic failures of ideology: those in the grip of an ideology have *false* or *distorted* ideas.<sup>8</sup> Ideological thought is often contrasted with scientific thought. But even if science is not our paradigm of knowledge, the alleged source of the problem is a failure in our representations of the world: we act in self-defeating/unjust ways because (somehow or other) our social milieu leads us to adopt false or unjustified beliefs that obscure our true interests. This approach has faced several related criticisms:

### Problem of Accuracy

Because ideology functions to create social reality, it 'makes itself true.' As MacKinnon says, '...the more inequality is pervasive, the more it is simply 'there.' And the more real it looks, the more it looks like the truth.'<sup>9</sup> So 'successful' ideology isn't usually false. This is, in fact, how we often end up forming the 'ideological' beliefs in question – we look around us. For example, women, as a group, are actually better caregivers than men; after all, we do most of the caregiving of the young, disabled, and elderly. The poor, as a group, are less able to hold time-intensive jobs that impinge upon other responsibilities; after all, they can't afford childcare, depend on public transportation, and often hold more than one job.<sup>10</sup>

### Problem of Epistemic Respect

If ideology is a matter of false or distorted beliefs, then we live our lives under a pervasive and systematic illusion. We are self-destructively deluded about the choices we make and the reasons for them. But this is not only implausible, it doesn't show respect for our basic epistemic capacities. Again, Hall puts it well:

.....  
'Distortions' opens immediately the question as to why some people – those living their relation to their conditions of existence through the categories of a distorted ideology – cannot recognize that it is distorted, while we, with our superior wisdom, or armed with properly formed concepts, can. Are the 'distortions' simply falsehoods? Are they deliberately sponsored falsifications? If so, by whom? ... (The alleged epistemic failures) make both the masses and the capitalists look like judgemental dopes. They also entail a peculiar view of the formation of alternative forms of consciousness. Presumably, they arise as scales fall from people's eyes or as they wake up, as if from a dream, and, all at once, see the light, glance directly through

9 MacKinnon 1989, p. 101.

10 The observation that ideology makes itself true must be qualified, however, depending on what claim is at issue. If ideological belief essentializes or naturalizes the patterns of social life, then it plausibly is false: women are not better caregivers by nature; those who are poor are not by nature unreliable. (See Haslanger 2012, Ch. 17; Haslanger 2014) But ideological belief need not be essentializing (though some is) to play a crucial role in an ideological orientation.

7 Young 1980/1990, p. 33.

8 Geuss 1981; Shelby 2003, 2014.

the transparency of things immediately to their essential truth, their concealed structural processes.<sup>11</sup>

Hall's last point introduces a third problem with 'ideology as illusion':

*Problem of Emancipation*

If the power of ideology lies in its falsehood, then what's needed to make the world more just is access to the truth. The truth shall set us free. But given the problem of accuracy, this is highly dubious.

To avoid these problems, it seems that either we should give up the notion of ideology or we need an alternative account of what it is and how it works.

## THE PROBLEM OF MATERIALITY

One diagnosis of the problems posed in the previous section targets the idea of *representation*. Ideology doesn't misrepresent the world because it doesn't represent the world at all. This strategy is connected with a broader linguistic-cultural-postmodern 'turn' that rejects many of the traditional philosophical 'dualisms', e.g., truth/falsehood, subject/object, mind/body, individual/society. We might as well, according to this strategy, just set aside the concept of ideology as outmoded.

There may be reasons to reject these 'dualisms' (though I do not think the reasons are persuasive), but even if we do, our original problem remains. How do we explain our ongoing and yet unintended participation in structures of domination and subordination? We aren't all stupid or self-deluded. A simple suggestion would be that we enact social structures simply out of habit formed through a process of socialization. We don't 'represent' what we are doing at all. In fact, it is even a stretch to describe our participation as action rather than behavior.

Admittedly, socialization avoids some of the problems of representation, but it is not a great improvement over economic determinism; we seem to have just replaced economic determinism with cultural determinism. The faint glimmer of hope is that we can overcome bad habits. But even this is unsatisfying because not all of

<sup>11</sup> Hall 1996/2006, pp. 29-30.

our participation in social structures is habitual. We choose to act in ways that perpetuate the structures. Is there a way to understand constraints on agency in such a way that (a) they are not due primarily to misrepresentation, and (b) they allow for genuine agency?

Judith Butler's notion of performativity helps here. On Butler's view, we enact our social roles and identities, not in a deterministic or unthinking way, but by *constrained choice*.

.....  
If one becomes a woman, according to Beauvoir, then one is always in the process of becoming a gender... In this sense, then, gender is a project, a skill, a pursuit, an enterprise, even an industry, the aim of which is to compel the body to signify one historical idea rather than another. Instead of claiming that one is a man or is a woman, it is necessary to substitute a vocabulary of action and effort for the reified vocabulary of self-identical nouns. Hence, one does one's womanhood, one executes it, institutes, produces and reproduces it, wears it, flaunts it, hides it, but always stylizes it in one way or another. For gender is a corporeal style, a way of acting the body, a way of wearing one's own flesh as a cultural sign.<sup>12</sup>

.....  
One does not become a gender through a free and unconstrained act of choice, for gender identity is governed by a set of stringent taboos, conventions, and laws. There are punishments for not doing gender right.<sup>13</sup>

.....  
And yet, on Butler's view, the agency that is constitutive of gender is also a source of transformative potential:

.....  
Gender is a mundane drama specifically corporeal, constrained by possibilities specifically cultural. But this constraint is not without some moments of contingency, of possibility, of unprecedented cultural confusion that will in-

<sup>12</sup> Butler 1989, p. 256.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 256.

variably work to destroy the illusion that gender constraint is a dictate from nature.<sup>14</sup>

Ian Hacking provides one way to understand this 'grip' of culture on agency. Intentional action plausibly involves an ability to understand what one is doing and to situate it at least within a frame of intelligibility, and often also within a space of reasons. He suggests, 'What is curious about human action is that by and large what I am deliberately doing depends on the possibilities of description...Hence if new modes of description come into being, new possibilities for action come into being in consequence.'<sup>15</sup> In short, the intentional act (or intentional dimension of the act) is linked to one's cognitive repertoire; and one's cognitive repertoire is provided by one's culture. One cannot intentionally become a wife without there being an institution of marriage situated within a broader frame of cultural meaning. Navigation of social life not only depends on an understanding of social norms but also on cognitive resources for apt intentions and action. Because our cognitive repertoire is inevitably limited, some forms of action are unintelligible. How could I then be expected to perform them? Moreover, this is also a site of disruptive potential. We can ask: why can't a woman have a wife? Should anyone be a wife? A critique of the available concepts and recognition that they are artificially limited opens space for new forms of action and new identities.

