II—Clare Chambers

Ideology and Normativity

This paper investigates the possibility of what Sally Haslanger calls 'ideology critique'. It argues that ideology critique cannot rely on epistemological considerations alone but must be based on a normative political theory. Since ideological oppression is denied by those who suffer from it is it is not possible to identify privileged epistemological standpoints in advance.

> How can wolf-whistling be offensive to women? It's a compliment. They're saying 'Cor you look all right, darling.' What's wrong with that?
>
> — Joanna Lumley in Retter (2016)

> Adam Thomas added: . . . 'I would like it if someone wolf whistled me. I would be like "hi guys!"' Joel Dommett also reckoned he'd be into it: 'I would absolutely love it.'
>
> — Lewis (2016)

> When I was 9 a man asked 'the girl with the dick sucking lips' to come here.
>
> — Bates (2014, p. 167)

> There are times I wish I wasn't female because I'm fed up of being scared of walking down the street on my own.
>
> — Bates (2014, p. 164)

In 'Culture and Critique' Sally Haslanger investigates what she calls 'ideological oppression'. Like all oppression, ideological oppression involves unjust social practices. Its distinctive feature is that it is not recognized as oppression by its victims, or its perpetrators, or both. It is not recognized as oppression because, in Haslanger's words, the 'cultural technē . . . frames the straightforward possibilities for thought and action so that certain morally relevant facts are eclipsed and others distorted' (2017, p. 168). In other words, the oppressive behaviour is framed by the social norms and cultural context as normal and appropriate.

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Wolf-whistling illustrates this phenomenon. Feminist analysis and women's experience tell us that wolf-whistling oppresses women by buttressing various aspects of male supremacy: the idea that women should be judged by their looks, the idea that women's bodies are public property, the idea that women are appropriate targets for sexual objectification, and the idea that woman both are and should feel unsafe on the streets (Dworkin 1979; MacKinnon 1979; Stoltenberg 1990; Gardner 1995; Bates 2014). Many women find the experience of being whistled at insulting, offensive, alarming, frightening or upsetting. Many men would never engage in wolf-whistling, recognizing it as an oppressive act.[1]

And yet, as the quotations demonstrate, there are both men and women who find wolf-whistling unproblematic, or even complimentary. A positive appraisal of wolf-whistling eclipses morally relevant facts: women's fear of and vulnerability to sexual violence by men; men's objectification of women; sex inequality in general. It frames thought according to the standards of male supremacy: women are to be objectified, so their objectification is appropriate; women should be judged by their attractiveness, so signs of judgement are to be welcomed. Moving beyond what Haslanger would call the cultural technē of the ideology of male supremacy has required women's consciousness and feminist analysis, which provide tools and grounds for critiquing the ideology and its sustaining practices, including renaming 'wolf-whistling' as 'street harassment'.

In general, I am very sympathetic to Haslanger's analysis. I certainly agree that ideological oppression exists and that we must resist it. As I have argued in my own work, using the concept of social construction rather than Haslanger's preferred concept of ideology, feminism as a social and philosophical movement has focused on critical analysis of the processes by which individuals are motivated to participate in practices that harm them.

I find it helpful to identify two main forms of social construction. First, there is the social construction of options: our social context not only determines which options are available, but also frames the available options as appropriate or inappropriate for people like us. The

[1] It is clear that many men who oppose street harassment have no idea how ubiquitous it is. For example, Tony Parsons claims, 'It is a strange anomaly of male behaviour that builders are the only men who feel free to shout loudly at passing females', which just shows that he has never been a passing female. He centres men's experience still further when he writes that 'there is no more ardent feminist in this world than the man with a growing daughter' (Parsons 2015).

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second, more controversial, aspect of social construction is the social construction of preferences. People generally *want* to conform to the norms of their social context. This desire to conform could take place at various levels of consciousness. It could be a politically conscious, rational assessment that conformity will offer greater pay-offs than defection. Examples include a woman who wears uncomfortable high heels to work because she judges that it will help her career, or a woman who undergoes cosmetic surgery so as to counteract age discrimination at work. Alternatively, the desire to conform could be embraced as part of the person's genuine preferences. Examples include a woman who considers buying and wearing high heels to be a personal indulgence, a treat, or a woman who asks her male partner to pay for her breast implants as a gift—not for him but for *her*.

