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INDIVIDUALISM, INTERPRETATION, AND INJUSTICE:
A REPLY TO STAHL, BETTI AND MIKKOLA

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I am honored and delighted to have the opportunity to respond to the critiques of my book *Resisting Reality* offered by Arianna Betti, Mari Mikkola and Titus Stahl (and, in person, to Beate Rössler). I am especially grateful to Robin Celikates for having organized the symposium on my work and for having given us this opportunity for publishing the commentaries along with my reply.¹

Each of the commentaries raises important concerns and suggestions, many of which I wholeheartedly endorse. In this reply, I will begin with Stahl's critique because it raises issues that segue easily into those raised by Betti and Mikkola.

1. Meaning, Individualism, and Ideology

Resisting Reality is a somewhat confusing book because it is a collection of papers written over the course of twenty years. So it is not at all clear how some bits connect to others. For example, my work on gender and race predated my work on ideology, and it takes effort to see how my accounts of gender and race function as ideology critique. Drawing on claims I

make scattered throughout the book, Stahl does an excellent job in piecing together the puzzle, while also showing how some of the pieces don't quite fit. As Stahl points out, ideology critique is best understood as a form of immanent critique, i.e., a critique that 'break[s] the spell of ideological self-understandings without resorting to an "external standpoint"' (5).² But the reliance on an internal rather than external standpoint is not the only important feature of ideology critique, for critique must also, as he says, 'break the spell' of ideology. Those who understand the critique cannot simply go on as before.

Stahl suggests that my distinction between manifest and operative concepts enables us to see how critique can be immanent. If one simply argues that a concept does not track reality – where what is real is discovered through 'metaphysical scrutiny' – this, Stahl maintains, is an external critique. External critique, as we know, often has little motivating force. However, if it can be shown that there is a conflict between 'the semantic self-understanding of people and the actual social kinds that their concepts track', then the tension provides an internal basis for changing how we go on. In contrast to the race or gender eliminativist who claims that the race or gender concept we have fails to track reality and so should be eliminated, the critical realist has resources to examine and explain how our (operative) concepts constitute divisions in the world that we misrepresent to ourselves.

The 'spell' of ideology is broken, moreover, not just by revealing the incongruence between the kind and the concept, for a solution to such incongruence might be simply to adjust the concept to the kind we track. Instead, the recognition both that the kind is constituted by our social practices – including our discursive practices as revealed in explicating the operative concept – and that the kind is embedded in structures of oppression, disrupts the imperative to revise our (manifest) concept to correspond to the (operative) kind. Stahl suggests:

'[...] the goal of revising our semantic intuitions such that manifest and operative concepts become *congruent* does not make sense any more. Rather, what we then should ask is how our practices must change in order for there to be no longer any necessity for incongruence.' (9)

Stahl's worry, however, is that this critical potential of my view is not available to me because my account adheres to a 'residual individualism' and is insufficiently materialist. If the goal of critique, as I develop it, is for individuals to change their use of the concept, e.g., by rejecting the manifest concept of *woman* and adopting the concept I offer, then the best we can hope for is a change in the beliefs of a few individuals and systematic miscommunication. What we are aiming for, however, is substantive social and material change: a change in the social practices that constitute individuals as raced and gendered. How can we achieve this?

Stahl argues that the account could achieve its critical potential more effectively by incorporating an inferential role semantics of the sort proposed by Brandom (1994). He maintains that although I embrace an objective type externalism in the spirit of Kripke (1970) and Putnam (1975), I fail to fully appreciate the social externalism Burge (1979) recommends, and so leave the determinants of meaning in the individual's head. However, if, as on Brandom's account, 'it is the pattern of socially licensed inferences between propositions involving certain concepts that determine their meaning' (8) and if the licensing is 'a matter of the implicit social rules of a linguistic practice as instituted in the entirety of a community's reactive dispositions' (8), then conceptual change cannot be understood simply in terms of changing an individual's mental states, but must involve a change in the community's practices.

There might be many reasons for preferring one semantics over another. However, in the context of this discussion, the question Stahl and I consider is only whether one semantics or the other is more useful for an account of ideology critique. I am a semantic externalist. I believe that the meaning of a term is its extension. A variety of concepts may be associated with a term, but these concepts are not part of the meaning and do not determine the term's extension in a Fregean way. Associated concepts and background beliefs may, however, be important pragmatically for fixing the term's extension, guiding inferences using the term, and the like (see Ch. 16).

My distinction between 'manifest' and 'operative' concepts associated with a term may be understood as metasemantic. The manifest concept is what

the typical user associates with the term, what concept we take ourselves to be deploying when we use the term. The operative concept is one whose extension matches the extension of the term as revealed in practice, and also explains our use and its deviation from the manifest concept's extension. It is true that I have sometimes spoken of the 'manifest concept' as if it is the sort of thing that an individual user has in his or her head and that the goal of the debunking project is to get him or her to change this. But there are also many contexts in which I emphasize the social and material determinants of meaning (e.g., Ch. 3, Ch. 13, Ch. 16), and the importance of changing social practices to dislodge problematic concepts (e.g., Ch. 5, Ch. 6, Ch. 15). The important question here, however, is whether one needs an inferential role semantics in order to achieve the critical potential of my account. I think an externalist semantics is adequate (even though other views might also be adequate).

