

How to Change a Social Structure

Sally Haslanger
MIT

1. Introduction

Societies are complex systems – or clusters of interacting systems – that reproduce themselves: their hierarchies, their culture, their practices, and their structures. Most, if not all, societies reproduce profound injustice.¹ How does this work? And how can the process of social reproduction be effectively disrupted and replaced so that better systems emerge?²

An important fact about social reproduction is that we all participate in sustaining unjust institutions and social relations, like it or not. We buy food and clothing; we rent or purchase homes; we transport ourselves from place to place; we raise our children and care for our pets; we rely on healthcare and education systems; we seek meaning, and beauty, and love. From a certain perspective, these are individual acts done for reasons, mostly good reasons, that are relatively transparent to us. But from another perspective, these actions are moves in complex systems of coordination that offer a limited choice architecture shaped by biological, geographical, demographic, economic, historical, and cultural conditions. The systems distribute burdens and benefits in ways that are unjust; yet the workings and consequences of the systems are not transparent, even to those who have the most power to control them.

To avoid any confusion, let me be clear: my concern is not about evaluating or assessing responsibility or blame for individual choices, but with the possibilities for structural change. I am also not restricting myself to change in the domain governed (legitimately) by the state. Social norms enable coordination that are beyond the reach of the liberal state, e.g., how we divide labor in the household, whom we invite home to dinner, how we manage dating and sex, what cultural artifacts (styles and fashions) become popular. Social practices of this sort are properly subject to critique because they manage access to resources, including not only money, but also other forms of social, cultural, and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1984).

In the first part of this paper I will consider the phenomenon of social reproduction and will point to some of the processes that are involved. One question is how members of a society develop practical orientations that enable them to coordinate their behavior. Another question, especially relevant for our purposes, is how, without being coerced, individuals 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 over and over, generation after generation. Consider the division of labor in the household, i.e., women’s “second shift” (Hochschild 2003); even those who are conscientiously egalitarian in their politics live in ways that burden women with housework, childcare, eldercare, care of the sick and

¹ I use the term ‘injustice’ and its cognates in a very broad sense to include social wrongs and social harms generally, and not just violations of rights or distributive unfairness. The term ‘social justice’ seems to have this broad extension, but for ease of exposition, I will mostly just speak of justice and injustice.

² These are questions I raise in most of my recent work and this paper draws substantially on texts and integrates material I have published elsewhere. See, e.g., Haslanger 2014, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2019a, 2019b.

disabled that far exceeds their fair share. Consider also the regular enactment and tolerance of racial subordination and class exploitation. Why do we continue to live these ways?

I will then turn to questions about social critique and social change. Philosophers tend to rely on a conception of critique that focuses on giving reasons through argumentation, debate, and deliberation. Supposedly, reason works through our agency, not against it, and the alternative is coercion, ultimately violence. I will argue that given the processes that sustain social reproduction, this method of critique has serious limitations for promoting social change. Law, however, is a means for coercing people, or "incentivizing" them, to do things differently in a way that is presumed legitimate. But law can function as a means of social reproduction as much as it disrupts it. Legislation depends on elites who, for the most part, have been disciplined to perform their "proper" social function and have an interest in maintaining the system. Moreover, legal activism, even if justified, tends to be ineffective unless there is a corresponding cultural change, over which law has limited control (Haslanger 2017a). I will argue that although both reasoned argument and law may have their place, structural change requires a multi-pronged approach; more specifically, social justice requires collective action that arises in social movements. This is not to say that all social movements promote justice; surely they don't. And social change and the disruption it causes will have costs. Power must be redistributed. Old ways will have to be abandoned and not everyone will be satisfied. I don't have even a glimmer of a solution to many of these challenges. And at no point in the discussion will I offer a normative account of justice; I will assume that we can agree that there structural injustice is a problem and change is called for. However, when structural change is needed, social movements guided by sound standpoint epistemology are a crucial part of the solution.³

II. Social Reproduction

In principle, social reproduction theory considers how any society or social formation reproduces itself; but in practice, the theory has developed as a critical response to an interpretation of Marx that focuses on a narrow conception of the economy and economic processes. Modern historical processes not only reproduce class exploitation, but race and sex (and other forms of) oppression; and the processes in question work not only through wage labor contracts, but through household activities and social structures that produce and maintain life and create and distribute forms of non-economic value. Social reproduction theory, broadly speaking, considers how these different domains and different processes interact to result in a variety of persistent forms of injustice (Federici 2019; Bhattacharya 2017).

Although it is important to consider detailed historical examples of social processes in order to understand how gender, race, class, and such are actually reproduced, it is helpful to have an account of social structures to work with.⁴ This is especially important for our purposes, for we need a model that will

³ What counts as a "standpoint" epistemology is controversial. See, e.g., Grasswick 2018. I say more about what I mean by a standpoint epistemology and how it is related to social movements and social critique in (Haslanger 2021).

⁴ In the 1980-90s, social theorists turned away from "totalizing" and "reductive" theories that aimed to explain the workings of all societies, at all times. The most extreme post-modern response was to embrace a skepticism about the very possibility of systematic knowledge. However, between reductionism and skepticism there is a large middle ground where theorists pursue "contextual analysis," i.e., systematic description and explanation that takes seriously contextual variation. As Tilly and Goodin (2011) put it, "In response to each big question of political science, we

provide resources for understanding the stability of structures along with possible leverage points. I have proposed a practice-first conception of social structures, and will sketch that here, along with some ideas about durability and resistance.

A. Structures

Let's begin by considering the relationship between systems, structures, and practices, understood in general terms. Stuart Shapiro suggests:

I define a system to be a collection of objects with certain relations. An extended family is a system of people with blood and marital relationships, a chess configuration is a system of pieces under spatial and "possible move" relationships...A structure is the abstract form of a system, highlighting the interrelationships among the objects, and ignoring any features of them that do not affect how they relate to other objects in the system. (1997, 73)

I take Shapiro to be suggesting, for example, that *my family* is a system that includes particular individuals (Steve, Isaac, Zina, Sparky, me) who stand in relations such as "parent of," "child of," "spouse of," "sibling of," "dog of," etc. But we can abstract from this particular Yablanger system to see it as instantiating a more general structure shared by other families. We can then distinguish the individual in a system (me), from the position within the structure (parent, spouse). That is, considering the relationships that form the structure, we can distinguish occupiers of positions from the positions. Because parents have certain rights and responsibilities with respect their minor children – this comes with the position in the structure – I have those rights and responsibilities with respect to my children. Considering places – or what I will sometimes call *positions* or *nodes* – as objects, we ignore the particular individuals that occupy the places, and focus on the relationships that hold between places. For example, when we talk about possible moves for a rook, we might mean how we might move a tower-shaped piece of wood or plastic in a particular chess game, or we might mean what the rules of chess allow for anything that counts as a rook.

To claim, as Schapiro does, that a structure "is the abstract form of" a system suggests that structures are virtual, immaterial, ideational;⁵ and it might also seem that, as such, they are not causally efficacious.⁶ But this is a misunderstanding. There are two moves in identifying a structure. The first is to shift attention from individuals to relations; the second is to recognize that the same relation can be instantiated by different individuals. Consider first the move to relations: relations are not mere abstractions. For example, in order for a house to stand, the roof rests on load bearing walls that transfer the weight of the roof to the foundation. The relation "rests on" (as in x rests on y) is causally responsible for the house

reply "It depends" (234). I embrace the methods of contextual analysis and the social ontology I propose here specifically allows for tremendous variation in causal processes, explanatory strategies, and theoretical priorities.

⁵ Giddens, among many others, falls for this temptation (Giddens 1986, 17); Sewell challenges it (Sewell 1992, 6).