On my analysis, which draws on feminists and critical theorists such as Catharine MacKinnon (1987, 1989), Michel Foucault (1991) and Pierre Bourdieu (1990, 2001), social construction means that most of our practices rely on a social context to make sense.[2] Without a social context there is no meaning to many practices. High heels and breast implants are not functionally successful, practically useful, or objectively beautiful (Chambers 2008, MS). They gain their appeal and pleasure purely as carriers of beauty, status and self-esteem, concepts that are inexorably social.

But analysis of what I call social construction and what Haslanger calls ideological oppression faces two key problems. The first problem is how to explain *why* ideological oppression is oppressive, if it is not recognized as such by those involved in it. The second problem is how to explain what gives the philosopher or the critic the ability and the right to judge that a culturally endorsed practice is wrong. These problems are closely related but not identical: if a culture or practice is oppressive then there is at least a prima facie case for critique, but we still need to know when critique is legitimate, especially where critique aims to be action-guiding. In cases of ideology, there is necessarily a disagreement about whether or not a practice is oppressive. The ideology critic claims that it is, but those who endorse and enact the practice claim that it is not. The critic may

[2] It seems plausible that some of our practices are pre-social. Examples might include bodily functions such as sleeping, eating and defecating, and the basic relationships of human life, such as sexual intercourse, birthing, breastfeeding and mothering. But even these practices vary across societies and history in their particular form and meaning, such that they still get much of their character *as practice* from the social context in which they occur.

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have the right to her opinion, but (why) does she have the right to try to enforce that opinion on others, or to attempt to end the practices that she and not they condemn?

These problems can be answered. But, as I have argued elsewhere, answering them requires a strong and unashamed commitment to substantive, controversial normative values—values that are themselves inevitably tied to particular social contexts (Chambers 2008). Recognition of social construction should not lead us to a permissive cultural relativism. It is legitimate to use our own normative commitments to critique practices, including those of other cultures, as long as we use those same values to critique our own practices at least as forcefully.

I

Defining Ideological Oppression. Awareness of ideological oppression, and the problems it raises, is not new. It features strongly in feminist critiques of gendered practices and sex inequality, in Marxist and socialist critiques of capitalism and class, in rational choice and decision theory, in development work, in critical race theory, in poststructuralism, and in contemporary debates in the theory of liberal multiculturalism.

The diverse contexts in which the concept of ideological oppression has been considered has led, predictably, to a diversity of attitudes towards it. Ideological oppression has been thought of as false consciousness, as adaptive preferences, as being a victim or a cultural dupe; or alternatively, as living an authentically situated life, as following tradition, as living according to the meanings of one's own culture. Similarly, the task for the philosopher has been alternatively described as being to liberate, to illuminate, to facilitate, to revolutionize, to save; or alternatively, those attempting such moves have been described as racist, imperialist, colonial, as themselves the oppressors.

Strategies for ending ideological oppression also vary according to one's interpretation of it. Ending the oppression might seem to require extreme measures such as regulation, restriction, coercion, enforced liberation, or even invasion. More moderately, ending oppression might seem to require campaigning, education, raising awareness, or raising consciousness. But for those who see

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ideological oppression as benign or even honourable (which is to say, not really as oppression at all), the correct response might be restraint, relativism, respect, and recognition of difference.

The first task is to define the concept clearly. At the start of 'Culture and Critique', Haslanger states that she will 'embrace' Hall's account of ideology, according to which ideology can be both a feature of a dominant form of 'power and domination' *and* part of 'the processes by which new forms of consciousness, new conceptions of the world, arise, which move the masses of the people into historical action against the prevailing system' (quoted in Haslanger 2017, p. 150). This definition is vague, describing ideology as having something 'to do with' these phenomena. But it sets out a concept of ideology as politically or morally neutral: found in both status quo and resistance, used by both oppressors and their victims, and liberators.