In several of my papers I rely on an account of practices that borrows from the social science literature. Practices are partly constituted by schemas. Roughly, schemas consist in clusters of culturally shared concepts, beliefs, and other attitudes that enable us to interpret and organize information and coordinate action, thought, and affect. (See also Betti's reference to schemas (15)). Both concepts and beliefs, in the sense intended, store information and are the basis for various behavioral and emotional dispositions. Schemas guide our responses to material resources, and the coordinated, embodied responses to resources are practices. On my view, schemas are the key to understanding ideology and also social meaning. Ideology is not just in the head, it is enacted.

I propose that in a particular social context the norms governing default inferences and apt (affective, behavioral) responses depend substantively on the schemas that are dominant in the context. The schemas associated with Fs 'license' what cognitive, behavioral and emotional responses are appropriate, given a conceptualization of something as an F. Note that I am not suggesting that the schemas are part of the linguistic meaning of the terms in question; nor am I claiming that the meaning of a term should be analyzed in terms of inferential role. Rather, the schemas are (in a loose sense) conventionally linked to the terms (and socially meaningful things in addition to terms) and play a pragmatic rather than a se-

mantic role. By drawing on pragmatics, we can understand linguistic interactions as guided by conversational norms, some quite general, some specific to a social milieu, and others to a particular context. The norms, among other things, determine the permissible next steps in the conversation (whose turn, what tone, speech act, content), permissible inferences, and default additions to the common ground. All this is compatible with a standard externalist semantics.³

Putnam (1975) makes a related point: in order to acquire a word, one must learn a stereotype associated with its extension. The content of the stereotype is determined by the linguistic community:

‘The nature of the required minimum level of competence depends heavily upon both the culture and the topic, however. In our culture speakers are required to know what tigers look like (if they acquire the word ‘tiger’, and this is virtually obligatory); they are not required to know the fine details (such as leaf shape) of what an elm tree looks like. English speakers are required by their linguistic community to be able to tell tigers from leopards; they are not required to be able to tell elm trees from beech trees.’ (249)

‘The theoretical account of what it is to be a stereotype proceeds in terms of the notion of linguistic obligation; a notion which we believe to be fundamental to linguistics and which we shall not attempt to explicate here. What it means to say that being striped is part of the (linguistic) stereotype of ‘tiger’ is that it is obligatory to acquire the information that stereotypical tigers are striped if one acquires ‘tiger’ [...].’ (251)

I am suggesting something similar, but extending it in two ways: the schema associated with a term is not just a set of beliefs about the extension of the term, but can include a broader range of cognitive/affective/behavioral elements. And, in the broad picture, I’m not just concerned with the schemas associated with terms, i.e., linguistic or specifically communicative items, but also social items more generally (actions, images, statuses, events).

So far it is not clear how an inferential role semantics is preferable to a model that places more emphasis on pragmatics. Given the obscurity of the line between semantics and pragmatics, this is not surprising. Stahl seems to suggest, however, that we might find further advantages to an inferential role semantics when we look more carefully at the importance of common ground in ideology critique.

As Stahl points out, I argue that ideology critique is not simply a matter of showing that ideological beliefs are false, for given the fact that ideology will often play a role in constituting social reality, ideological beliefs are often true of that reality. For example, if ideology drives the social division between racial groups, there will be truths about the differences between racial groups that are important to know. As he says:

‘[...] ideological concepts] can be employed correctly without ideology critique becoming inappropriate – for such critique does not primarily rest on the assumption that the application of these concepts is *false*, but rather that these concepts (and consequently, the social contexts of assessment) are in some way *defective*. For this reason, ideology critique need not endorse the relativist implications that seem to follow from the idea of contextual truth. Ideology critique as a practice, Haslanger argues, must rather aim at finding a *common ground of assessment* from which a rejection of ideological judgments can be shown to be justified.’ (10)

In my papers on this issue (Ch. 15, Ch. 17), I waffle considerably on how we should pursue critique across ideological frames. In some cases, I think, we can only achieve external critique. But, as indicated above, in practice there are reasons to work for immanent critique, or critique relative to a common ground shared by those engaged in the dispute. How can we establish a common ground, or shared context of assessment, across ideological differences, specifically one that is adequate to demonstrate the defectiveness of a concept? I suggest that in some circumstances one context of assessment might be better than another, e.g., more objective, more reliable, more politically acute, etc. In such a case the external critique from that context would be justified and, one might argue, even those not situated in that context have reasons to embrace its results.

It is not obvious to me that any of my suggestions work, especially if the goal is to find a model for immanent critique. However, let's suppose for the moment that an immanent critique is one that is offered against the backdrop of a common ground, drawing only on that common ground. Stahl suggests:

[...] there might be another aspect of what makes a common ground into something 'common', namely a *normative understanding*, not only in regard to which further discursive moves are justified given that common ground, but which also might include an agreement about how one can *change* that common ground.' (10)

'If we acknowledge this normative aspect of ideological 'common grounds', we might formulate an immanent critique of the degree to which the institutional or normative rules of conventional speech situations *limit* the development of conceptual alternatives from 'within.' (11)

The idea seems to be that the common ground consists not only in a set of shared beliefs, but also a set of norms for conversation. These norms govern which next moves are permissible in conversation (who's turn, what tone, speech act, what content), permissible inferences, and default additions to the common ground.⁴ In addition the conversational norms set limits on conceptual revision; in terms sketched above, they circumscribe what changes are allowed to the schemas associated with the terms used.