So where do we stand? How is performativity related to the questions of ideology that we are trying to address? We started with the question how ideology – understood roughly as 'concepts and languages of practical thought' – stabilizes structures of power and domination. We considered the idea that we are simply socialized (driven by economic or cultural factors) to think and behave in certain ways. But this seemed overly deterministic. We also considered the suggestion that ideology consists of a false representation of the world, e.g., a set of false beliefs, and found it inadequate. My beliefs that there is an institution of marriage, and (at a certain place and time) that marriage 'is between a man and a woman' are not false, and my intention to become a wife is not a misrepresentation. Nevertheless Butler and Hacking have offered a way to locate a kind of agency constrained by 'concepts and languages of practical thought' that have social origins.

The problem is not, first and foremost, that we misrepresent the world; rather, we lack certain tools of representation to make apt choices, e.g., our concept of marriage is too limiting and obscures options that could be available.<sup>16</sup> So we have made progress. But how do we link this ideological constraint with structures of power and domination? As Butler notes, it would be misguided to think culture, in itself, is subordinating. First, there is no agency at all without the conceptual resources that society, through our language, provides. Second, such resources are not only constraining, they are also enabling.<sup>17</sup>

I submit that this is the problem of materiality for Butler (and the broader tradition she represents). Subordination may involve culturally interpolated subjectivity and constrained agency, but that cannot be the beginning or the end of the story. Subordination occurs in the economy of social relations. And these social relations are the site of material injustice. The moderate materialist gives 'a methodological priority to concrete social institutions and practices along with the material conditions in which they take place'<sup>18</sup> because this is what matters from the point of view of justice. Limiting marriage to 'one man and one woman' is unjust because it deprives individuals of rights and organizes society in ways that stigmatize other loving relationships; a normalized division of labor between husbands and wives that disproportionately burdens women with drudgery and has them accept that as their proper role, is unfair and renders them susceptible to abuse. The problem is not, as Butler sometimes suggests, just that our cultural repertoire is taken as 'given' and we are denied playful exploration of possibilities in constructing our own identities. Open-ended existentialist opportunities to construct ourselves are still compatible with deep and persistent injustice.<sup>19</sup> Is

<sup>16</sup> Especially Butler 1990; 1993.

<sup>17</sup> Butler 1990, pp. 148-149.

<sup>18</sup> Young 1980/1990, p. 33.

<sup>19</sup> There are actually two different criticisms of Butler packaged together here. First, the problem of materiality; second, the problem of normativity. A materialist feminism links the two: a primary site of injustice is material, and although there may be additional forms of injustice, we should grant a methodological priority to injustices as they are manifested in concrete social institutions and practices. Butler (1997) is more sensitive to the materialist critique (cf., her 1990, 1993) and situates her earlier view in a broad understanding of the economy, e.g., 'an expansion of the "economic" sphere itself to include both the reproduction of goods as well as the social reproduction of persons.' (p. 272) I welcome this move and see it as compatible with the direction I want to push her. However, to my mind, the normative critique remains,

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 261.

<sup>15</sup> Hacking 1986, p. 166.



there a way to retain some of the insights from Butler and Hacking and incorporate them into a materialist account of ideology?

## SOCIAL PRACTICES

Social structures are networks of social relations. These include relations *between people*: being a parent of, being an employee of, being a spouse of; they also include relations *to things*: cooking, owning, occupying, driving, eating, herding. Social relations, in turn, are constituted through practices. Consider cooking:

.....  
Cooking rice is an instance of a more general practice of cooking, and regular engagement in the practice is constitutive of a social role: cook. Being a cook relates one in specific ways to other persons (not only the customer or family, but also the farmer, grocer, garbage collector, sources of recipes, including traditions, cookbooks, etc.), and also relates one in specific ways to things (foodstuffs, sources of heat, water, utensils). Cooking is only possible within a social structure that provides the ingredients, skills, tools; the norms for taste, texture and ingredients; the distribution of labor of cooks and consumers, etc.  
.....

What, then, is a practice? Social *practices* are, in the central cases, collective solutions to coordination or access problems with respect to a *resource*. The solution consists in organized responses to the resource. E.g., traffic management, food

and this is a symptom of her insufficient materialism. For example, she says: 'The economic, tied to the reproductive, is necessarily linked to the reproduction of heterosexuality. It is not that nonheterosexual forms of sexuality are simply left out, but that their suppression is essential to the operation of that prior normativity. This is not simply a question of certain people suffering a lack of cultural recognition by others, but, rather, is a specific mode of sexual production and exchange that works to maintain the stability of gender, the heterosexuality of desire, and the naturalization of the family.' (p. 274) Note, however, that she does not offer a normative critique of the family, of heterosexual desire, or gender. As she describes it, the problem is that they seem to be treated as 'stable,' 'natural,' and 'normal.' But these features are not what makes gender, heteronormativity, and the family, unjust. Thanks to Robert Gooding-Williams for urging me to clarify this. See also Fraser 1997; 2000

distribution. Borrowing from contemporary practice theory<sup>20</sup>, I have proposed this hypothesis:

.....  
Practices consist of interdependent *schemas* and *resources* 'when they mutually imply and sustain each other over time.'<sup>21</sup> Sets of interdependent practices constitute social structures.  
.....

What are *schemas*? I use the term as a kind of placeholder. Roughly, schemas are clusters of culturally shared mental states and processes, including concepts, attitudes, dispositions, and such, that enable us to interpret and organize information and coordinate action, thought, and affect.<sup>22</sup> But there are two ways of thinking about schemas. The fact that schemas are shared gives them a public standing. Like word-meanings, schemas are abstract entities that are instantiated (or tokened) in particular psychological states of individuals. We can call these *cultural schemas*; they include social meanings. In order for social meanings to function, they must be recognized, but they need not be endorsed. For example, I may know that being a mother and being a father carry different social meanings in my milieu, and I may take that into account in my actions, but reject the meanings and look for ways to resist them. And yet, public schemas are typically internalized by individuals and have a role in thought; this enables individuals to act fluently in social contexts. Psychological schemas process and store information that is the basis for various behavioral and emotional dispositions. Although schemas are variable and evolve across time and context, their elements are sticky and resist epistemic updating. The schemas that partly constitute practices are cultural schemas; however, when we enact a token of the practice, corresponding psychological schemas guide us.

I've suggested that schemas organize us around resources. What are *resources*? Resources are things of all sorts — human, nonhuman, animate, or not — that are taken to have some (positive or negative) value (practical, moral, aesthetic, re-

20 Sewell 1992.

21 Ibid. p. 13.

22 I don't use the term 'concept' here in the sense often assumed within philosophy of mind and language as a constituent of thought or the sense of a term. Instead, my use is closer to the psychological sense of a mechanism for storing default information. See Machery 2009.

ligious, etc.). Valuable resources are a source of power. For example, water, land, time, knowledge, are all valuable resources; toxic waste is also a resource, but has negative value. In principle, whether something is a resource and what kind of resource, depends on the cultural frame. In the context of agriculture, a grasshopper may be a pest; in another context it may be a culinary delicacy. Outside of any interpretive frame, there are grasshoppers, but they don't count as a resource (good or bad); and even things that are in many contexts highly valuable, e.g., money, in other contexts are not valuable in all.<sup>23</sup>

In social reality, schemas and resources are interdependent and create looping effects. Sewell suggests:

.....  
A factory is not an inert pile of bricks, wood, and metal. It incorporates or actualizes schemas....The factory gate, the punching-in station, the design of the assembly line: all of these features of the factory teach and validate the rules of the capitalist labor contract....In short, if resources are instantiations or embodiments of schemas, they therefore inculcate and justify the schemas as well....<sup>24</sup>  
.....