⁶ The ontological distinction between abstract and concrete objects does not presuppose that abstract objects are the product of (cognitive) abstraction; in fact, there is a longstanding debate in philosophy about the nature of abstract objects. The argument I am making here is addressed to those who assume that "abstract objects" are either a product of cognition or are in Frege's "third realm." If one already grants that "abstract objects" can be causally efficacious parts of the material world, then the point I am making here is not news. But I will avoid using the term 'abstract' because of its tendency to evoke anti-realist understandings of structure.

remaining upright when x is a roof and y is a load bearing wall. It is a physical relation not an idea or representation. The fact that the roof rests on certain walls allows for – enables – other walls, windows, and doors to be constructed without risking a roof collapse. Moreover, because such a physical relation plays an important role in construction, materials are manufactured in order to facilitate and sustain that relation: beam brackets, joist hangers, straps and ties, nail plates, fasteners and such. Although I have chosen an artifact to make the point, the physical world is constituted by material relations and structures that are the subject matter of natural science (Garfinkel 1981).

Likewise, social relations are not mere abstractions. My family is a particular system that instantiates parent, spouse, pet, and sibling relations. The parent-child relation is part of its structure. This relation is not a mere abstraction: it is not virtual, or “just an idea.” Like a load bearing wall, it helps to hold up a family. It constrains and enables action. For example, why did Isaac go on a field trip but Tyler have to stay at school instead? Because Sally is Isaac’s parent and she signed Isaac’s permission slip; but Aiden signed Tyler’s and Aiden is just one of Tyler’s friends. In cases such as this one, the relation and its consequences occur in a system of law and policy and are the result of human intentional action (the social relation x is parent of y is not biological). But social systems include relations that are not designed or intentional and may not even be recognized. For example, Zina and Isaac are in open adoptions. Zina has a birth sister, Mahoganie. Since Mahoganie is the (full, biological) sister of my daughter; is she also my daughter? She is not my birth-daughter, or step-daughter, or daughter-in-law. I am close to her and she is “like” a daughter to me. But because American adoption practices were for so long focused on hiding (White families’) adoptions and the birth families (Solinger 1992), this relationship is rarely recognized, has few (if any) norms associated with it, and there is no generally accepted word for it. We make it up as we go along and come up with a variety of answers we can give to strangers’ questions, e.g., at passport control. (Other adoptive/birth relations are similar, e.g., what do we call my relationship with my children’s birth parents, or my children’s relationships with members of each other’s birth families.)

Social relations shape the activity of those who stand in them through their instantiation in social practices: culturally specific social norms delineate what counts as being a good spouse or parent and individuals adjust their behavior accordingly. Evolving practices, however, can also change the structures: the practices of same-sex relationships and their increasing visibility has changed the structure of marriage and kinship more broadly. The general phenomenon of marriage, or its equivalent – socially sanctioned relations between long-term partners that organize sex/intimacy, child rearing, and economic interdependence – is widespread across time and place and is part of broader networks of social relations. However, marriage customs and prerogatives differ widely from culture to culture as does their specific function in a broader network of relations. Families, as structures, are constituted by a network of relations; family systems embody those relations.

What, then, is the relationship between practices, systems, and structures? Although I resist Schapiro’s characterization of structures as “abstractions,” I find his distinction between systems and structures useful. As I see it, practices are particular patterns of behavior (I say more about this below) that occur as parts of systems; structures are networks of interdependent relations instantiated in different systems. Structures are, in a sense, the skeleton that connects different practices and the social relations they instantiate in a social body.

B. Practices

I've spoken of practices, but it remains unclear what practices are. Rawls offers important insight in his 'Two Concepts of Rules' (1955). There, Rawls argues that there is an important difference between "summary rules," and "practice rules." Summary rules are "summaries of past decisions" (19) and rely on a "statistical notion of generality" (21, fn 22). Practice rules, in contrast, are *prior to* the behavior and states of mind of the participants and define "offices, moves and offenses" (25); moreover, "to explain or to defend one's own action, as a particular action, one fits it into the practice which defines it" (27).

What does it mean to say that the practice is 'logically prior' to the behavior and states of mind of the participants? Rawls (1955) suggests:

In the case of actions specified by practices it is logically impossible to perform them outside the stage-setting provided by those practices, for unless there is the practice, and unless the requisite proprieties are fulfilled, whatever one does, whatever movements one makes, will fail to count as a form of action which the practice specifies. (25)

We need practices, he argues, because "in many areas of conduct each person's deciding what to do on utilitarian grounds case by case leads to confusion, and that the attempt to coordinate behavior by trying to foresee how others will act is bound to fail" (24). Practices provide a public understanding of what is to be done and carry social normativity: "[when there is a challenge] to the particular action defined by the practice, there is nothing one can do but refer to the rules" (27).

Rawls' insights are crucial for understanding the social conditions for much of our agency. But for our purposes, two adjustments to his view are necessary. First, the model of "rules" he seems to have in mind assumes that practices are, like games, governed by an explicit set of principles that define offices and their requirements and permissions. However, most social practices are much more tacit, informal, and improvisational (Bertinetto and Bertram 2020; Bigelow and Schroeter 2009). Second, he says little about how to determine the conditions under which a rule applies. More specifically, rules perform their function only if they are general and at least potentially apply to more than one case. As a result, any application of a rule requires interpretation of the conditions as ones that call for the rule. Even in games, a challenge to an action, say, a decision by an umpire, may not concern the rule, but the proper application of the rule to the case at hand. And as conditions change, allowable interpretations of the rule expand or contract, and sometimes the rule is changed to catch up with the practice (MLB.com n.d.; Rymer 2014). This suggests that Rawls' claim that practices (or practice rules) are "logically prior" to action is misleadingly rigid. Practices evolve. Although some actions cannot be performed unless they accord with an explicit rule (as interpreted in that context), practices and the actions that instantiate them are dynamically interdependent. So we should not assume that practices or the actions that instantiate them are "rule governed," but consider, as Rawls says, how practices provide a "stage setting" for action.

To address these issues, it is helpful to turn to William Sewell's (1992) influential account of social structure. Although Sewell provides a theory of structure, his account embeds a conception of practice. Following Giddens (1979), he claims that "Structures shape people's practices, but it is also people's practices that constitute (and reproduce) structures" (Sewell, 1992, 4). Sewell argues – in terms that will require explication – that "Structures...are sets of mutually sustaining schemas and resources that empower and constrain social action and that tend to be reproduced by that social action" (19). As I develop his view, the various "mutually sustaining schemas and resources" are the practices that constitute

the structures when they are stably reproduced. So what does he mean by “mutually sustaining schemas and resources” and how is that an account of practices? I have discussed this in detail elsewhere (Haslanger 2018), so I will only summarize the main points here.

Very roughly, Sewell uses the term *schemas* for the tools that a culture provides to human and some non-human agents for perceiving, thinking, feeling, and acting in ways that facilitate coordination (see also Balkin 1998, Ch. 1; Lessig 1995). They are public, and so like the meanings of words, are not best thought of as mental states.⁷ Publicity is necessary in order for us to rely on them to coordinate. Sewell proposes that schemas consist of “the array of binary oppositions that make up a given society's fundamental tools of thought, but also the various conventions, recipes, scenarios, principles of action, and habits of speech and gesture built up with these fundamental tools” (7-8). Drawing on Sewell, Balkin (1998, 3) and others, I think we should include:

- i. Simple meanings (pink means girl, red means stop);
- ii. Narrative tropes (“First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby in the baby carriage”);
- iii. Default assumptions (“Marriage is between one man and one woman” “The US Constitution protects liberty and justice for all.”); Concepts (*bachelor, marriage, sex, gender, race, water, justice*) and alleged analytic truths about them);
- iv. Heuristics (imitate-the-majority, or imitate-the-successful (Hertwig et al 2013, 7; Gigerenzer et al 1999);
- v. Familiar patterns of metaphor and metonymy (“God is love,” “The pen is mightier than the sword,” Camp 2006);
- vi. Entrenched conceptual homologies (reason : passion :: man : woman (Balkin 1998, Ch. 10; Balkin 1990).
- vii. Explicit public declarations (“Black Lives Matter,” “Blue Lives Matter”).