We can then compare conversational contexts with respect to the specific norms in place: do the norms in question allow us to challenge beliefs about, say, the naturalness of race, or is the naturalness of race treated as a necessary component in the schema associated with racial language? (The same may be asked for evaluative beliefs in the schema too.) Stahl suggests that, on this model, highly restrictive norms that prohibit conceptual critique and revision are more ideological than those that are less restrictive. Possibly, this could then be a basis for immanent critique: the rigidity of your norms for conceptual revision prevents you from responding in fruitful ways to input that, by your own lights, you should accommodate.

I am completely sympathetic to the suggestion that conversational norms play an important role in placing ideological limits on our thinking and speaking. One way they function is, as I just suggested, by making it unacceptable to challenge the schemas associated with ordinary terms, even when the schemas include problematic elements. I accept Stahl's point that the norms governing conversation, including how we update the common ground, are social norms and are not best explained in individualistic terms (though there may also be very specific norms that individuals develop in conversations with each other). I am not convinced, however, that one needs to embrace an inferential role semantics to accommodate this (nor is it clear that Stahl thinks so).

I am less sympathetic, however, to Stahl's suggestion that we can evaluate whether a set of conversational norms is problematically ideological by the extent to which they allow for conceptual revision. One problem is that it is not entirely clear when we have conceptual revision and when we have a new concept, or when we revise a schema and when we employ a new schema. (This is relevant to Betti's commentary.) Moreover, a set of norms that limits revision but is liberal in allowing the introduction of new terms, schemas, etc. may be no more limiting to our thinking and speaking than a set of norms that easily tolerates revision. Or so it seems.

Yet this response leaves out the valuable point that Stahl makes earlier, i.e., that an eliminativist approach to problematic concepts is less powerful in 'breaking the spell of ideology' than critique that juxtaposes the manifest and operative concepts in order to illuminate their incongruence; or, at least, an eliminativist approach is less powerful than a critique that finds ways to make explicit how our discourse and other social practices are implicated in creating the divisions that we purport to simply represent. Given this insight, I believe that rather than focusing on the general norms of conversation with respect to revision, we need to go back to a view of ideology critique as substantive debunking: look at how our words contribute to creating the reality we purport simply to describe when we use the words. As Stahl points out, this is not a critique of an individual's use of words, nor is it a critique of what a particular individual believes. It is a critique of a set of social practices in familiar normative terms. What makes it ideology critique is that a crucial first step in the

process is to reveal the social practices that we misrepresent to ourselves as not apt for evaluation. (The normative basis is in question in Mikkola's commentary.) This, I think, is a valuable form (though not necessarily the only form) of ideology critique.

2. Interpretation, Explanation, and Conceptual Change

One of the main projects I undertake in my book is to offer a critique of our social practices constituting gender and race by offering a focal analysis of these social categories (Introduction and Ch. 7). The idea of a focal analysis is common in readings of Aristotle's metaphysics (Owen 1960), though perhaps a more illuminating terminology for the phenomenon is 'core-dependent homonymy' (Shields 1999). Core-dependent homonymy is called for when the uses of a term suggest it is polyvocal, but treating it as simply ambiguous is inadequate because there are systematic connections between the different uses. Aristotle claims that,

'Just as everything which is healthy is related to health (*pros hūgieian*), some by preserving health, some by producing health, others by being indicative of health, and others by being receptive of health; and as the medical is relative to the medical craft (*pros iatrikēn*), for some things are called medical because they possess the medical craft, others because they are well-constituted relative to it, and others by being the function of the medical art - and we shall also discover other things said in ways similar to these - so too is being said in many ways, but always relative to some one source (*pros mian archēn*).' (Met. 1003a34–b6)

Christopher Shields elucidates the standard example of health:

'[...] 'health' is a core-dependent homonym, since its various occurrences coalesce around a core notion. The accounts of 'healthy' as it crops up in various contexts should reflect this coalescence. If we provide accounts of 'healthy' in 'healthy practice', 'healthy complexion', 'healthy glow', 'healthy regimen', 'healthy portion', 'healthy salary', 'healthy relationship', and 'healthy frame of mind', we will need to relate them all to some

one principle. There must therefore be a base sense or base case of being healthy which is in somehow prior to all of these derivations. Perhaps 'healthy person' serves as such a case. If so, we may say that healthy complexions and healthy glows are indicative of the health of a healthy person; healthy practices and regimens are sometimes productive of health and at other times preserve it; healthy bodies are not corrupt and so are capable of being healthy, and are thus 'receptive of health'. Core-dependent homonyms are non-discrete homonyms which display a theoretically significant form of association.' (Shields 1999, 105-6)

An important, though controversial, feature of Aristotle's notion of homonymy is that the focus of analysis is not words or concepts, but things, kinds, properties. The project is one of 'real definition' rather than 'nominal definition' (Rosen 2013). In the case at hand, we want an account of *what health is*, not simply of 'our concept' of health. Although we begin our inquiry by employing the concept as we understand it, we may learn that we are confused or misled about the relevant reality; in other words, the division(s) we take our concept to track may not be the division(s) that are worth tracking. We discover the divisions worth tracking not just by a priori inquiry, but by methods that also include empirical inquiry. The goal of analysis, on this view, is to explicate and improve our understanding of a domain by mapping the systematic relationships in reality that our language aims to trace.