For example, a schema enables us to interpret a kind of nut as food, and so a resource. What it is to be food is not just a matter of what is edible, since not all edible things are known to be or count as food; food is what is intelligible to us as to be eaten. Our interpretation of it as food also situates it within a framework of reasons: we gather nuts because they are food. So schemas and resources are constitutively interdependent. Moreover, the interpretation of a kind of nut as food, i.e., as a valuable resource, raises questions about how to gather, maintain, produce, distribute, protect, and store, the nuts. These tasks require us to develop schemas to guide us, and our actions, in turn, affect the quality, quantity, and

<sup>23</sup> Note that my account differs from Sewell's in several ways. For example, on his view, resources are defined as a source of power; on my view something is a resource by virtue of being seen as having value (negative or positive). On Sewell's view, schemas and resources constitute structures; on my view they constitute practices that, in turn, make up structures. Some of Sewell's language suggests that the interdependence between schemas and resources is both causal and constitutive, but he doesn't explicate his points in these terms. See also Haslanger 2012, Ch. 17.

<sup>24</sup> Sewell 1992, p. 13.

sorts of nuts produced. So there is a causal interdependence over time between schemas and resources as well.

Schemas evolve – memes emerge enabling us to recognize new resources or form new responses to old resources. Resources change – California is running out of water. This requires new practices, new schemas, e.g., almond production is at risk. We then ask: what nuts require less water to produce? Our thinking and acting evolve along with the object/artifact. Moreover, the practices may become congealed and dissociated from the interests and functions that were their original impetus.

So where does ideology fit into this picture of social structure? Do we have a better model for agency within self-defeating and unjust structures? Social structures and the practices that constitute them consist partly in cultural schemas – the public meanings and such that enable us to interpret each other and coordinate. Call a set of interdependent schemas governing a social structure a *cultural technē*. A cultural *technē* provides us with the know-how to be part of a social group. An ideology is a cultural *technē* that organizes us (a) in relations of domination and subordination (either through the production and distribution of goods, or in the constitution of selves), or (b) to resources whose value is misconceived or not recognized. This gives us two dimensions of ideology critique: we are valuing the wrong things (or in the wrong way), or our ways of organizing our relations to things of value are unjust. Let's now reconsider the problems raised above.

## RESPONSES TO PRIOR CONCERNS

### The Problem of Ideology as Illusion

Progress can be made on the failures of ideology, first, by considering elements other than the *attitudinal* parts of schemas. If we assume that ideology consists of propositions that we (typically) believe, then we will have to rely on traditional epistemic critique. However, we can also undertake a critique of concepts, or cognitive processes of various kinds. How do we evaluate concepts? Concepts, themselves, are neither true nor false, e.g., *wasteful*. Instead, the question is whether it

is *apt* or not. Is the concept *apt* when applied to a particular crop, e.g., almonds? By what standards should we judge this? Or we might ask: Should we have this or that concept in our repertoire at all? If so, how should we construe it? E.g. should we employ the concept of *race*?

Recall that we considered three challenges to the idea of ideology as illusion. Does a conception of ideology as an inapt or unjust cultural *technē* help?

#### Accuracy

The question was how an account of ideology can accommodate the fact that sometimes ideological beliefs are true, because they are *made true* by the power behind the ideology. Beliefs framed with inapt concepts may still be true. However, we may not be fully justified in what we believe for our concepts may be inapt, our way of understanding the world is distorted, incomplete, the evidence we have may be misleading.<sup>25</sup>

#### Respect

The issue is whether we can undertake ideology critique without attributing 'false consciousness' to those in the grip of an ideology. And if so, isn't this being disrespectful of their epistemic capacities and over-confident in our own. However, as we've seen, critique need not attribute false beliefs to those who are engaged in a practice (though sometimes false beliefs play a role). Rather, critique offers a different way of understanding the practice, often a fuller story that makes different features salient. Drawing attention to this is often a collective process achieved through consciousness raising. The insights and experiences of the oppressed are crucial to undertaking this effectively. Moreover, the problem is cultural, not individual: we ask what our social meanings prioritize and, importantly, what they leave out, distort, or obscure. As mentioned before, the subordinated are often aware of social meanings and adjust to them without endorsing them.

#### Emancipation

The concern was that emancipation in particular, and justice, more generally, is not achieved simply by 'seeing the truth,' or getting others to see the truth. What's required is a different way of living together, different, and more just, forms of interpretation and coordination. But this is exactly what is recommended by the critique of an ideological *technē*. How might we change our

practical orientation or practical consciousness to respond differently to the world? We might challenge the social meanings that constitute the ideology directly; or we might disrupt the material resources that are configured by the schemas. In both cases we begin by destabilizing the practices that form the unjust social structure, aiming for more just practices.

## The Problem of Materiality

My proposal is sympathetic with the idea that ideology should not be evaluated primarily in terms of truth and falsehood, and embraces the suggestion that agency is possible (and only possible) within a discursive frame. However, there are two points to note especially in contrast to the Butler/Hacking model of cultural constraints on agency.

First, material conditions – not just my attitudes and the attitudes of others – are factors in my choice architecture, e.g., what *food* I prepare is constrained by the foodstuffs and tools available, my movement depends on the terrain and what pathways and forms of transportation are available. To understand these material constraints, we need to recognize how the physical world, interpreted and shaped by culture, is arranged to produce and reproduce injustice. Correlatively, we need to take note of how changes to the physical environment can make a difference, e.g., curb cuts that were designed and justified to assist the disabled have had positive effects in enabling women, and now men, pushing strollers to have access to public space.

Second, it is neither necessary nor sufficient for social justice to destabilize assumptions about what's natural or 'given.' To determine whether a cultural *technē* is ideological, we need a normative account of what's valuable, how we ought to organize, produce, distribute, appreciate things of value/disvalue, and what are acceptable terms of cooperation. This requires attention to material disparities, distributions of productive and reproductive labor, and insight into the pathologies and potential of collective action. The methods and starting points for such a normative account are controversial, but the issues cannot be side-stepped.