A particular practice relies on a set of social meanings; I call the various (sometimes contradictory) social meanings that interweave in a social structure a *cultural technē*. (Sewell sometimes speaks of this as a “semiotic net.”)

On Giddens’ account, *resources* are “anything that can serve as a source of power in social interactions.” Sewell 1992, 9; interpreting Giddens 1979, 100). This can include such things as knowledge, money, status, but also material stuff such as factories, weapons, and land. Giddens and Sewell take resources to be at least regarded as positively valuable, a source of power, but I have argued that because we also coordinate around the need to eliminate or avoid what is harmful, toxic, and disgusting, we should allow a broader range of things as resources, or what I sometime call ‘*sources*’ to avoid the positive connotation of ‘resources’. Resources, in this sense, include anything recognized (drawing on the available schemas) as having some kind of (positive or negative) value.⁸

⁷ There is a literature on psychological schemas that is relevant, for it provides insight into how public schemas are internalized. This is also relevant to the literature on implicit bias. However, schemas in the sense intended by Sewell and others, are cultural, not psychological. I have switched to using the term ‘social meanings’ in order to avoid the confusion with psychological schemas. (Admittedly, my previous work has not always been clear about this!)

⁸ Note that I am a pluralist about value and do not assume that all values are commensurable. So to say that something has positive or negative value, I do not mean that they fall at a particular place on a monistic scale of value.

To see the relation between schemas and resources in a practice, let's start by considering an example: The practice of an academic lecture coordinates a community in producing and distributing *knowledge* (a resource) through an interpretation (made available by schemas) of the physical and interpersonal conditions. We interpret some individuals as professors engaged in knowledge production and as having a responsibility to share their knowledge; we interpret spaces as lecture halls where students, or the public, can gather to learn; we interpret furniture as podiums, desks, and blackboards near which professors stand; we interpret chairs arranged facing a podium as places to sit quietly for ~50 minutes to listen (etc.). Such interpretations are governed by social meanings internalized through participation in academic life. Academics – both students and instructors – know how to navigate academic lectures without much thought: one need not deliberate about whether to stand at the front of the room and speak, or sit quietly in a chair facing the front and listen. We know how to perform our role in the practice fluently.

On the account I endorse, social practices are patterns of behavior, but need not be guided by rules or performed intentionally. However, they are not mere regularities in behavior, either, for they are the product of social learning and evolve through responsiveness both to each other's performances and the parts of the world we have an interest in collectively managing.⁹ This responsiveness is mediated by social meanings – carried in the cultural technē – that enable us to communicate, coordinate, and manage the things taken to have value. I suggest that we might capture this as follows (Haslanger 2018, 245):

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

It is important to note that social meanings and resources form a causal loop (as Sewell says, they are “mutually sustaining”); this is relevant to their stability and change. Culture provides tools to interpret some part of the world as valuable (or not) – as a source of value/disvalue – and offers guidance for how to properly interact with it. Our interaction with a resource affects it: we grow it, shape it, manage it, distribute it, destroy it, etc. How it responds to our actions affects our ongoing interactions with it. In cases where the practice takes hold, we shape the resource in order to facilitate the further application of the schema. A paradigm example of this is food production. We interpret some, but not all, edible things as food. Edible things come to have different social meanings (around here we don't consider grasshoppers to be food, but elsewhere they are a special treat). Agricultural practices produce, distribute, and dispose of what our culture recognizes as food. These items are easy to get in the market, we know how to cook them, and our palates adjust to them. And this reinforces how cultures divide edible things into food and non-food and, in turn, the material reality of agriculture. An unjust social practice, or structure, might fail to provide us the semiotic tools to interpret and value things aptly, or it might organize us around what's valuable in unjust ways. But because social practices don't just represent

⁹ Because of the huge cognitive demands of coordination across highly varying and variable circumstances, humans cannot rely on “preinstalled, competence-specific information” (Sterelny 2012, xi). To be effective social foragers in a variety of ecological contexts, humans evolved capacities for social learning, reliable cross-generational transmission, and the material and technological resources for building on what came before (Sterelny 2012, esp. Chs. 2-3). These capacities are the hallmark of social animals. (See Haslanger 2019a.)

reality, but also act on it and shape it to conform to our practices, it is easy to conclude that nothing is wrong: the fit between practice and world is natural and good. This is a mistake.¹⁰

Returning briefly to the two concerns I raised about Rawls' conception of practices in terms of rules: on my account, some but not all practices have "rules" for correct performance, but most are shaped by our tutored, but also improvisational, responsiveness to social meanings and our material environment. As Sewell suggests, by focusing on how practices organize us around things taken to have value, we are in a better position to understand how power circulates through practices and how we maintain unjust structures.

C. Reproduction

We have been considering issues in social ontology in order to address a question raised at the beginning of this Chapter: How can we disrupt the perpetuation of injustice through the reproduction of structures? Let us turn now to consider some of the ways and whys we reproduce structures.

Evolutionary game theory provides a variety of tools for thinking about the dynamics of social change and stability (Skyrms 1996, 2004; O'Connor 2019). In particular, it provides models for why some choice strategies yield stable equilibria over the long run. Although the approach is valuable for answering some important questions, it often relies on assumptions that diminish its value for understanding actual social systems. (See Alexander 2019; D'Arms et al 1998.) For example, it assumes a theory of value according to which individuals always want more of what's valuable and interpersonal comparisons are calculable. This is normatively and psychologically implausible (Anderson 1993, 2000, 2001; Peter & Schmid 2007). Although, in contrast to traditional game theory, it does not assume the participants are perfectly rational, it does assume that within the limits of bounded rationality, individuals maximize their own self-interest. This may be important for a normative account of prudential rationality, but it is unclear both how to spell this out and whether it is empirically realistic for explaining human behavior (Satz and Ferejohn 1994). Further, in order to use the model we must have identified the relevant stability and the factors that constrain choices in the circumstances; but once we have done this, it isn't clear what the model adds. The model only describes an abstract hypothetical etiology without drawing on any historical evidence (and sometimes at odds with the evidence); and it is only one possible model among many. As J. McKenzie Alexander argues:

...most of the evolutionary game theoretic models developed to date have provided the crudest approximations of the real cultural dynamics driving the social phenomenon in question. One may well wonder why, in these cases, we should take seriously the stability analysis given by the model; answering this question would require one engage in an empirical study as previously discussed, ultimately leading to the charge of irrelevance again. (Alexander 2019, 37)

Admittedly, I am not providing an analysis of a particular historical process either; my project is also highly theoretical. However, as we think about strategies for social change, it is helpful to identify various

¹⁰ Much of my work over the past thirty years has been devoted to understanding this "looping effect" of social meanings and the material world. I am indebted to Catharine MacKinnon's brilliant work for illuminating this phenomenon and centering it in her analysis of sex oppression and social epistemology.

kinds of constraints that play a role in our efforts to coordinate: Where do choice architectures come from? Why are some choices ruled out, unintelligible, impractical? As Sewell makes clear:

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

If we allow that socially legible agency depends on a background “stage setting” – a set of social meanings and social practices – through which we interpret the world and each other, then any choice architecture will reflect the multiple constraints Sewell mentions. As a result, we can grant that a full account of social stability and change requires insights from game theory and systems dynamics, and also agree that there is additional work to be done in exploring meanings, as well as incentives and bargaining, in analyzing the dynamics of social systems.