My core-dependent accounts of gender and race are attempts at real definition not conceptual analysis in the traditional sense. As in the case of health, there are a variety of expressions that draw upon gender/race terminology and concepts, e.g., gender/race identity, gender/race oppression, gender/race discrimination, gender/race norms (masculinity/femininity, whiteness (Frye 1992)), gender/race symbols and meanings; also more specific notions such as: 'Black art', 'women's literature', 'women's knowledge', 'the Hispanic/Asian/Black family etc. It is unclear how to make sense of such ideas (see, e.g., Hall 1992). What does it even mean to suggest that rationality is gendered? (See Antony and Witt 1993); more specifically, my contribution reprinted as Ch. 1. offered my account in an attempt to show that although terms for gender/race are being used in different ways in these examples, there is a systematic connection between

them that is not just a matter of loose association; the best account treats them as core-dependent homonyms with the core being gender and race as social classes. For example, (oversimplifying considerably) if *being White* is to be socially privileged by virtue of a reading of the body as having relatively recent European ancestry, then *White racial norms* are those such that following them makes those so-marked successful in that position of privilege, and *White racial identity* is an internalization of those norms in some form or other (see also Ch. 9).

A virtue of my account is that it elucidates a core-dependent homonymy between different uses of gender/race terms by reference to the systematic relationships between social phenomena that we have reason to track. My claim is not that my account ‘analyzes our concept’, in the sense that it provides an interpretation of what people have in mind when they use the term, or that it is what determines the extension of gender/race language in a Fregean way, but that it captures the social reality that underlies our thinking and speaking, but is hidden from view. This is an aspect of the account that Stahl draws on in arguing that my work offers a way to understand immanent critique: what we are talking about is at odds with what we take ourselves to be talking about. (His further suggestion, recall, is that we ‘break the spell’ of ideology by revealing this gap and our role in creating the social reality that has been hidden.)

A common complaint against my accounts of gender and race is that they are counter-intuitive, and that I am simply ‘changing the meaning’ of the terms. Arianna Betti brings to the conversation her expertise in the history and philosophy of science, and suggests that if I embrace Betti and van den Berg’s (2014) model approach to concepts (and their application of this approach to interpretation in the history of ideas), then the charge of changing the subject is misguided.

Betti and van den Berg are interested in the question: How can philosophers and scientists in different periods (or even at the same period!) be employing the same concept but also disagree with respect to what the concept entails? (Betti’s primary example is the concept *science*.) There are, of course, a variety of options for addressing this question of conceptual difference and conceptual change: perhaps some thinkers have a bet-

ter grasp of the concept than others; perhaps they use the same words, but are not really employing the same concept; perhaps their disagreement lies in the application or determination of the concept, not the concept itself, etc.

But Betti and van den Berg are unwilling to opt for these solutions. Behind this question they see a challenge to the very project of the history of ideas:⁵ If to capture an idea one must represent the author/thinker’s historically specific understanding of it (and who could better understand the idea than its author?), then the worry is that ideas cannot have a history. Something with a history changes. But how could an idea, assuming it is fully determinate and transparent to an individual, change? A history of ideas could only be a sequence of different ideas, held at different times by different authors. The history of *an idea* must either not adequately capture the idea in question, or must not be genuinely historical.

On Betti and van den Berg’s model approach, complex concepts should be understood as having a core set of conditions and a more peripheral set. The core conditions are essential to it and the peripheral ones are accidental. So just as an ordinary object can vary with respect to its accidental features and remain the same thing, so a concept can vary with respect to its accidental conditions and remain the same concept. For example, perhaps it is essential to the concept of *university* that it is an institution of higher learning, but only an accidental condition that it grant (post-) graduate degrees, or include professional schools. Moreover, in a particular context, some of the conditions for the application of the concept may be implicit and others explicit, so this makes space for the theorist to illuminate aspects of the concept that those who deploy the concept may not be aware of. In short, Betti and van den Berg resist the claim that ideas are fully determinate and transparent to an individual; an idea may change over time as long as in different periods it has certain structural features (core conditions) in common (2014, 7).

I am sympathetic to many aspects of a model approach to the history of ideas. I too resist the claim that we have transparent access to what we think or mean, and also that ideas/concepts must be fully determinate. I worry, however, that Betti and van den Berg’s project does not mesh as

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neatly with mine as Betti suggests. First, although Betti draws a parallel between their model approach to concepts and my focal analysis of gender and race, the phenomenon of focal meaning – or core-dependent homonymy – is not just a matter of differentiating core and margin conditions of a concept; and second, Betti and van den Berg's investment in the history of *ideas* is somewhat at odds with my effort to provide real definitions.

Recall that a core-dependent account of, say, *health*, does not define the word or concept in terms of a set of conditions, some of which are essential to it and some accidental. Rather, such an account of *health* captures the explanatory core of a range of phenomena, including cases when we use cognate terms such as 'healthy,' 'healthful,' 'heal,' etc. It is possible for a concept to conform to a model account and yet not be part of a core-dependent homonymy; and it is possible for some core concepts of core-dependent homonymies to be definable in strictly necessary and sufficient conditions. The phenomena crosscut each other.

One might think, however, that in both cases, the challenge is to represent a complex phenomenon structurally, and so to see how different parts are related to a core. In the history of ideas, the goal is to represent how people think of something, e.g., science, by relating their different understandings of it to a core set of ideas, allowing variation along the margins. There is a sense in which my project is consistent with this and a sense in which it is not.