My account of ideology is materialist because the source and structure of a discursive/conceptual frame depends on the complex network of social relations that organizes our relationship to things of (assumed) value. In the broadest sense, this is the economy: 'economic' relations should not be understood simply in terms of the market. (In this I am sympathetic to Butler 1997; see also fn. 10 above). The

25 Hall 1996/2006; Anderson 1995.



economy is the system that manages a community's resources, and if resources are what has value within that society, then the economy also involves the distribution of power, status, health, leisure, education, etc. These are managed through the interplay of schemas and resources that constitute social practices and relations.

## CONCLUSION

I've argued that a materialist feminism needs a theory of ideology in order to explicate how unjust social structures are routinely enacted and reinforced, while maintaining a commitment to genuine agency, respect for the epistemic capabilities of the oppressed, and attention to the materiality of injustice; ideally, the account will also offer insight into possibilities for resistance and social change. Providing a full theory is not possible in a single lecture, but I hope that I have sketched a path for fulfilling these desiderata that can be fruitfully developed. Social structures are enacted by individuals within conditions of constrained choice. We are constrained by our basic human needs (for food, shelter, engagement with others, etc.), the material conditions of our situation, and the social meanings that enable us to coordinate with each other. Such constraints are usually organized unjustly, though not intentionally so. Many practices we engage in fluently but not deliberately; and the fallout of interactions between practices is hard to notice, much less predict. As Charles Tilly emphasizes: '... whatever else we have learned about inequality, social scientists have made clear that a great deal of social inequality results from indirect, unintended, collective, and environmentally mediated effects ...'<sup>26</sup> To see structural injustice, we need to step back from our self-conscious agency and consider how we are molded (socially, physically, historically) by our environments to participate in practices that present themselves as worthwhile and meaningful, yet often result in broad and deep injustice. Fortunately, we can modify or change unjust constraints on agency, if we think and act together. It would be helpful now to show how the theory works by providing some examples.

<sup>26</sup> Tilly 2002, p. 28.

Very briefly, let's return to the second shift. Family life is structured around gender: We organize access to leisure, carework and housework through gendered schemas.

.....  
In increasing numbers women have gone into the workforce, but few have gone very high up in it. This is not because women cool themselves out by some 'auto-discrimination.' It is not because we lack 'role models.' Nor is it simply because corporations and other institutions discriminate against women. Rather, the career system inhibits women, ... by making up rules to suit the male half of the population in the first place. One reason that half the lawyers, doctors, businesspeople are not women is because *men do not share the raising of their children and the caring of their homes*. Men think and feel within structures of work which presume they don't do these things.<sup>27</sup>  
.....

Interestingly, those women who are successful in the workforce are those who can afford to outsource housework and childcare. It isn't men who take up the slack. Women burdened with these chores are more likely to quit school or work and become more socially and economically vulnerable. This is ideology at work, organizing us in relation to the material realities of laundry, dishes, and diapers.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks especially to the following for their help in thinking through the ideas in this lecture: Katya Botchkina, Robin Celikates, Robert Gooding-Williams, Jerome Hodges, Rahel Jaeggi, Daniel James, Mari Mikkola, Beate Roessler. Also thanks to Marijn Sax for his excellent work in preparing the manuscript.

<sup>27</sup> Hochschild 2003, p. xiii.



LECTURE II

**Ideology and Morality**

## WHERE TO BEGIN?

A study published in 2013 documented 413 cases in the United States between 1973-2005 in which pregnant women were deprived of their liberty through arrests or forced medical interventions.<sup>28</sup> In 368 cases, the race of the woman was documented: 59% were women of color; 52% (=191) were African-American. In almost three quarters of the cases the women qualified for indigent defense. In only 23% of cases was the father or woman's male partner even mentioned in case documents. Given the methodology of the study, this number is extremely conservative and the actual number may exceed this by hundreds. Two examples are striking:

- A woman who was in active labor when 'A sheriff went to [her] home, took her into custody, strapped her legs together, and forced her to go to a hospital' where she was compelled, by order of a judge, to have a caesarean 'which she had refused and believed to be unnecessary.' What could possibly have warranted this? She was allegedly posing a risk to the fetus by planning a vaginal birth after caesarean (VBAC). Since that time she has given birth vaginally to three more children.<sup>29</sup>
- A juvenile court took custody of a fetus of a woman who was living in a trailer home that allegedly was being used or had been used in the manufacture of methamphetamine. Although there was no evidence that the woman was using any illegal drugs while pregnant, the case focused on whether she had inhaled dangerous fumes while in the trailer. Without any scientific evidence to support the allegation, a jury ruled that her 'unborn child' was 'deprived,' i.e., at risk for injury, serious bodily injury, with defects or death.<sup>30</sup>

In recent years 'feticide' legislation has been introduced in several US states with the goal of further protecting pregnant women from domestic violence by criminalizing assault that results in harm or death to the fetus. However, contrary to the intent of the law, these laws have been turned against the pregnant woman herself.

- This spring a woman in Indiana was sentenced to 20 years in prison for fe-

<sup>28</sup> Paltrow & Flavin 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. pp. 306-307.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 319.

ticide – illegally inducing her own abortion. Although the facts are unclear, there was no evidence of the alleged ‘abortion pills’ in her body or the body of the fetus. It is a reasonable hypothesis that she simply had a miscarriage. Recently, in the same state, a woman was charged with feticide for attempting suicide while pregnant. Pleading guilty to a lesser charge, she served a year in custody.<sup>31</sup>

Many other cases involve nothing more than alleged drug or alcohol use by the pregnant woman. Alarming, ‘...refusal to follow [a doctor’s] treatment orders was identified as part of the justification for the arrest, detention, or forced medical intervention in nearly one in five cases.’<sup>32</sup> All this, in spite of the fact that

.....  
 ...no state legislature has ever passed a law making it a crime for a woman to go to term in spite of a drug problem, nor has any state passed a law that would make women liable for the outcome of their pregnancies...Similarly, no state legislature has amended its criminal laws to make its child abuse laws applicable to pregnant women in relationship to the eggs, embryos, or fetuses that women carry, nurture, and sustain. No state has rewritten its drug delivery or distribution laws to apply to the transfer of drugs through the umbilical cord.<sup>33</sup>  
 .....

I have no doubt that in these cases, some of the police officers, sheriffs, judges, medical practitioners, and members of juries were, as individuals, sexist, racist, and classist. I also believe that there are serious problems with the laws that govern women’s reproductive lives. However, at the heart of this pattern is a structure of social relations that is ideologically sustained. In my previous lecture I discussed why the concept of ideology remains important and sketched an account of social structures in which ideology plays a role in guiding our actions to sustain injustice. Today I am going to explore further how ideology gets in the way of gaining moral knowledge thus interfering with our moral agency, and some implications this has for ideology critique.

<sup>31</sup> Bazelon 2015.

<sup>32</sup> Paltrow & Flavin 2013, p. 316.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. pp. 320–321.

## MORAL CRITIQUE OR IDEOLOGY CRITIQUE?

How do we locate ideology in the examples just described? What does it mean to say that the pattern of mistreatment of pregnant women is ideologically sustained? And on what basis do we target *ideology* for moral critique?