Cailin O’Connor (2019) contributes to this project by defending a form of evolutionary game theory that does not attempt to provide a full account of social stability, but instead asks: what are the minimal conditions under which social inequality would emerge and be stable? On her view, a central set of coordination problems are best understood as complementary problems: rather than coming up with a solution that has us all do the same thing (drive on the right), the solution requires us to act differently, but in sync, such as ballroom dancing (“step forward if you are a woman and back if you are a man” (2019, 39)). Complementary problems are solved by establishing roles that are suitably related. But we need more than roles, for we need methods, such as social markers and social categories, to identify who functions in what role. (2019, 38-39). In some cases, we may create categories to solve a new problem, but it is useful to rely on the same categories across tasks: networks of social relations form that regularly position individuals in one category together, fulfilling roles that build up broad competencies and shape identities. Divisions of labor are efficient. But, O’Connor argues,

Once categories have been adopted, the cultural dynamics that lead to bargaining norms are radically changed. New norms that are inequitable, but not especially efficient, arise. And once they do, they can be self-perpetuating. In other words, the development of types sets the stage for serious inequity to spontaneously emerge and to persist between social groups” (2019, 4).

Because O’Connor situates coordination problems within social practices that may shape choices and identities, evolutionary game theory can be one tool among many to explain stability.

i. Interpellation

As I’ve argued, social meanings provide tools to mark or register things as valuable; they provide us scripts for dividing labor in producing, distributing, maintaining, and eliminating what’s valued. In some cases, the meanings and norms are codified in law or other explicit policy. But social life is mostly enacted fluently and managed by less formal means.¹¹ Fluency is crucial, because deliberation about every action,

¹¹ It is common to use the analogy with language. When we speak a language, we do so without consulting rules of grammar; our speech is not always strictly grammatical, but communication happens nevertheless; and correction is not always necessary or desirable. As people use language in new ways, grammars, pronunciations, and lexicons evolve and communities come to have their own dialects. Some would argue that although language – and likewise

every gesture, every glance, would make our participation in social life too burdensome and time-consuming and would be collectively inefficient. In teaching social skills, we don't focus on having our children learn a set of rules (though we may use "summary rules" as guides), but rather, use discipline: we scaffold a process of developing the right dispositions in the right contexts. In the critical theory tradition, this process of producing a social subject capable of legible agency is sometimes referred to as *subjectivation*, or *subjection* (Lepold 2018; Smith 2016). Much of this work draws substantially on Althusser's idea of *interpellation*.

In his work, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1971/2014), Louis Althusser distinguishes *repressive state apparatuses* (RSAs) from *ideological state apparatuses* (ISAs). RSAs include the "government, administration, army, courts, prisons," that "function by violence" or, "massively and predominantly by repression." Ideological state apparatuses, including religion, education, the family, the legal system, the political system, trade unions, communications/media, and culture ("literature, the arts, sports, etc.") "function massively and predominantly by ideology." (No state apparatus is purely one or the other, and each depends crucially on the other, though in modern society, the ISAs are the dominant mode of social management.) Althusser highlights the educational system (or the "school-family") as the primary contemporary ISA, for students learn in school the "know-how" required for participation in production. However, learning technical "know-how" is not enough:

...besides these techniques and knowledges, and in learning them, children at school also learn the 'rules' of good behaviour, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he is 'destined' for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience, which actually means rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination. They also learn to 'speak proper French', to 'handle' the workers correctly, i.e. actually (for the future capitalists and their servants) to 'order them about' properly, i.e. (ideally) to 'speak to them' in the right way, etc. (235-236)

A crucial difference between an ISA and an RSA is that individuals are "hailed into" a subject position by an ISA, rather than violently forced into it; and it is characteristic of those "good subjects" who respond to the hailing that they take up the norms as binding on themselves. As a result, they don't need to be coercively managed, they work "all by themselves!" (269).

Two points are worth highlighting here.¹² First, discipline teaches us how to participate in social practices: what you wear, to whom you speak, how you speak, what you eat (plus when and how much), whom you

practices – are not rule "governed" in the sense that we do not consult rules as we speak, but our behavior conforms to rules. This does not do justice, I think, to the improvisational aspects of linguistic or social agency. (See also Hornsby 2005, Bigelow and Schroeter 2009.). In this section, I draw on Haslanger 2019a; 2019b.

¹² Note that the term 'ideology' is sometimes used in a non-pejorative sense for any system of beliefs or social meanings that organize groups, and sometimes in a pejorative sense for only those that organize us in unjust ways. I follow the critical theory tradition in using it in the pejorative sense. An ideology is a cultural technē "gone wrong" – it fails to provide us with the tools for apt valuing or organizes us around what's valuable in unjust ways. Ideological oppression and ideological domination are unjust practices performed without coercion: our everyday, unthinking complicity in injustice. This is sometimes a form of self-subordination, or at least complicity in our own subordination. (Note that there are multiple ways of being complicit: unthinking complicity is ideological, but there is a range and some cases are less obviously ideological complicity in this sense, e.g., action with some awareness of the

date, where you take your date, etc. And this know-how both derives from and reinforces the practices that realize the social structure (this is a looping phenomenon of the sort we considered above). Second, the practices, as contingent forms of social organization, dissolve into the background: it appears that individual agents are just following common sense. As Foucault puts it, “the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary” (Foucault 1979, 201). In some cases, agents come to identify with a cluster of practices: they take their performance of them to be both a reflection of and demanded by who they are.

Althusser is concerned primarily with how the ISAs and RSAs, together, reproduce the productive forces within specific relations of production. Sandra Bartky (1990) points out, however, that a process of discipline – the shaping of individuals to participate fluently in social practices – is also characteristic of gender. Women’s bodies are constrained by norms specifying shape, size, motility, appearance (“A woman's skin must be soft, supple, hairless, and smooth; ideally, it should betray no sign of wear, experience, age, or deep thought.” (69)). This is not usually achieved directly by coercion. Under surveillance, we do it to ourselves, though coercion is often a threat in the background (Manne 2017). Crucially, “The absence of a formal institutional structure and of authorities invested with the power to carry out institutional directives creates the impression that the production of femininity is either entirely voluntary or natural” (75). Bartky continues:

[And] insofar as the disciplinary practices of femininity produce a "subjected and practiced," an inferiorized, body, they must be understood as aspects of a far larger discipline, an oppressive and inegalitarian system of sexual subordination. This system aims at turning women into the docile and compliant companions of men just as surely as the army aims to turn its raw recruits into soldiers. (73)

Bartky focuses on the production of feminine subjects, but of course masculine subjects are also produced. And we can extend the notion of interpellation or subjectivation to a wide range of roles and identities beyond class and gender, including race and ethnicity, religion, professional roles, etc.¹³ Interpellation is not all-determining, however. The micro-powers that create docile bodies also “define numerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which as its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of an at least temporary inversion of the power relations” (Foucault 1979, 27).¹⁴

ii. Structural stability

When a social group has settled on a set of practices that manage coordination, the members of the group rely on a range of shared schemas, scripts, and background assumptions to manage behavior. Recall the

wrong, but under duress. The issue here is related to concerns about adaptive preferences. For important discussion, see Khader 2011, 2019.

¹³There is an extensive literature on how different practices and structures interact in a broad social formation. In particular, how do forms of domination, such as capitalism, White Supremacy, and patriarchy, interact, and how do they produce subjects at their intersection? Is there one system that combines them all? Are they separate systems, and if so, how should they be delineated? I do not take a stand on these issues here and do not have a settled view. See, e.g., Arruzza 2014; Oksala et al 2015; Fraser and Jaeggi 2018, Haslanger 2020b.

¹⁴ A now classic book on the “hidden transcripts” of the subordinate is Scott (1990). The large literature on standpoint epistemologies is also relevant; for an overview, see Kidd et al (2017). Work on contentious politics demonstrates the multiple forces of resistance to interpellation and domination (McAdam 2001).

example of an academic lecture: we all know what to do, how to navigate the space, what latitude we have for improvisation. Some of us may identify strongly with its roles or ideals, and invest heavily in making the traditional form of the practice work; others may explore ways to challenge or alter it. Note, however, that this one small practice depends on a broad range of relations (professor/student, researcher/funder, academic/non-academic staff, employee/state) set within broader institutional structures; these structures are themselves part of a global economy and this is reflected in the history of academia (Newfield 2011; Wilder 2014; Haslanger 2020a). Such embeddedness in broader structures is a feature of all practices. How should we account for the durability of practices and the structures they embody? I will focus on three factors that are relevant.