I have already emphasized that I am a semantic externalist; as is typical, my externalism extends to concepts as well, i.e., conceptual content is not a matter of what is in the head, but is determined by the social and physical environment. There are places in Betti and van den Berg (2014) where it appears that their project is to capture something more like the narrow content of a concept as employed by different thinkers. They opt for a model approach because it allows them to focus on core elements of the narrow content in order to argue that individuals have the same concept, in spite of some differences, because they share those core elements. Externalists do not face this problem. We share with Socrates the concept of water because the semantic/conceptual content of *water* is water. Of

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course, we also differ from Socrates in our understanding of water, because we believe that water is composed of hydrogen and oxygen, and he did not. He did not have the concepts of hydrogen and oxygen.

In the case of water, we can be confident that we share our concept with Socrates because the stuff we are talking about is right before us (and him): we drink it, bathe in it, etc. Our disagreement about what sort of stuff it is, or about what counts as instances of it, does not call into question the content we share. It is more complicated when what we are talking about is less concrete and obvious. On my view, however, the content of the concept of *race* (and the meaning of the term 'race') is a determinable with particular social groups (Blacks, Latino(a)s, Whites, Asians, American Indians, relative to the current US context) as determinants. Roughly, a race is a group of individuals situated in a social hierarchy by reference to markings assumed to be evidence of ancestry in a certain geographical region. This specification is a way of gaining insight into the organization of our classification of individuals into races and our racial practices more generally. It captures important features that the groups we call races have in common. Many people do not think of the groups this way, but that does not mean the specification does not capture the content of the concept of race. Socrates did not think of water as made of hydrogen and oxygen, but that does not mean that his concept of water was different from ours.

Just as it is important to distinguish what water is from what we think about water, it is important to distinguish what gender/race is from what we think about gender/race. This is relevant to what I said above concerning my distinction between the manifest and operative concept. It is best to think of both the manifest and operative concepts as metasemantic. The manifest concept is a specification of what the typical user associates with the term, i.e., the standard beliefs (schema?) that are conventionally connected with the term in a context (see the previous quotes from Putnam). The operative concept offers a specification of the content so as to illuminate the extension, e.g., so that we are better able to track it counterfactually, to explain our use, and to account for errors in the manifest concept.

Betti suggests that my account of gender does not provide a descriptive analysis, but is instead ‘normative’.

‘The claim that *woman* is to be construed as “subordinated in a society due to their perceived or imagined female reproductive capacities,” I maintain, must be seen as a descriptive construal of a felt social *norm* (a norm adopted in certain cultures, periods, by certain people and so on...) A model such as the Classical Model of Science mentioned above is not a schematic representation of a *normative* claim on what science should be, it is instead the *descriptive* abstract systematization of science as a felt norm *by others*, of what others have thought that science must be. There are two levels here, one descriptive and one normative, and although their interaction is key, the two levels must be kept apart.’ (15)

Although I am not sure I understand the point Betti is making, I maintain that my analysis of gender is descriptive, in fact, descriptive of the material reality of gender, even if it is not descriptive of anyone’s thinking about gender. In short, I am offering a theory of *what gender is*, not what some people think it is, or what they think it should be. This is the goal of real definition.

So although I take seriously the charge that my proposed accounts of gender and race are not accounts of ‘our concept’ or that they change the meaning of the terms, the argument for this claim based on our everyday thinking about race and gender is not convincing to me. I would interpret these complaints, rather, as pointing out that the schemas associated with our use of terms such as ‘race’ and ‘gender,’ schemas that are encoded in manifest concepts, are at odds with the best account of what race and gender are, i.e., with important facts about gender and race that my accounts illuminate. And this charge I embrace, for it is exactly this incongruence, as Stahl puts it, that I aim to draw attention to as a first step in ideology critique.

3. Justice, Oppression, and the Normative Basis for Social Critique

Although I frequently speak of ideology critique and the critique of social practices, I have not myself offered a normative theory of social or political justice that might be invoked to support such critique. This is, in part, due to the accidents of my philosophical biography. I was trained in analytic metaphysics, epistemology and philosophy of language, not in moral and political philosophy. So I often feel more comfortable relying on the normative work of others, e.g., Elizabeth Anderson, Iris Young, G. A. Cohen, Ann Cudd, Susan Okin, to provide the moral basis of social critique.

One might think, however, that in a paper titled ‘Oppressions: Racial and Other’ (Ch. 11) one should provide an account of the moral wrong of oppression. What else would we be looking for? Yet my goal in that paper was not to elucidate oppression per se, but to give an account of what it is for oppression to count as *racial* oppression, or *sex* oppression. An account of such modification is straightforward if one believes that in order for a practice or structure to oppress a group, individuals within the structure must have hostile or offensive attitudes towards members of the group. But I do not hold that view. I believe that structures can oppress groups even without targeted hostility or ill-will. The problem becomes acute if some groups suffer multiple disadvantages, e.g., if those who are poor are also members of a racial minority. In such cases the group may be systematically disadvantaged, but it is much harder to say what makes that systematic disadvantage *racial* if the group is not targeted for ill-will due to their race. My paper attempts to explain how we can distinguish cases of structural race-oppression from structural class-oppression (and similar cases), *assuming* that the group is oppressed for the purposes of the discussion.

Nevertheless, Mari Mikkola challenges my tendency to avoid normative theorizing and calls on me to provide an account of what makes oppression morally wrong. She is not asking for a theory of justice – in fact, she argues that we do not need a theory of justice to identify forms of oppression. But we do need an account of the wrongness of the injustices we seek to rectify. I agree that it would be good to have such an account.