In my first Spinoza Lecture I argued, drawing on prior work, that we should understand social practices as interdependent *cultural schemas* and *resources*, and social structures as a network of social practices. I suggested that the set of interdependent schemas that are elements of a structure’s practices is a *cultural technē*, and the *technē*, when internalized, provides agents the know-how to play their part in the relevant practices. An ideology is a cultural *technē* of a bad or unjust social structure: it organizes us either (a) in relations of domination and subordination, e.g., through the production and distribution of goods, or in the constitution of selves, or (b) to resources whose value is misconceived or unrecognized. This offers two dimensions of ideology critique: we are valuing the wrong things, or the practices and structures that produce things (including, in a sense, ourselves), or provide access to them, are unjust.

Suppose for the moment that we can locate ideology in the cultural *technē* that constitutes our practices. What, then, is the basis for ideology critique? One dimension is *epistemic*: the schemas are cognitively faulty, e.g., they rely on inapt concepts, draw our attention to problematic stereotypes, entrench misguided inferences. The epistemic flaws of ideology aren’t simply a matter of false or inconsistent beliefs, but are located in processes of thought and affect, and dispositions to act. Another dimension is *socio-political*: the practices constituted by the schemas distribute resources in ways that are morally problematic or unjust. Note, however, that this characterization of both epistemic and political failures, points to the *forms* of critique (epistemic or political), but doesn’t give us a substantive *basis* for critique. I have not yet provided the normative premises that would be required, for example, to critique the pattern of cases in which pregnant women are deprived of liberty. I aim to make progress on this normative task in this lecture.

What is wrong in the cases just described? It might seem that we don’t need anything like ideology critique to criticize the incidents. They are epistemically problematic because the sheriffs, judges, police officers, and others in authority have false beliefs about the law, and probably also about the likelihood of harms to a fetus of a VBAC birth or drug exposure. And these false beliefs lead them to do bad things, viz., to violate women’s legal and moral rights. But notice that this

answer says nothing about schemas, resources, practices, or ideology. Why worry about ideology?

As I see it, there may be false beliefs and violations of rights in these cases, but this is just a symptom of the disease. These individuals don't *just happen* to have these problematic beliefs, or *just happen* to respond in extreme ways to these incidents. The pressing question is how to explain the grotesque, but at least seemingly well-intentioned, systematic violation of rights by those whose identity is invested in the protection of rights. Explanations that rely simply on the ignorance or vices of particular individuals are unsatisfying because at least part of the problem lies at the social rather than the individual level.

Ideology provides a tool for understanding *patterns* of epistemic distortion. Recall from last lecture 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.'<sup>34</sup> I argued that ideology provides a cultural *technē*, a set of dominant public meanings, scripts, patterns of thought and reasoning, that guides our coordination in ways that, often unintentionally, sustains injustice. People, often unthinkingly, enact patterns of interpretation and action because they are guided by a cultural *technē*: they engage in the local practices which rely on the shared meanings (schemas) and have also shaped the environment to prompt the relevant action.

For example, traffic laws and norms constitute a relatively benign cultural *technē* that enables us to coordinate in sharing right of way: traffic signs, lines, and signals have a social meaning that we respond to, assuming that others will do so as well. We can explain patterns in driving behavior by reference to the laws, signs, licensing tests, design of roadways, vehicles and the like, without having to consider drivers as deliberating in the ordinary case about what to do at, say, a stop sign. We become fluent in driving and, if there is general fluency and the conditions are good, coordination is fairly successful. But sometimes an intersection can be dangerous because the traffic pattern is badly structured or badly marked; we explain the pattern of accidents there not in terms of bad drivers, but of bad design.

Many social practices are benign, but we can also become fluent in unjust or harmful practices and hardly notice what we are doing, or the collective effects. In such

34. Hall 1996/2006, p. 24.

cases, the cultural *technē* is ideological. Ideology creates an epistemic obstacle to understanding the workings of structures of domination; but it is also more than epistemic, and more than an obstacle, for it affects not only our perception and belief formation, but also a wide range of affective, conative, and hedonic states and processes, as well as bodily dispositions. Ideology shapes our practical orientation towards the world.

For example, there is a pattern of anti-Black racism in the United States. On my view, this is a structural problem: there is an interlocking set of practices that are guided by a racist *technē*, e.g., residential segregation, police brutality, biased hiring and wage inequity, educational disadvantage. Somewhat different ideologies inform racist practices affecting Asians, Latino(a)s, Native Americans, and increasingly, AMEMSA.<sup>35</sup> Such ideologies are complex and multi-dimensional, have aspects that are geographically and domain specific, and involve differentiation along lines of gender, class, age, and the like. The schemas and social meanings that constitute the ideology are a *source* of individual beliefs and attitudes, and explain a pattern of thought, emotion, and behavior.

The examples I started with are a snapshot of a larger pattern in which women of color and poor women are not granted the respect they are entitled to; this disrespect is exacerbated in some contexts, including contexts in which the woman is pregnant. How might we explain this pattern? I suggest that pregnant women have a social meaning, and poor pregnant women and pregnant women of color are at risk for violating that social meaning. When they do, there are a variety of possible responses, but on one approach to law enforcement, correction is called for.

What, then, is the social meaning of pregnant women? There are, of course, many meanings. However, drawing on George Lakoff (1999), we might begin by listing a number of distinct but overlapping positive associations<sup>36</sup>: mother, caregiver, carrier of male seed, incubator of fetus, producer of the next generation, part-

35. AMEMSA is an acronym for: Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian. For more information, see: <http://aapip.org/files/incubation/files/amemsa2ofact2osheet.pdf>

36. Schemas don't just consist of associations. For example, merely associating Doberman Pinschers with aggression leaves it open whether the association is positive or negative and what beliefs the association tends to generate, e.g., a mere association between Doberman's and aggression is equally compatible with the thought that Doberman's are disposed to aggression and that Doberman's as a breed are not aggressive but are wrongly assumed to be so. (Thanks to Susanna Siegel for pointing this out.) But clusters



nered (i.e., unavailable) female. The cluster of positive associations forms the basis for an ideal or paradigm, allowing that the particular weighting of elements of the cluster will vary depending on context. The ideal, in many US contexts, is the white, relatively affluent, heterosexual, married, behaviorally cautious, young, fit, woman. The social meaning of pregnancy governs a wide range of social practices that manage access to resources such as liberty, autonomy, infants, material/medical support, work, and even an individual's own body. Moreover, practices involving pregnant women are interlocked with other practices involving sex education, childcare, marriage, property, citizenship.