First, action that conforms to a social practice is intelligible to others; if one strays too far, one is either misinterpreted or viewed as only a questionable member of the community. Both options are undesirable, for we need each other: we need to be interpretable, recognizable, included. Moreover, we need tools to make sense of ourselves. Bernard Williams (2002) articulates this as a double challenge:

One is a political problem, of finding a basis for a shared life which will be neither too oppressively coercive (the requirement of freedom) nor dependent on mythical legitimations (the requirement of enlightenment). The other is a personal problem, of stabilizing the self into a form that will indeed fit with these political and social ideas, but which can at the same time create a life that presents itself to a reflective individual as worth living; in particular, one that does so by reinventing in a more reflective and demystified world assurances that were taken in an earlier time (or so we imagine) as matters of necessity. (201)

So we seek those “various structures [that] serve to build a self that will at once make sense of episodic feelings and thoughts—render the subject, as I have put it, steadier—and also relate the person to others in ways that will serve the purposes of co-operation and trust.” (200) Of course, these challenges lie behind the phenomenon of interpellation: cooperation demands of us that we occupy a role and the schemas offer a narrative, an identity, a “steady” way to go on, and we take up the offer, often without much choice. (See also Haslanger 2014 for a discussion of the challenges Williams describes.)

Second, practices distribute what is taken to be valuable, and in doing so, they also distribute power, e.g., who has access to the valued stuff, who can produce it, own it, withhold it. Power, on this account, is distributed throughout a social field and is crystalized in social relations (Foucault 1979; Hayward 2004). Consider again the example of the relation between parent and minor child. However one enters into or lives that relation, i.e., regardless of the attitudes of the individual parent and child, a parent has power, by law, to make certain decisions for the child. To capture this, we should distinguish power that is intrinsic to a particular system and power whose source is extrinsic. For example, I may have more power than my spouse to make decisions for the family in our family system. But in addition to the particular power I wield by virtue of my personality, knowledge, or actions, there is an extrinsic source of power in law that gives the right to make decisions to both of us. This latter is structural power. Although law is an important vehicle for the distribution of structural power, less formal social norms and scripts distribute power as well. For example, knowledge is valuable and is distributed (sometimes fairly and sometimes not) through norms about who gets to speak when, and for how long, and on what topics (Dotson 2011; 2014).

The distribution of power in practices is an important factor in their durability and the durability of the broader structure. Consider, for example, practices concerning the use of violence. When police or vigilantes, lynch mobs or male partners, are permitted to use violence to manage behavior that does not conform to certain scripts, there is, understandably, greater conformity to the scripts and the practices and structures persist. But of course, permission to use violence is not the only source of power. Occupying a position that provides one a disproportionate share of money, status/influence, health, knowledge, security, and such, allows one to have an asymmetric impact on others that helps maintain the structure and one's position in it.

Third, the material conditions of practice may make it difficult to change. Returning to academic life, many classrooms have student desks bolted to the floor in rows and columns facing the teacher's desk and blackboard. However, discussions that take place in a circle promote common-knowledge amongst the participants because each can see (and in small groups make eye contact with) all of the others; this facilitates coordination. Moreover, circular seating arrangements come to symbolize equality, inclusiveness, and reciprocity because there is equal access to the responses of others, the boundaries of the group can "grow organically" with additional rings of participants, and the circle seems to "bind" people together (Chwe 2001, esp. 30-36). Thus, it is not surprising that a seating arrangement in a classroom affects the dynamics of discussion and the kind of learning possible.¹⁵

Such architectural decisions manage public space more broadly. The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act has had a huge impact on public accommodation in the United States, not only in removing many (but not all of) the physical barriers to access, but also in changing attitudes. At least some basic forms of accommodation are generally recognized in the United States to be a right rather than a favor. (I say this based on my experience traveling with a disabled partner in Europe, the UK, and Canada where this is not always the case.)

In the cases just mentioned, I have described physical limitations – chairs bolted to floors, curbs without cuts – that stabilize practices (the interplay between schemas and resources). This highlights that it is important to consider the technology or apparatus that provides material support for a practice. The practice of playing a musical instrument requires the instrument, possibly a score; riding a bicycle requires a bicycle, maybe a path. The technology we rely on to go about our everyday lives is extensive: utensils, pots and pans, packaging, signs, badges, vehicles, algorithms. The apparatus can change over time in ways that alter the practice. For example, market exchange, of course, relies on money. But money comes in different forms and the form it takes affects who uses it and how it is used. Consider the differences between commodity money such as gold coins, fiat money such as paper currency, "bank money," bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies. The particular apparatus for monetary exchange may be part of the material conditions for a transaction. Such technologies – now expanded to include robotization of the stock market – are part of the material conditions for contemporary capitalism (The Economist 2019). The apparatus for a practice constrains and enables agency, and can shape what is

¹⁵ Whether a circular/U-shaped or a traditional rows and columns seating arrangement is preferable seems to depend on the anxiety level of the students and whether the class is required or an elective. A literature survey covering 51 years (1958-2009) suggests that a circular or U-shaped arrangement of students in a classroom facilitates discussion, especially in smaller elective classes (Rocca 2010).

feasible at a particular point in time. But just as a curb can be cut, a technology can be redesigned, for better or worse.

III. Social Change

Let us now turn to social change in pursuit of justice; how is structural change possible? Of course it is important to change the actions and attitudes of individuals so they are more attentive to the broader implications of their actions and act in ways that are more just. However, as we have seen, individual action occurs against a backdrop – a “stage setting” – of social practices that make up powerful and usually quite stable social structures. In the previous section, I discussed ways in which agents are shaped to not only willingly conform their actions (and preferences!) to the demands of social practices, but also how deviation is costly and, in worst case scenarios, can trigger action by a repressive state apparatus. Moreover, many of the things we reasonably want to do in life require an apparatus that we don’t control, and implicate us in broader practices that promote injustice. No one could blame me for transferring money to my daughter for groceries under COVID restrictions. But the apparatuses of banking, agriculture, consumer marketing, etc., by which I provide her with food are not ones that I consider just.¹⁶ This is why educating individuals or providing arguments about the injustice produced by practices they perform is only a small part of the process of social change: broadly opting out of fluent participation in social coordination is not an option, and even if an individual can accomplish it along some dimension (e.g. becoming vegan), or in a local context (boycotting a store), an individual’s commitment, alone, has limited impact.¹⁷

What is needed is a way to change the terms of coordination that have become stabilized in the practices. Given the account of practices I favor, we should consider changing the resources and schemas (though, of course, other options should also be considered).¹⁸ If we focus on resources, then we should change the material conditions, perhaps by disrupting the availability of the apparatus of the practices in question or the resource being managed. If we focus on the cultural technē, then we should change social meanings that provide the tools to interpret and experience something as valuable (or not) and the scripts to follow (Lessig 1995). In small settings, e.g., a family, an individual may have the power to bring about such changes in the practices and interpersonal dynamics. But because resources and social meanings are not encapsulated, even in a small well-defined context, broader social pressures will have a significant impact.

Law and politics are the most obvious sites for managing broad systems of coordination. In the last century or so, mainstream Anglophone political philosophers concerned with the rampant injustice in the world have focused on developing theories about what justice requires; some non-ideal theorists have also taken up the question of how we might achieve greater justice. Much of this work has focused on structures that protect basic rights and manage economic distribution. Their audience has mostly been elites who are in a position of power to bring about changes in law and policy. I am happy to grant that some forms of ideal theory have a place in philosophical theorizing and that political and legal theorists

¹⁶ I am not providing a theory of justice in this paper. My claims about justice are examples that readers may or may not agree with. If they are unconvincing as they stand, I invite readers to reflect on others that they find more convincing.

¹⁷ I’ve raised some related concerns about implicit bias training. See Haslanger 2015.