Mikkola develops her challenge by drawing a distinction between the bad or harm caused by oppressive conditions and the wrongfulness of oppression. She says:

‘A certain background assumption guides my examination of Haslanger’s position: that our theories of oppression must not only elucidate the harms of oppression but also its wrong. That is, our theory should explicate the wrongfulness-making feature of oppression as well as its harmfulness-making conditions for social theoretical purposes.’ (20)

Although it is not clear to me that I have explicated the harmfulness of oppression any more than the wrongfulness of oppression, Mikkola seems willing to grant that I have done enough on the issue of harm; it is an account of wrongfulness that she takes to be lacking. This focus may be because she maps a contrast between good/bad and right/wrong onto my distinction between moral theory, whose subject matter I take to be the actions and character of individuals, and political theory, whose subject matter I take to be how we collectively organize ourselves.

‘[...] Haslanger’s] moral/political distinction seems to map onto the right and wrong/good and bad distinctions. So, structural oppression involves political wrongs, which pertain to our collective arrangements; it does not supervene on individual moral wrongdoing; political wrongs are about goodness/badness (as opposed to right and wrong); and oppression turns on inegalitarian social relationships and distributions of social power. However, it is still unclear to me how such political wrong comes apart and differs from morally wrong *structural* arrangements. In short, why think that political wrongs are different in kind from moral wrongs?’ (20)

I am afraid that I have been terribly unclear about the distinction I intended between moral and social/political theory. All that I intended to suggest is that moral theory (and ethics) is about the actions (good and bad, right and wrong) of individuals, and social/political theory is about the collective arrangements (good and bad, right and wrong) of groups of individuals. It was not my intention to suggest that individuals’ actions are subject to evaluation in terms of right/wrong whereas collective arrangements are subject to evaluation as good/bad. The mapping Mikkola pro-

poses in the passage just quoted was not what I intended.

As I understand the distinction between good/bad and right/wrong, to judge something good or bad is to make a value judgment about it. Things can be evaluated as good along many dimensions depending on the kind of value at issue, e.g., aesthetic, prudential, democratic, moral. To judge something as right/wrong is to judge it to be at least *pro tanto* required. Again, there may be different sorts of requirements of us: religious, cultural (etiquette), civic, moral. It is important to note that in addition to requirements of us as individuals, e.g., one ought not to break one’s promises, there are also requirements concerning how we ought to organize ourselves, e.g., we ought to organize ourselves to provide care for the disabled. Both individuals and political institutions can do good things that are not morally required, and can do morally required things that are not good along some dimension or other.

That aside, the question remains: What makes oppressive structures and practices wrong? What makes it the case that we are required not to organize ourselves in oppressive ways? One possible answer is that it would be bad or harmful to do so. This is an answer that rests on the assumption that we ought not to organize ourselves in ways that are bad or harmful. This answer is incomplete insofar as it leaves open the question of what sort of bad or harm is relevant (what values would be violated)?⁶ But it is surely a familiar strategy that utilitarians, in particular, and many consequentialists would endorse. And feminists could plausibly contribute: first we determine a set of feminist values, and then we articulate a principle or set of principles for weighing values, e.g., should all of the values be maximized to the extent possible? If we agree that sexual equality and individual autonomy are valuable, how do we weigh sexual equality and individual autonomy to create a just society?

Of course, many have argued that a consequentialist approach to justice is inadequate because consequentialists cannot guarantee the protection of certain basic rights. I am sympathetic to such concerns. Perhaps Mikkola is suggesting that we need a theory of social wrongdoing that goes beyond causing socially bad things (i.e., things contrary to what is socially valuable) to happen. Of course, many forms of oppression are wrong because

they violate basic rights. For example, Iris Young suggests that one of the five faces of oppression is systematic violence. And the contemporary world is one in which women, LGBTQ individuals, racial minorities, the disabled, and others, are oppressed by virtue of suffering systematic violence. In such cases the wrongfulness of oppression is the wrongfulness of violating the right to bodily integrity and security. It is unclear to me why we need a new normative grounding of such rights. (I will return to the question of whether we do.)

Mikkola argues, however, that there are cases that cannot be handled so easily, e.g., exploitative relations of asymmetric dependence. She points out that asymmetric dependence in the case of parents and children is not unjust. In my ‘Oppressions...’-paper, I suggested that I was sympathetic to Elizabeth Anderson’s (1999) relational egalitarianism (another example of passing the hard normative work to others!). Anderson argues that contemporary egalitarians have gone astray by focusing their attention on distributive justice. She proposes that the core egalitarian commitment is to egalitarian social relations. She says:

‘[...] egalitarians seek to abolish oppression – that is, forms of social relationship by which some people dominate, exploit, marginalize, demean, and inflict violence upon others. Diversities in socially ascribed identities, distinct roles in the division of labor, or differences in personal traits, whether these be neutral biological and psychological differences, valuable talents and virtues, or unfortunate disabilities and infirmities, never justify the unequal social relations listed above [...]. Positively, egalitarians seek a social order in which persons stand in relations of equality. They seek to live together in a democratic community, as opposed to a hierarchical one. Democracy is here understood as collective self-determination by means of open discussion among equals, in accordance with rules acceptable to all.’ (Anderson 1999, 313)

On this view, social structures are unjust if they include or depend on ‘forms of social relationship by which some people dominate, exploit, marginalize, demean, and inflict violence upon others’. It seems to me that one might articulate this in terms of rights (that as moral equals we have a right not to be treated this way) or in terms of values (that femi-

nists place a high value on equal social relationships, and this value can only be overridden in extreme circumstances). In either case, we can use this as a basis for saying that asymmetric dependence in parent-child relationships is permissible as long as the relationship does not position parents to dominate, exploit, marginalize, demean or inflict violence on the child. Some social structures do organize family life so that these violations are accepted, others do not. The former structures are unjust and they are so because they are inegalitarian.