In the rights violation cases, the dominant element of the schema seems to be that of the fetal incubator; this meaning, of course, is linked to meanings of caregiver, producer of next generation and carrier of male seed. The presumed failure of the woman to fulfill that function adequately overrides all other considerations in how to respond to her. Her cries of protest, her midwife's expert advice, her partner's resistance, are filtered through a frame of meaning that renders them irrelevant. The fetal incubator is malfunctioning and action is required to save the fetus; or worse, she is a criminal attacking an innocent victim. The poor woman of color is not interpreted as a citizen whose rights must be protected.<sup>37</sup>

## IDEOLOGY AND EPISTEMIC CRITIQUE

If we are to take aim at ideology, it would seem that the first step would be to point out how the schemas fail us, e.g., the ways in which the ideology of pregnancy and the criminalization of poor women and women of color, relies on false beliefs, distorted stereotypes, a problematic emphasis on certain facts and neglect of others, background desires and other emotions. We could look for unjustified or contradictory assumptions, hypocrisy, looping effects of power.

of positive associations (a high value on one property correlates with a high value on the other), will often congeal into a stereotype or paradigm and these are commonly part of a schema.

37 The fact that the officers' actions occur within structures and are informed by schemas does not absolve them from responsibility; as discussed in the previous lecture, we have genuine agency even under conditions of constrained choice.

It is important to emphasize, however, that the epistemic goal cannot be to rid ourselves of cultural schemas that organize how we select and process information, as if we could just let the facts speak for themselves. Coordination and communication would not be possible without the tools culture provides us. For example, ostension, which is a fairly primitive communicative act, depends on our being able to narrow efficiently the range of possible referents. Coordination requires that we attend and respond to the right signals, filtering out the noise, in order to do our part in the plan. Some cognitive selection occurs naturally, no doubt, but socialization also shapes our cognition. A crucial part of socialization involves learning how to engage in social practices and adapting cognition to participate in them fluently.<sup>38</sup>

Jack Balkin (1998) refers to these tools as 'cultural software.' Such software is 'installed' in individuals and comes to guide our thinking through the process of socialization.

.....  
To be sure, beliefs can be tools of understanding and can be used to create new tools. But more important objects of study are cognitive mechanisms that produce beliefs [and other attitudes?]. Examples include the tendency to structure experience in terms of narratives, psychological methods of categorization, varieties of metaphoric and metonymic thinking, strategies for reduction of cognitive dissonance, heuristics and biases employed in making judgments under uncertainty, and understanding by means of networks of conceptual oppositions in the form 'A is to B as C is to D.'<sup>39</sup>  
.....

Balkin's use of the term 'software' is chosen to highlight that at least some of our cognitive processes are artifacts, i.e., they are a product of our social milieu; that thinking is not a static representation such as a belief (though it produces beliefs) but a process or a practice; that there are shared forms of cognition (understood by analogy with a program), but also variation with individual uses (plug-ins, patches); and that forms of thought that we take for granted and hardly question are, nevertheless, mutable and contingent. Although the analogy with software

38 McGeer 2007; Zawidzki 2013.

39 Balkin 1998, p. 102.

is illuminating in some ways, I will continue to use the terms *cultural schema* and *cultural technē* to refer to the tools of practical thought.

Note that this conception of ideology as a set of cultural tools that guides us in interpreting and coordinating with each other resists the idea that ideology consists in a set of beliefs.<sup>40</sup> Just as word meanings are not 'in the head,' neither is ideology; however, just as word meanings are learned and expressed in speech, so is ideology.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, in learning an ideology, we don't just form a set of beliefs; there is a sense in which we learn a form of life. Culturally shared cognitive processes shape our capacities for and objects of attention, memory, emotion, expectation and imagination. Such shared mechanisms result in shared attitudes. (Beliefs are among the attitudes, but I have in mind the sense of 'attitude' more common in psychology, where an attitude towards X is a complex disposition to perceive, have emotions, deliberate, and act in specific ways towards X.<sup>42</sup>) The coordination of our attitudes allows us to collectively identify and distribute access to resources (things taken to have or lack value) and so distributes power; the patterns are learned and reinforced by material prompts: signs, symbols, the built environment, and cultural artifacts broadly speaking.

Because we become participants in a culture through ordinary (messy!) processes of socialization, there are not only commonalities among us, but also substantial differences. This is important to create space for resistance. Some of these differences are due to the varieties of human personality and temperament (not all of us are easily socialized!); some are due to differences in the communities and families in which we grow up; and some are due to the fragmentation and evolution of social life. I was raised by a deeply compassionate mother who was a Christian Scientist, didn't go to college, and took parenting to be the most valuable thing a woman could do. Of course I learned the dominant ideology of my milieu (at home, in school, through the media), but I was also given tools to interpret the world in unexpected ways and to resist aspects of the practices I was

40 Shelby 2003; 2014.

41 In previous work I used the term 'schema' to refer both to public symbolic forms and meanings, and to the cognitive schemas that we rely on to produce and process them. Here I separate the two into public schemas/social meanings and the attitudinal internalization of them.

42 Anderson & Pildes 2000, p. 1509.

asked to perform. Such tensions between micro and macro cultures are inevitable and valuable.

So which cultural technēs are apt for ideology critique? I have followed Balkin (1998), and others, in the suggestion that ideologies '*create or sustain unjust social conditions or unjust relations of social power.*'<sup>43</sup> There are two points to note about this view. First, a cultural technē is ideological by virtue of its unjust consequences.<sup>44</sup> Second, to evaluate the consequences as unjust, we need to rely on a conception of justice.<sup>45</sup>

How does this apply to the abuse of pregnant women? We might start with a normative theory of justice that affirms women's human rights to bodily integrity and autonomy with respect to health choices, and then show how the violations of these rights flow from the schemas of *pregnant woman* employed in the contexts in question. A critique would insist that *personhood* (and corresponding elements of autonomy and dignity) be included in the model for pregnant woman and problematized in the model for fetus. We might challenge, more generally, the practices of thought that govern the dominant thinking about women, pregnancy, and related matters, not just in the minds of individuals, but in the culture more broadly.

## IDEOLOGY AND MORAL CRITIQUE

There is a worry about such a critique however. Those who are invested in the practice of correcting and punishing pregnant women for being non-White or poor will surely regard the normative theory as not only unmotivated, but as *ideological* itself, e.g., they will resist challenging the full personhood of the fetus. This raises the more general worry that ideology critique will never be 'neutral.' But if not neutral, then won't any critique, itself, be problematically ideological? And how, then, can it carry moral weight? Moreover, I take it to be a desideratum

43 Balkin 1998, pp. 104-106.

44 Ibid. p. 110.

45 Ibid. pp. 105, 111, 118, 120.

of Critical Theory that it engage with a social movement to make a difference, that it be, in some sense, emancipatory.<sup>46</sup> How does a hauling in a normative theory from the seminar room achieve this? I will respond to these concerns by sketching some thoughts about moral knowledge, and what it means to 'challenge' practices of thought and action.