¹⁸ Also, of course, there are different accounts of social critique, social practices, and social structures that would point us to different leverage points, e.g., Celikates 2018, Jaeggi 2018, Shelby 2016, Anderson 2010.

should develop arguments to convince elites – lawyers, policy makers, legislators, judges – to change structures by reinterpreting or changing laws is valuable. I will argue here, however, that in order to address problems of structural injustice, we should expand the domain of concern to include social practices more broadly and draw on the account of practices that I have offered to think strategically about interventions.

A. Law and Social Practices

I have argued elsewhere that although law is an important factor for both reproducing and disrupting social structures, meaningful social change requires a change of the cultural *technē* – the web of social meanings and schemas – that guides a system of social practices. Law is interpreted through culture, so even well-intentioned and well-crafted efforts can go awry; culture provides a basis of resistance to legal interventions, so law can be outflanked; and those credentialed to pursue political and legal strategies are often out of touch with those whose interests they aim to promote. Unless the law effectively changes our practices, it will not yield justice; and in order to change our practices, we must change social meanings that we use to judge what is valuable and to organize ourselves.

It may be helpful to disambiguate the idea of law for our purposes. On one hand, law is a set of directives. It tells us what we can and can't do from the state's point of view. We learn the directives and respond to them. So in this sense, law is part of the cultural *technē* that shapes a broad range of structures. For example, when we learn to drive, we learn the laws of the road and they become “second nature” to us. But on the other hand, law is itself an institution – a set of practices that specialists manage and non-specialists get caught up in and by. In this latter sense, law is not the frame for social agency, but is contested practice that claims and distributes freedom, money, and power. Keeping in mind both senses of law, resistance may be to a particular law or set of laws, or it may be a resistance to the place of law in society.

It is plausible that if we could snap our fingers to make it the case that cultural *technē* that incorporated just laws organized our social coordination, then things would be better. But such change can only happen through legal and political institutions. Because such institutions compete with other institutions for influence – institutions that interpellate subjects (including legislators and lawyers) who are invested in forms of life at odds with justice – law cannot count on meaningful or intended uptake unless it reinforces the existing structures, or it is part of a critical effort to change social meanings.

Lawrence Lessig (1995) has argued that one of the functions of law is to shift social meaning. Both he and Anthony Appiah (2010) have written about legal efforts in the 19th c. to stop dueling in the American South. On Lessig's account, two strategies stand out: one strategy “aimed to eliminate dueling simply by banning it from social life; the other aimed to eliminate it simply by changing its social meaning” (971). The first strategy was unsuccessful. He argues: “Proscription here fails in part because it directly challenges the norms of loyalty built within the social structure, and these norms can be quite strong. Within the elite's rhetorical structure, a law banning dueling was not a sufficient reason to refuse to duel” (971). The second, focusing on social meaning, was successful. How did it work?

Under this sanction, an individual participating in a duel was barred from public office after the duel. Holding public office, however, or more importantly, serving the public, was itself a duty of the elite. Thus, exclusion created a conflict in the duties faced by the elite, and hence an elite-based reason for refusing the challenge of a duel...What is different about the second proscription is that it functions within the elite's rhetorical structure, to undermine the very basis for dueling itself. A gentleman could appeal to a gentleman's duty in escaping the duel, rather than appealing to self-interest or the rules of commoners. (971-2)

This is an excellent example of how social meanings interact in structures and, more generally, how law and culture are intertwined. But of course, things are not always so simple or as successful, for the weight and breadth of social meaning may surpass the ingenuity of lawmakers, e.g., the social meaning of race remains a dominant force in shaping US social structures in spite of lifetimes of legal effort to displace it.

Law is also a valuable mechanism for directly managing resources. I have already mentioned the Americans with Disabilities Act; it has changed architectural practice so that access to public space is distributed more justly. Tax law is another tool that can redistribute capital and, with it, power to promote justice. But such moves are most effective when they arise out of social movements that have already shifted practices. For example, many find it surprising how quickly marriage equality laws were passed in the US. But the LGBTQ rights movement worked for many decades to shift understandings of same-sex relationships and to integrate them into more traditional family structures. In some places, the change of law was a formal recognition of what the movement had achieved in practice. Social movements have greater freedom than legal institutions to rethink our background assumptions and disrupt the status quo; legal practice has power by virtue of being backed by the state. Deep engagement between the two is crucial for envisioning and creating more just structures.

B. Social Movements and Philosophy

Social movements come in a variety of different forms and have very different aims and methods. Given our focus on social justice, I will concentrate on what some call liberation movements, i.e., movements that call for the end of oppression or injustice towards a group (Mansbridge and Morris 2001). These would include the civil rights movement, black lives matter movement, women's liberation movement, labor movement, living wage movement, transgender rights movement, disability rights movement, immigrant rights movements and the like; I also include those targeting specific forms of oppression such as the prison abolition movement, pro-choice movement, animal rights movement, and marriage equality movement. There are three ways that social movements can be important for addressing social justice.¹⁹

First, not all oppression is falls within the scope of law or policy and so, especially within the context of liberalism. Women and girls are treated unjustly in families, but the division of labor in the family is not considered a matter for the state to control (though law may incentivize fairer practices). But the public/private distinction is not the only barrier. Iris Young (1990) argues that oppression is group-based

¹⁹ My comments here are, by necessity, brief and selective. I also over-generalize and over-idealize. I risk this because I believe that the moral and political import of social movements has been neglected in mainstream moral/political philosophy and my goal here is primarily to call attention to them as objects of inquiry and sites of moral agency. For a background on the sociology of social movements see Della Porta and Diani (2015).

injustice. On the terms we are using, it is structural in the sense that it affects individuals by virtue of how they are positioned in a network of social relations. As a result, addressing wrongs against an individual, although important, may miss the broader process that reproduces injustice. Young describes five faces of oppression:

i. Exploitation: Exploitation occurs “...through a steady process of the transfer of the results of the labor of one social group to benefit another....Social rules about what work is, who does what for whom, how work is compensated, and the social process by which the results of work are appropriated operate to enact relations of power and inequality.” (6)

ii. Marginalization: Marginalization occurs when “a whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination.”(9) “Marginals are people the system of labor cannot or will not use.” (8)

iii. Powerlessness – “The powerless are those who lack authority or power...those over whom power is exercised without their exercising it; the powerless are situated so that they must take orders and rarely have the right to give them....The powerless have little or no work autonomy, exercise little creativity or judgment in their work, have no technical expertise or authority, express themselves awkwardly, especially in public or bureaucratic settings, and do not command respect.” (10)

iv. Cultural Imperialism – “To experience cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as the Other.” (12)

v. Systematic Violence – “What makes violence a face of oppression is less the particular acts themselves...than the social context surrounding them, which makes them possible and even acceptable. What makes violence a phenomenon of social injustice, and not merely an individual moral wrong, is its systematic character, its existence as a social practice.” (13) “The oppression of violence consists not only in direct victimization, but in the daily knowledge...that they are *liable* to violation solely on account of their group identity.” (13)

Any attempt to address such issues must be multi-pronged and include efforts to: change or replace the social meanings that guide the relevant practices and the values that drive them; dismantle the material and technological apparatuses that sustain the relevant practices and offer mutual aid to address the harm (Spade 2020); and build coalitions that identify links between unjust practices that affect multiple groups (Reagon 1983).

Second, social movements do not simply hand down directives but create alternative practices, seeking ones that work in the context where problems arise, with the aim of spreading them to others. This allows them to benefit from local knowledge (Ostrom 1990; Argawal 1992), from participants’ sensitivity to existing social meanings and practices (Escobar 1998), and from small scale “experiments in living” (Anderson 1991). Co-designing new practices is empowering to those directly affected and has greater democratic legitimacy (Hoffecker 2017). However, scaling up new practices to establish more just structures is a profound challenge. Elizabeth Anderson points out, however, that contention can at least create a wedge that inspires efforts to rethink the status quo and explore other options.