A normatively neutral account of ideology makes sense of the phrase 'ideological oppression'. Since not all ideology is oppressive, it makes sense to distinguish that which is. A neutral definition also raises the epistemological problem of the possibility of ideology critique: if ideology is always and everywhere part of our conceptual and social practices, how can we escape it, much less criticize it? If our thoughts and practices are always shaped by ideology, how can we know what is right or wrong, good or bad? Questions of the legitimacy of ideological critique are also raised here: if there is always ideology, what gives 'us' the right to critique 'theirs'?

However, later in the paper Haslanger's usage shifts, and the neutral term for the practices and systems that shape our thoughts and understanding is 'culture', sometimes further refined into the idea of the 'cultural technē'. Here ideology becomes normatively problematic by definition. Thus she writes, 'whether a cultural technē is ideological is to be determined in terms of the injustice of its effects and the values it promotes. … Not every cultural technē is ideological' (Haslanger 2017, p. 165; see also p. 164).

On this normatively charged definition, the term 'ideological oppression' is somewhat tautological: all ideology is oppressive. The question of the legitimacy of ideology critique also seems to be answered immediately: we should critique ideology because, by definition, it creates and perpetuates injustice or other moral wrongs (concepts that Haslanger uses interchangeably). However, this answer to the question merely begs it. If the only difference between

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ideology and culture is normative (cultures good, ideologies bad) the real question is not 'On what basis can we criticize an ideology?' but 'On what basis can we say that something *is* an ideology?' And this is not an easy question to answer, because the key feature of ideological oppression is that it is not recognized as such by those who are subject to it. The claim that the followers of an ideology are in the grip of oppression is precisely what they deny. Those who are subject to ideological oppression would describe themselves as subject to (mere) culture. And since we, and everyone, are also subject to culture, how can we criticize that?

Now, as Haslanger notes, there are two main solutions to this problem of how to go about a legitimate ideology critique. One is epistemological and the other is moral (more broadly, it is normative). The epistemological critique points to the ways in which the ideology 'prevents us from valuing things aptly' (Haslanger 2017, p. 165) and relies on the idea that there are identifiable sources of non-ideological knowledge. The moral critique points to the way that ideology produces morally bad or unjust outcomes and relies on the idea that there is some agreement or non-ideological basis for identifying what counts as morally bad.

II

Epistemology and Normativity. The normatively charged definition of ideology implies that, even if there is always culture, there is not always ideology. We might say that a project of emancipation is a project not just of ideology critique but of ideology destruction.

The normatively charged definition also raises the question of how culture relates to ideology. Is 'ideology' simply the name of a culture that has gone wrong, such that there are some things that count as cultures and other things that count as ideologies, with both things being of the same phenomenological/ontological type but differing in their moral characteristics? Alternatively, is ideology one part of culture, such that within a culture there is or may be a subset of ideology? Either way, how general or large are cultures and ideologies? For example, should we be speaking of the culture/ideology of a country, or of a political party, or should we be dividing still further into wings of a political party or factions of a

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religion, or should we be looking at trans-national movements? In the examples that Haslanger describes is the relevant culture/ideology America, or Republicans, or Trump supporters, or the alt-right, or the more amorphous White Supremacy, or American values, or liberalism, or conservatism? Or should we speak of America as a culture which contains many ideologies, some of them overlapping, such as White Supremacy, the alt-right, male supremacy, and so on, but say that America or American values are not themselves ideological because there is a version of each that is not unjust?

If ideologies are subsets of cultures then situated criticism may answer some of the problems (MacIntyre 1981; Walzer 1985, 1994; Rorty 1989). Critique becomes possible, because even within a culture it is possible to identify alternative beliefs; there are easily accessible positions from outside an ideology but inside the same culture that provide both epistemological and moral challenges to the ideology, as well as providing the alternative practices that Haslanger says are necessary to critique (2017, pp. 158–9). To give an example, one can criticize the American alt-right by pointing to American political positions that are not the alt-right, and by highlighting tensions between the values of the alt-right and other American values, as enshrined in the Constitution, in legislation, and in the convictions and voting behaviour of millions of Americans.

The problem with the idea that ideologies are subsets of cultures is that it illegitimately assumes that the normatively acceptable culture is larger than the normatively bad ideology: that injustice is the exception and justice the rule, that oppressors are the minority and progressives the majority. This may or may not be true of any particular society. There is no reason to suppose it is always true. And the problem with the reliance on situated criticism is that it relies on the idea of shared traditions, which may in fact be traditions only of the dominant group (Okin 1989).