## Moral Epistemology

If ideology is to be judged in terms of the injustice of its effects and the values it promotes, it would seem that there must be a fact of the matter about what is just and unjust, good, and valuable. If *in fact*, women – and not fetuses – are entitled to the full rights of personhood, then a rights critique of our dominant cultural models of *pregnant women* is not ideological, even if it relies on background values. And a cognitive/political shift that prevents such violations of rights, is warranted.

I endorse this presupposition that there are moral facts. It is a moral fact 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 facts cannot be avoided by those engaged in justified political resistance.<sup>47</sup> Note, for example, that 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.

When confronted with critique, however, a tension arises that concerns moral epistemology: how do we *know* what is good or just?<sup>48</sup> 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 so-

<sup>46</sup> Geuss 1981.

<sup>47</sup> I am not committing myself here to a particular meta-ethical view about the nature of moral 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.

<sup>48</sup> For an excellent discussion of what is required for moral knowledge and how it is possible, see Setiya 2013. I take my view to be sympathetic to the view Setiya defends.

cial structures that produce injustice. But what do we know in the moral domain? Can we have moral knowledge? The shift to moral epistemology is important, but stated in a way that can be misleading.

First, 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.<sup>49</sup> Second, knowledge of what's good and bad, right and wrong, is at least partly an empirical matter. We cannot have moral knowledge without reference to details of human experience, facts about human psychology, anthropology, and history; we cannot know how to organize ourselves fairly without an appreciation of forms of understanding and cooperation in particular historical contexts. So philosophers engaged simply in (a priori?) ideal theory are not especially well-equipped to know what justice is.<sup>50</sup> This is not to say, however, that ideal normative theory is pointless, though pursued on its own, especially by a narrowly educated non-diverse set of experts, it is highly unreliable, or worse. Third, moral knowledge doesn't require certainty.<sup>51</sup> I can be justified in believing a moral truth without my justification guaranteeing its truth; justified belief is really different from knowledge, and I can learn that my justified belief is false.

## Practices, Values, Reasons

What is really going wrong when a sheriff straps together the legs of a woman in labor or when a pregnant woman is taken into custody to protect her fetus from her? What is really going wrong when a woman is sentenced to 20 years in prison for not attempting to revive a non-viable stillborn? I think that the experiences and choices of the pregnant women *don't matter* in these circumstances; they aren't recognized or valued. It is tempting to say that from the dominant perspective, the experiences and choices of these individuals, even these individuals themselves, are not *seen* or not *seen as such*; they are eclipsed by attention to other features of the situation. Of course the sheriff and officers hear the women's cries of resistance. But they aren't understood; they aren't meaningful in the

<sup>49</sup> Balkin 1998, p. 120.

<sup>50</sup> Anderson 2014.

<sup>51</sup> Reed 2011 provides a helpful overview of recent work on certainty.



way they should be.<sup>52</sup> Remember, though, that I'm not talking about whether individual women matter to individual men. I'm not talking about what people *believe*. I'm talking about broad social meanings and the cognitive software that generates and sustains subordinating patterns of behavior.

Of course, there is a sense in which the choices of pregnant women culturally matter *a lot*.<sup>53</sup> That is evidenced by heated controversies over abortion and attempts to control women's reproductive lives. So the claim is not that the facts of race, poverty, and pregnancy don't matter at all, that these parts of human life are culturally invisible. My claim is about the failure of the dominant culture to provide resources for understanding – or even acknowledging – the perspective of poor women and women of color.<sup>54</sup> The experiences, reasons, constraints, and values of such women – their perspectives – don't matter within the dominant culture of the US, and the experiences and choices of more affluent white women matter culturally only relative to their role in men's lives and their willingness and ability to fulfill those roles. So the perspectives of LGBT women, disabled women, immigrants, and women of the Global South, whether white or not, economically privileged or not, are similarly eclipsed.

Let's attempt to apply the ideas I've been sketching to understand this. Cultural software shapes our experience through selection, attention, memory. Recalling Balkin's examples, it provides such things as a shared set of narratives to structure experience, modes and terms of categorization, varieties of metaphoric and metonymic thinking, strategies for reduction of cognitive dissonance, heuristics and biases employed in making judgments under uncertainty. These tools occlude some phenomena and highlight others.

If we engage in the social world and make choices to act without attending to what's morally relevant, we will make serious mistakes. Ideology systematically pre-

52 Work on testimonial injustice (e.g., Fricker 2009) and illocutionary silencing (Langton 2009; Maitra and McGowan 2012) is also relevant here; cf. Hornsby et al. 2011; Bauer 2015. I believe however, that casting the problem as one of testimonial, or even hermeneutic, injustice doesn't take us far enough, for such an analysis remains overly individualistic (was the woman heard, did she have the resources to protest). As I see it, the central problem is how the cultural resources structure our lives. Thanks to Rachel McKinney for helpful discussions of this point.

53 Thanks to Lucas Stanczyk for emphasizing this point.

54 For insightful work on the notion of a perspective, see Elisabeth Camp 2006, 2013.

vents us from noticing some of what's morally relevant by shaping and filtering experience to provide a practical orientation that reinforces the dominant structure.<sup>55</sup> For example, plausibly there is cognitive dissonance in believing that both the fetus and the women are entitled to the full rights of personhood when faced with a situation in which their survival, or basic well-being, is (believed to be) at issue. To avoid the cognitive dissonance, there are cultural frames and practices that license placing more value on one over the other. Culturally, the fetus is often represented as the helpless, innocent, victim; the pregnant woman as the irresponsible, uncaring, perpetrator, or even disposable incubator. The fetus needs help, and those whose responsibility it is to protect the innocent are taught how to respond. It is no surprise that those who have internalized this ideology cannot find the critique of their actions credible: their experience of the world is already infused with the cultural *technē* that motivates and justifies their action.

Just as we can criticize forms of reasoning because they don't take into account relevant information, so we can criticize patterns of experience and patterns of valuing. We might say to the police officer or judge: your experience leaves out morally important features of the situation. Or your placing greater value on the fetus in this context is not adequately informed: it is selective in what it takes into account; it is missing the significance and relevance of the woman's autonomy. You are not correctly interpreting the meaning of the woman's cries of resistance because you cannot really hear her. And this is not accidental. This is a learned practice of interpreting and valuing; it is shared with others because it is encoded in the cultural software. You lack moral knowledge.

Consider Rawls<sup>56</sup> on promising. In being committed to the practice of promising, individuals commit themselves to forego calculations of individual self-interest (among other things) when the time comes to make good on the promise. If you are good at promising, if you have been socialized properly, your dispositions to break the promise are hardly noticeable. You may want to do something else, but you ignore the want, and rightly so. However, White Supremacy teaches us to be selective in what we notice, what we respond to, what we value. Just as the promisor ignores the desire to act in self-interest and takes this to be called for,

55 The growing literature on the epistemology of ignorance and epistemic injustice develops this point, e.g., Alcoff 2007; Mills 1988; Mills 2007; Medina 2013; Fricker 2009.