A norm can be sustained only if most people believe that most others accept its practical authority. Once enough people demonstrate their repudiation of its authority, even in the face of official sanctions, others who have acquiesced in the norm only from unreflective habit or the expectations of others may waver in their support... (Anderson 2014, 13-14)

If the powerful cannot rely on willing participation in the unjust practices that they benefit from, there is a chance for substantive change (Sharp 2012).

Third, although I believe that a legitimate social movement must be empirically and morally justified, carefully reasoned arguments are not necessary for gaining moral knowledge or for moral progress (See Haslanger 2017b; 2021). Neither are they, in the vast majority of moral disagreements, effective in changing minds. And, as I argued above, changing individual minds does not change practices that are the established mode of coordination in a milieu. Legal interventions provide nudges and sanctions that can be helpful in changing behavior. However, conformity to a new norm based on sanctions is not stable (Anderson 2014, 3-4). Instead of relying (wholly) on reasoned debate, social movements prompt paradigm shifts in understanding the social world through practical engagement with others.

Between pure argument and violence is a wide range of contentious activities that are more or less disruptive of habitual ways of life, from petitioning, publicity campaigns, theatrical performances, candlelight vigils, litigation, and political campaigns to street demonstrations, boycotts, teach-ins, sit-ins, picketing, strikes, and building occupations. (Anderson 2014, 9)

One might wonder, on this view, what is the role for philosophers, social theorists, critical theorists. Aren't we in the argument business? If social justice is discovered and implemented in the streets, then what are we doing building theories? One approach is to undertake inquiry in the academy, as usual, and rely on others to spread the word (or occasionally participate in public philosophy events oneself). This, however, fails to recognize the epistemic benefits of engaging in movement work: what questions we ask, what harms we identify, what concepts and language we employ, are at risk of being irrelevant to the struggle if we are not .

In my experience, many philosophers and other academics take themselves to be theorists *rather than* activists, as if one cannot be both. At least they suppose that theory is not a form of or even part of activism. This is confusing to me, for it seems to assume that activists are illiterate or stupid, or that they are not interested in theory (don't activists just make signs with simplistic slogans?). But this is deeply misguided. Theory, and philosophy, in particular, is a crucial part of any movement, for at least two reasons. First, social movements rely on a critique of what is taken for granted, what "everyone knows," the world as we live it, as ideology has made it. This shift of consciousness not only calls for philosophical reflection; it is at the heart of philosophy. Second, movements are called upon to critically engage dominant paradigms, to offer alternative explanations, and to construct new tools of thought and action. Philosophical work isn't only happening in classrooms and academic offices. And work that does happen in classrooms and offices plays a role in activism.²⁰ Catharine MacKinnon's work is a perfect example. I have been at demonstrations where those speaking quoted MacKinnon; I myself have been a speaker at demonstrations and quoted MacKinnon. And not all activism occurs at demonstrations. As Audre Lorde

²⁰ Classic feminist work on embedded inquiry includes Christian 1987; MacKinnon 1991; Smith 1992.

(2017) said, “Sometimes we are blessed with being able to choose the time, and the arena, and the manner of our revolution, but more usually we must do battle where we are standing.”

IV. Conclusion

I have argued that we can understand how unjust structures are reproduced with an account of practices that highlights the interdependence of social meanings and resources. Very roughly, a local cultural *technē* provides a set of publicly recognized tools – the cultural *technē* – for managing coordination around what is taken to have value. Regular participation in practices shaped by the *technē* has an impact on the interpreted materials (resources) in ways that reinforce the meanings assigned to them. As a result, the practices seem to be empirically warranted and rational. The process of social reproduction perpetuates structures because individuals are interpellated into practices that provide convenient (and sometimes the only) opportunities for coordination and because participation is backed by coercion, so compliance is maintained even by those who fail to become “good subjects.”

Processes of social reproduction need not be unjust or wrong. Problems arise, however, if the cultural *technē* that guides practices occludes or distorts what is true or valuable, or if it results in practices that organize us in unjust or harmful ways. Social reproduction, then, creates subjects who enact unjust structures, often unknowingly and unwillingly. Structures remain stable because fluency makes the background social meanings mostly unavailable for critical reflection; because we shape our world to affirm and reward the socially “correct” responses; and because we have strong incentives to cooperate, even on unfavorable terms.

Social movements address some of these barriers to change and disrupt social reproduction. They provide alternative (tested) practices that rely on new meanings. This reveals existing meanings as optional, or at least open for contestation, and offers other real options for coordination. Direct action disrupts the material apparatus for existing practices – through strikes, occupations, sit-ins, and other measures – to make it difficult to carry on with life “as usual.” This draws attention to how material conditions are artifacts of the practices rather than natural or immutable foundations. And if movements are successful in expanding the community of participants through public engagement, they gain credibility to challenge existing power structures.

There are many reasons to do philosophy, and many ways to do it. Structural change is needed to make progress towards social justice. If we want to contribute to that change, we should engage deeply with others directly affected and attend to the social systems that we, together, enact. This is a way to do philosophy. If we not only start to think differently but act differently, along with others, this is a way to join a movement. If we together disrupt the practices that maintain the process of social reproduction, then there will be structural change.

Acknowledgements:

To be added...

Works Cited:

- Agarwal, Bina. 1992. "The Gender and Environment Debate: Lessons from India." *Feminist Studies* 18(1): 119-158.
- Alexander, J. McKenzie. 2019. "Evolutionary Game Theory", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/game-evolutionary/>>.
- Althusser, Louis. 1971/2014. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, translated by Ben Brewster. London: Verso..
- Anderson, Elizabeth S. 1991. "John Stuart Mill and Experiments in Living." *Ethics* 102(1): 4-26.
- _____. 1993. *Value in Ethics and Economics*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- _____. "Beyond *Homo Economicus*: New Developments in Theories of Social Norms," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 29: 170–200.
- _____. 2001. "Unstrapping the Straightjacket of 'Preference': A Comment on Amartya Sen's Contributions to Philosophy and Economics." *Economics and Philosophy* 17: 21-38.
- _____. 2010. *The Imperative of Integration*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press
- _____. 2014. "Social Movements, Experiments in Living, and Moral Progress: Case Studies from Britain's Abolition of Slavery." Lindley Lecture, University of Kansas.
<https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/handle/1808/14787>
- Appiah, K. Anthony. 2010. *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.
- Arruzza, Cinzia. 2014. "Remarks on Gender." Viewpoint Magazine (Sept 2).
<https://viewpointmag.com/2014/09/02/remarks-on-gender/>
- Balkin, J.M. 1998. *Cultural Software: A Theory of Ideology*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Bartky, Sandra. 1990. *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*. New York: Routledge.
- Bertinetto, Alessandro and Bertram, Georg. 2020. "We Make Up the Rules as We Go Along: Improvisation as an Essential Aspect of Human Practices?" *Open Philosophy* 3: 202-221.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/opphil-2020-0012>
- Bhattacharya, Tithi, ed. 2017. *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*. London: Pluto Press.
- Bigelow, John and Laura Schroeter. 2009. "Jackson's Classical Model of Meaning." In Ian Ravenscroft (ed.), *Minds, Ethics, and Conditionals: Themes from the Philosophy of Frank Jackson*. Oxford University Press, pp. 85-109.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Camp, Elisabeth. 2006. "Contextualism, Metaphor, and What is Said." *Mind and Language* 21(3): 280-309.
- Celikates, Robin. 2018. *Critique as Social Practice: Critical Theory and Social Self-Understanding*. Trans. Naomi Van Steenberg. London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Christian, Barbara. 1987. "The Race for Theory." *Cultural Critique* 6: 51-63.
- Chwe, Michael Suk-Yung. 2001. *Rational Ritual: Culture, Coordination, and Common Knowledge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Code, Alan. 1987. "Soul as Efficient Cause in Aristotle's Embryology." *Philosophical Topics* 15(2): 51-59.
- D'Arms, Justin, Robert Batterman, and Krzysztof Górný. 1998. "Game Theoretic Explanations and the Evolution of Justice," *Philosophy of Science* 65: 76–102.
- D'Arms, Justin. 2000. "When Evolutionary Game Theory Explains Morality, What Does It Explain?" *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 7(1–2): 296-299.