I am not arguing here that Anderson’s relational egalitarianism is the last word in understanding the wrongs of oppression, or that further elaboration is unnecessary. For example, in my view Anderson (1999) places too much weight on our pure status as moral equals to ground social equality, and situates her view in too Rawlsian a framework emphasizing the political domain. For example, she claims:

‘[...] democratic equality regards two people as equal when each accepts the obligation to justify their actions by principles acceptable to the other, and in which they take mutual consultation, reciprocation, and recognition for granted.’ (313)

I believe we need more material demands on social equality than this suggests. And Anderson signals that she would agree. For example, she claims that ‘[...] democratic equality is sensitive to the need to integrate the demands of equal recognition with those of equal distribution’ (314). And: ‘To live in an egalitarian community, then, is to be free from oppression to participate in and enjoy the goods of society, and to participate in democratic self-government.’ (315) However, as I understand the structure of her view, it is the stance of moral equality that rules out oppressive social relations. In particular, the attitudes of mutuality she takes to be fundamental to moral equality are incompatible with oppressive relationships: if there is oppression, then someone is failing to view and treat another as a moral equal.⁷

I find this implausible. Oppression is, in the primary instance, a structural phenomenon. Under conditions of oppression, the relations between groups of individuals are wrongly hierarchical, i.e., members of the op-

pressed group are systematically positioned in relations that disadvantage or wrong them. But such positioning is typically the result of broad social forces that are not under individuals' control. As Charles Tilly puts it:

'[...] 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 [...].' (Tilly 2002, 28)

People may even be socialized to think that *the way* to treat another as an equal is to position them in relations that are, in fact, problematic, e.g., ensuring equal access to wage labor looks good, but it isn't good if it is ensuring equal access to exploitation.

More importantly, it is reasonable to think that structures are oppressive when they organize social life so there are roles that require individuals to wrong or harm others.⁸ Individuals who occupy such roles are responsible for their wrongful/harmful actions, but to point only to the individual actions is to miss the fact that the structure will find ways to position someone in that role. For example, in oppressive work conditions, a manager will be responsible for many unjust hardships the employees face. But even if a particular manager quits, there will be others who replace him or her. There will be others who replace him or her because the broader structure offers few options for those who reasonably seek to avoid poverty or abuse. So even if we agree that the individual manager acts badly and/or wrongly, there is a further bad/wrong in the structure of the workplace and the broader society. (Note also that good structures provide roles for people to do good; structures can facilitate, by the roles they make available, vision, creativity, generosity, leadership, and other good things).

As I see it, there are four claims that should be distinguished:

a) No harm done unless (somewhere down the line) there is harm to an individual.

b) No wrong done unless (somewhere down the line) an individual is wronged.

c) No harm done unless (somewhere up the line) an individual causes the harm.

d) No wrong done unless (somewhere up the line) an individual does (the) wrong.

I am (with qualifications) somewhat sympathetic to (a); but (b)-(d) strike me as false. People can be wronged without being wronged by an individual, or being wronged by a structure/practice that was wrongly created by an individual. Most structures and practices are not created by the actions of an individual or even a well-defined group of individuals. They evolve, and their evolution is caused by forces other than individual agency. So things can go wrong socially even when, under the circumstances, no individual is violating a moral requirement, or even, strictly speaking, causing the harm.

Claim (d) is compatible with much of what Anderson says about democratic, or relational, egalitarianism. (It may even be compatible with everything she says!). If, however, I do not locate the normative basis of egalitarianism in the moral equality of individuals, one might insist that I articulate an alternative basis for egalitarianism. And this might be what Mikkola is asking of me. But I am tempted to reject the demand, for I do not see why we need to provide a further normative grounding for a commitment to social equality, i.e., a society free of relations of domination, exploitation, marginalization, etc. in order to proceed.

What does it mean to 'proceed'? Should we simply apply existing theories of justice in our accounts of the wrongs of sexism and racism? Or does a concern with oppression require a different approach? I think there are two broad traditions in political theory that correspond roughly to those concerned with justice and those concerned with oppression. The difference is methodological: what questions are we asking and why? What methods are apt in looking for answers and what counts as an adequate answer? What are the sources of epistemic authority?

Crudely, to distinguish theories of justice and of oppression, it is useful to ask: is the theory being done for the purpose of social activism? Or is social activism what we do once we apply our theory to the world and find that the world falls short? Are we looking to theory because there are pressing matters within feminism that need sorting out; or are we theorists who are happy to guide activists when they will listen to us?

In describing critical theory, one often finds it emphasized that a critical theory is embedded within a social movement. I quote Nancy Fraser in the introduction to my book:

‘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. [...] 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 example, 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.’ (Fraser 1989, 113)

Theories of oppression begin with an investment in a particular social movement and the theoretical/political questions they ask are those that are important for bringing about social justice in a particular time and place. They do not begin by asking what justice is, in the abstract, or attempt to provide a universal account of justice. I think Mikkola and I agree that usually a universal account of justice is not necessary to improve the situation, for we can adequately identify pressing injustice. In theorizing about oppression we are theorizing about something actually occurring that we want to change.