56 Rawls 1955.

the police officer ignores or interpretively skews the cries of the poor woman of color. Her perspective is not what matters.

Although sometimes calling attention to morally relevant information can be effective, simply reasoning with others is often not sufficient to override their sense of what morality demands. This may be because in the context of evaluation, social practices give shape to what we value, and consequently our reasons for action.

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.<sup>57</sup>

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 cultural 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.<sup>58</sup>

What Balkin might have gone on to say is that not only valuing, but reasoning too is a human practice.<sup>59</sup> Reasoning involves tutored, guided, responses to things *and people* around us. Our cultural technē organizes us to solve coordination problems, to establish and affirm relationships and identities, and to distribute power, resources, knowledge; to do so, it must structure our experience and thinking as well.

57 Balkin 1998, pp. 27–28.

58 Ibid. p. 17.

59 Laden 2012.

## Moral knowledge?

Where do we stand? I've argued that a cultural technē is ideological insofar as it promotes and sustains structures that are unjust or based on skewed values. I've suggested that we can have moral knowledge that would enable us to distinguish between ideological and non-ideological technēs. However, I've also argued that some values and likewise forms of moral reasoning are constituted through social practices, i.e., actual historical practices don't just mediate our access to moral knowledge, but can constitute value, provide us with reasons for action, and coordinate our shared projects. This seems to pose a problem. If the practices of a sheriff or judge constitute reasons, then where do we stand to critique them? On what basis can we say that pregnant women matter, that women matter, that Black lives matter?

There are two assumptions in the background of my reply to these questions. First, human beings are capable of recognizing at least very basic forms of good and bad, justice and injustice for humans; and under good enough conditions, the method they have for doing so is fairly reliable. And so at least in some cases, it is not just an accident that our justified moral beliefs are true and constitute knowledge.<sup>60</sup> This is compatible with individuals and even whole societies being grossly mistaken about what's right and wrong. For example, under certain conditions, e.g., of social chaos, famine, widespread terror, the influence of certain charismatic leaders, humans may not be reliable in their moral judgments; nevertheless, humans are, in general, capable of recognizing human suffering and have it matter. More specifically, under those conditions when humans recognize the wrong of certain forms of suffering (among other things), we are exercising our human 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 leaves room, of course, for disagreement about the conditions under which we are adept at exercising our capacities to judge the moral facts.<sup>61</sup>

60 Setiya 2013, Ch. 4.

61 Basic human capacities can play a role in providing a basis for morality, or for moral epistemology. I am here arguing for the latter, not the former. For helpful discussions of humanist morality, see Antony 1998, and 2000; and Mikkola 2011, and 2016. Note also that on Mikkola's view, *dehumanization* is the core moral notion. I take this to be compatible with my claim that one may have knowledge of moral wrongs without

Second, although humans are capable of moral knowledge and this can provide a basis for legitimate social critique, other moral knowledge can only be gained by participating with others in practices that create social meaning and value, i.e., those that, as Balkin suggested, give shape to and concretize our more inchoate sense of value. Most moral knowledge we don't have simply by virtue of our humanity, and so there will be many questions about the legitimacy of social practices and social structures that we cannot answer 'from the point of view of humanity.'

This suggests that there are two levels of moral epistemology: we can draw on knowledge we have by virtue of being human under good-enough conditions, and we can draw on knowledge we have by virtue of being a participant in a particular form of life. One thing we know, I believe, is that human coordination is, in principle, valuable; we also know that not all forms of human coordination are morally acceptable. We do not know this a priori, but humans are able to reliably judge this, under conditions that are suitable for gaining moral knowledge. I propose that human coordination that is coerced, i.e., coordination (between adults?) on terms that are intolerable to some participating groups, is at least morally questionable. This means that collective resistance to such forms of coordination must be taken seriously.

Of course we cannot make the defenders of patriarchal White supremacy care about poor women of color. But the terms of coordination they impose, often violently impose, are intolerable, and this is, in principle, knowable. However, due to the ideological filters that guide their practical orientation, they lack the relevant moral knowledge. So we may legitimately demand that their practices of valuing be less selective – we might say less problematically biased – by calling attention to or reframing morally relevant features of the situation that are not evident from their social position. This may be a matter of calling upon their humanity – their ability to make reliable moral judgments – but often is not simply a matter of asking individuals to improve their cognitive processes (though that would be good), for we cannot always just open our eyes to see what ideology masks. Gaining the relevant knowledge may require changes to the cultural technē, the

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claiming a full theory of justice because one can know that an act is dehumanizing without knowing what it would be to be granted full moral dignity.

frame of social meanings and social practices, that shape their practical orientation.

On what basis can we legitimately make such challenges, especially ones that require substantial changes to their perspective, to the cultural milieu? Allowing that considerations will vary depending on context, we might argue:

- You should want your practices of valuing – the ones you are committed to – to be open to new information and to avoid misinformation.
- If you are going to coordinate effectively, you should be attentive to the reasons that all parties have to maintain the coordination. If others have good reason to defect, you are at risk of losing the benefits of coordination.

Both considerations, you might think, are a matter of rational self-interest. One problem, however, is that these considerations are less than compelling when there are substantial differences of power. If you can coerce me to conform to the terms of coordination, then self-interest doesn't require you to listen to me or take in information that challenges your power.

But note that it is not our only option to 'ask' those in power to take us seriously, as if our only option is to reason with them. The question is: what justifies us in undertaking cultural change, engaging in social movement work, with the intention of disrupting the social order? Are we simply attempting to take control, to restructure social life so that our interests dominate? What justifies our efforts if we cannot rely on shared knowledge of what justice requires? Although fragile and uncertain, I think we should begin here:

- If you (the dominant) were to hear the demands of the currently disenfranchised, you would gain moral knowledge; you would have reason to and want to be responsive to them and change your practices of valuing, producing, distributing, relating – and the further practices that depend on them – to be more open and inclusive.
- If you were to change your practices to take the disenfranchised into account, this would result in new forms of coordination that you yourselves would recognize to be an improvement.

One might worry that such claims are (a) paternalistic and (b) unrealistic. Re (a): I don't think that such a demand or hope can be paternalistic. What we are saying to the powerful is that we do matter, and that if we are recognized to have value and treated humanely, we will all be better off. That may not be true. But it is what we have to offer. Re (b): whether it is unrealistic depends on the contingencies of history and our efforts to work in solidarity with the disenfranchised for



social change. At this stage of social injustice, there are no promises. We will have accomplished a lot, however, even if hope can provide a basis for action.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am especially grateful to the following for their valuable contributions to my thinking about these issues: Joel Anderson, Ekaterina Botchkina, Robin Celikates, Jerome Hodges, Colin MacLeod, Rachel McKinney, Mari Mikkola, Beate Roessler, Kieran Setiya, Susanna Siegel, Lucas Stanczyk, Nicolas Vrousalis. Thanks also to Marijn Sax for his excellent work in preparing the manuscript.

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