- Della Porta, Donatella and Mario Diani. 2015. *Oxford Handbook of Social Movements*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dotson, Kristie. 2011. "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing." *Hypatia* 26(2): 236-257.
- _____. 2014. "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression." *Social Epistemology* 28(2): 115-138
- Escobar, Arturo. 1998. "Whose Knowledge, Whose nature? Biodiversity, Conservation, and the Political Ecology of Social Movements." *Journal of Political Ecology* 5: 53-82.
- Federici, Sylvia. 2019. "Social Reproduction Theory: History, Issues, and Present Challenges." *Radical Philosophy* 20(4): 55-57.
- Foucault, Michel. 1979. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975). Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Random House.
- Fraser, Nancy and Rahel Jaeggi. 2018. *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Garfinkel, Alan. 1981. *Forms of Explanation: Rethinking the Questions in Social Theory*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1979. *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- _____. 1986. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gigerenzer, Gerd, Peter M. Todd, and The ABC Research Group. 1999. *Simple Heuristics That Make Us Smart*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Grasswick, Heidi. 2018. "Feminist Social Epistemology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/feminist-social-epistemology/>>.
- Haslanger, Sally. 2014. "Studying While Black: Trust, Opportunity and Disrespect." *DuBois Review* 11(1): 109-136.
- _____. 2015. "Social Structure, Narrative, and Explanation." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 45(1): 1-15.
- _____. 2016. "What is a (Social) Structural Explanation?" *Philosophical Studies* 173(1): 113-30.
- _____. 2017a. "Culture and Critique." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume* 91: 149-173.
- _____. 2017b. "Racism, Ideology, and Social Movements." *Res Philosophica* 94(1): 1-22.
- _____. 2018. "What is a Social Practice?" *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 82: 231-247.
- _____. 2019a. "Cognition as a Social Skill." *Australasian Philosophical Review* 3(1): 5-25.
- _____. 2019b. "Disciplined Bodies and Ideology Critique." *Glass Bead Site 2: Somatic Reason and Synthetic Eros*. <https://www.glass-bead.org/article/disciplined-bodies-and-ideology-critique/?lang=enview>
- _____. 2020a. "The Problem with Philanthropy." *The New Statesman* (Oct 16). <https://www.newstatesman.com/ideas/2020/10/problem-philanthropy>
- _____. 2020b. "Why I Don't Believe in Patriarchy: Comments on Kate Manne's *Down Girl*." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 101: 220-229.
- _____. 2021. "Political Epistemology and Social Critique." *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy* 7: 23-65.
- Hayward, Clarissa. 2004. "De-facing Power." *De-facing Power*, Cambridge Univ. Press. Ch. 2.
- Hertwig, Ralph, Ulrich Hoffrage and the ABC Research Group. (2013). *Simple Heuristics in a Social World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Hoffecker, Elizabeth. 2017. "Rethinking How Innovation Creates Development Impact." MIT D-Lab. <https://d-lab.mit.edu/news-blog/blog/rethinking-how-innovation-creates-development-impact>
- Hornsby, Jennifer. 2005. "Semantic Knowledge and Practical Knowledge" Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes 79: 107-130.
- Jaeggi, Rahel. 2018. *Critique of Forms of Life*. Trans. Ciaran Cronin. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Khader, Serene. 2011. *Adaptive Preferences and Women's Empowerment*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 2019. *Decolonizing Universalism: A Transnational Feminist Ethic*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kidd, Ian James, José Medina and Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. ed. 2018. *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*. New York: Routledge.
- Lepold, Kristina. 2018. "An Ideology Critique of Recognition: Judith Butler in the Context of the Contemporary Debate on Recognition." *Constellations* 25: 474-484.
- Lessig, Lawrence. (1995). "The Regulation of Social Meaning." *University of Chicago Law Review* 62(3): 943-1045.
- Lorde, Audre. 2017. *A Burst of Light and Other Essays*. Garden City: Ixia Press.
- MacKinnon, Catharine A. "From Practice to Theory, or What Is a White Woman Anyway." *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 4: 13-22.
- Manne, Kate. 2017. *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mansbridge, Jane and Aldon Morris, eds. 2001. *Oppositional Consciousness: The Subjective Roots of Social Protest*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McAdam, Doug, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly. 2001. *Dynamics of Contention*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- MLB.com. n.d. "Strike Zone." <https://www.mlb.com/official-information/umpires/strike-zone>
- Newfield, Christopher. 2011. *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-year Assault on the Middle Class*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- O'Connor, Cailin. 2019. *The Origins of Unfairness: Social Categories and Cultural Evolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Oksala, Johanna, Sara R. Farris, FTC Manning, and Cinzia Arruzza. 2015. "Capitalism and Gender Oppression: Remarks on Cinzia Arruzza's "Remarks on Gender." Viewpoint Magazine. (May 4) <https://viewpointmag.com/2015/05/04/gender-and-capitalism-debating-cinzia-arruzzas-remarks-on-gender/>
- Ostrom, Elinor. 1990. *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Peter, Fabienne, and Hans Bernhard Schmid, eds. 2007. *Rationality and Commitment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rawls, John. 1955. "Two Concepts of Rules," *Philosophical Review* 64: 3-32.
- Reagon, Bernice Johnson. 1983. "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century." In *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, edited by Barbara Smith, 356-368. New York: Kitchen Table Press.
- Rocca, Kelly A. 2010. "Student Participation in the College Classroom: An Extended Multidisciplinary Literature Review" *Communication Education* 59(2): 185-213.
- Rymer, Zachary D. 2014. "What Can MLB Do to Solve its Expanding Strike Zone Problem?" *Bleacher Report*. <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/2279903-what-can-mlb-do-to-solve-its-expanding-strike-zone-problem>

- Satz, Debra and John Ferejohn. 1994. "Rational Choice and Social Theory." *The Journal of Philosophy* 91(2): 71-87.
- Scott, James C. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sewell, William H. Jr. 1992. "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency and Transformation." *The American Journal of Sociology* 98(1): 1-29.
- _____. 2005. "The Concept(s) of Culture" In *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn*, edited by Gabrielle M. Spiegel. New York and London: Routledge. pp. 76–95.
- Sharp, Gene. 2012. *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation*. New York: The New Press.
- Shelby, Tommie. 2016. *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Skyrms, Brian. 1996. *Evolution of the Social Contract*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. (2004). *The Stag Hunt and the Evolution of Social Structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, Anna Marie. 2016. "Subjectivity and Subjectivation." In *Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, edited by Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth, 955-972. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, Dorothy. 1992. "Sociology from Women's Experience: A Reaffirmation." *Sociological Theory* 10(1): 88-98.
- Solinger, Rickie. 1992. *Wake Up Little Suzie: Single Pregnancy and Race before Roe v. Wade*. New York: Routledge.
- Spade, Dean. 2020. "Solidarity not Charity: Mutual Aid For Mobilization and Survival." *Social Text* 38(1(142)): 131-151.
- Sterelny, Kim. (2012). *The Evolved Apprentice: How Evolution Made Humans Unique*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- The Economist. 2019. "The Stockmarket is Now Run by Computers, Algorithms and Passive Managers." (October 5). <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2019/10/05/the-stockmarket-is-now-run-by-computers-algorithms-and-passive-managers> London: The Economist Group Limited.
- Tilly, Charles and Robert E. Goodin. 2011. "Overview of Contextual Political Analysis: It Depends." In *Oxford Handbook of Political Science*, edited by Robert E. Goodin, 431-459j. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wilder, Craig Steven. 2014. *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Williams, Bernard. 2002. *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Young, Iris M. 1990. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.