Moreover, theories of oppression are not typically trying to answer the normative question: is this unjust? Is this oppressive? In the context, it is usually pretty clear to everyone that an injustice has occurred or is occurring. A large part of what theorists of oppression try to do is explain how and why certain recognizably unjust social structures work to the advantage of some and not others. Part of the project is descriptive/interpretive, calling upon us to *see* the system as a system, to *see* the unfairness, the injustice.

Because theories of oppression require a description and explanation of actual injustice, they cannot be achieved a priori. So critical theorists rely on work in the social sciences. Along these lines, it may be helpful to think of ‘justice’ as a thin moral concept and ‘oppression’ as a thick moral concept. For example, philosophers have contrasted the terms ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ with terms such as ‘courageous’, ‘miserly’, ‘insulting’, ‘generous’. The latter thick terms seem to somehow involve both a normative and a descriptive component. It is highly controversial how to spell this out, but if the contrast makes sense, it is plausible that ‘justice’ is thin like ‘right’ and ‘good’ and ‘oppression’, ‘domination’, and ‘emancipation’ are thick. This suggests that different methodologies are called for in exploring what justice is and what oppression is.

A corollary of this is that theories of oppression do not attempt to be normatively neutral. They are invested in the emancipation of particular subordinated groups. So for any theorist, there are particular groups of individuals in whose interest it is developed. It does not assume that all of us have shared, or even compatible, interests.

The ‘critical’ in critical theory is not just about embeddedness, however, but also about social critique. In the background there is a moral epistemology committed to situated knowers. This is not to adopt a standpoint epistemology or to privilege the epistemic position of the subordinate; but it does require that an understanding of injustice take into account – in fact and not just in practice – the experiences of the subordinate. There is controversy about the details of the epistemology, but here is an example in Iris Young:

'Normative reflection arises from hearing a cry of suffering or distress, or feeling distress oneself. The philosopher is always socially situated, and if the society is divided by oppressions, she either reinforces or struggles against them. With an emancipatory interest, the philosopher apprehends given social circumstances not merely in contemplation but with passion: the given is experienced in relation to desire. Desire, the desire to be happy, creates the distance, the negation, that opens the space for criticism of what is. This critical distance does not occur on the basis of some previously discovered rational ideas of the good and the just. On the contrary, the ideas of the good and the just arise from the desiring negation that action brings to what is given.' (Young 1990, 5-6)

I myself am dubious of Young's specific epistemology of social critique, for desire is as affected by existing social norms as belief and action. My point here is not to endorse any particular moral epistemology of injustice, but to highlight the idea that within inquiry into oppression, theorists, in general, and philosophers, in particular, are not granted special epistemic authority in understanding what is good and right and just; but neither are we just trying to systematize the 'ordinary understanding' of these notions, granting authority to the 'ordinary person'. The goal is an immanent critique that draws on a full range of epistemic capacities – not just rational, but also perceptual, emotional, practical – in response to the lived world we are part of; theorists differ on how such critique gains normative traction.

So as I understand the relationship between injustice and oppression, the issue is less whether one concept applies to one sort of wrong and the other to another (though I think it is pretty likely that there are cases of injustice that are not cases of oppression, and not likely that there are cases of oppression that are not forms of injustice). The issue is what sort of theory each is embedded in: what questions it asks, what methods it employs, and what purposes it serves.

Many thanks, again, to my commentators for an enjoyable and tremendously valuable discussion of these issues.

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² There are many questions about what counts as ideology critique, and how to characterize immanent critique, that I will not go into here. Instead, I will draw on what I take Stahl's use of the terms commit him to.

³ I discuss this also in my Eastern APA Presidential Address. December 29, 2013. Forthcoming in the *Proceedings and Addresses of the APA* 2014.

⁴ I am grateful to Jack Marley-Payne for helping me appreciate this point.

⁵ Note that they are explicit in using the terms 'concept' and 'idea' interchangeably (2014, 2). For the purposes of this exposition of their view, I follow them in this.

⁶ Mikkola assumes that harmful acts may be not only permissible, but morally required, e.g., '[...] harms and wrongs come apart: I may suffer severe harms due to some painful medical condition, but this makes the condition neither morally wrongful or unjust.' This, however, is highly controversial. See Harman 2009; Thomson 2011; Bradley 2012. As a result, I will avoid using speaking of 'harm,' and will speak instead in terms of 'badness'.

⁷ This is one reading of the argument (see Anderson 1999, 315). However, I find her use of ‘moral equal’ and ‘social equal’ somewhat confusing in this section of the paper. A different reading of the argument reaches the conclusion that social equality is incompatible with oppression. Given that this claim would seem to be trivial, and that we are starting with moral equality as the normative basis of egalitarianism, I have interpreted her to be arguing that a society in which moral equality is the basis of human interaction is one in which oppression would be eliminated. Although this is plausible in the abstract, I do not believe it is plausible for actual societies for the reasons I sketch. Another, perhaps deeper, question is how we should understand ‘moral equality.’ Anderson sometimes speaks as if moral equality consists in a set of attitudes we have towards each other: each accepts obligations of justification, recognition, etc. (see the passage quoted above); in other contexts moral equality seems to be a feature of relationships that does not supervene on the attitudes of the individuals in the relationship, but functions as a kind of fundamental standing in the moral universe. Relations of domination are wrong because they violate this standing. I find this idea more plausible, but also more elusive.

⁸ Thanks very much to Tom Dougherty for making this point in conversation and pushing me to develop it.