It is more plausible to say that ideology and culture are phenomenologically and ontologically equivalent, differentiated only by their normative features—or, as I would put it, that there is always social construction, and the question is what *values* it reflects and maintains. This interpretation is more plausible, but it makes the possibility and legitimacy of critique more problematic. Critique, on this perspective, is not possible from a position outside culture, because there is no such position. So this way of thinking about ideology and culture already suggests that ideology critique cannot

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be merely a matter of epistemology. We cannot critique ideology by saying that it shapes the thoughts, concepts and practices of its members, because culture does the exact same thing, and because we are necessarily speaking from within a culture ourselves. Instead, the critique has to be that ideology shapes knowledge *badly*, where this is a normative and not an epistemological bad.

In response, the defender of the epistemological critique might claim that even within an ideology there are some who have better access to the truth than others. This claim is deeply plausible; after all, in any group of people there will be some who are better epistemological agents than others. But two further problems arise. The first is how to *identify* the superior epistemological agents. The second is how to justify that assessment of superiority: how to *legitimate* their judgements.

First consider which subject-positions are best placed to produce knowledge and critique. It seems to be in the nature of ideology and culture that those who are members of it are not best placed to assess it. By definition, those whose way of thinking is shaped by an ideology or culture are less likely to be able to gain critical purchase on that ideology or culture. And yet Haslanger argues, somewhat surprisingly, that those who are 'in' an ideology or culture are actually well-placed—possibly even best-placed—to critique it. 'Much of the discussion of cultural critique situates such critique as cross-cultural', she writes. 'I suggest, however, that we take the paradigm of critique to occur *within* a culture' (Haslanger 2017, p. 166). The reason Haslanger gives for this judgement is 'those directly affected by the practices in question' are 'likely to have better access to morally relevant facts' (ibid.). A crucial part of her analysis is the claim that people can have access to morally relevant facts without relying on moral principles or a theory of justice. For critique, Haslanger argues, 'it is not necessary to *know what justice is*, or have a complete moral theory'. Instead, critique can emanate from the knowledge that 'a moral wrong or injustice is being done *to me* or *to us*' (ibid.).

Now, while it is undoubtedly true that it is not necessary to have a *complete* theory of justice to identify injustice (Wolff and de-Shalit 2007), it does not follow that *no* objective (i.e. non-cultural/ideological) normative knowledge is necessary. For without some theory or principles of justice we cannot justify why something being

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done to us is an injustice rather than merely something we don't like, and we have no way of justifying which facts are morally relevant.

There are many claims to have suffered injustice that we should not take at face value. The obvious example is the child who insists 'It's not fair!' when what she really means is 'I don't like it!' But adults do this too. For example, Dan Turner, father of Stanford rapist Brock Turner, caused legitimate outrage with his claim that a jail sentence for his son would be 'a steep price to pay for 20 minutes of action' (Miller 2016). Dan Turner thought a prison sentence would be an injustice done to his son. He was wrong.

Moreover, some claims that an injustice has been suffered are incompatible with others. A member of a privileged group may claim that affirmative action towards minorities is unjust; others accuse universities of ingrained and institutional racism against minorities.[3] Anti-abortion campaigners may claim that abortion is unjust or immoral harm to the foetus; advocates of the woman's right to choose may claim that being denied an abortion is an injustice.[4] Not all claims that an injustice or moral wrong has been done are compatible, and they cannot all be true. Identifying a legitimate claim of injustice requires theory or principles of justice.

We need to be careful here. Since culture is everywhere, and since there is no pre-social consciousness, we are not looking for pre-social or non-social normative facts. Instead we are looking for normative facts that do not depend on a particular culture or ideology for their truth-value. Facts and judgements that depend on a culture for their truth include statements like 'crop tops are cool' or 'high heels are sexy' or 'pale skin is beautiful'. These will be true in some cultures and false in others. Normative facts and judgements are not like this. Statements like 'sexism is unjust' and 'racial segregation is

[3] For views on both sides see Pojman (1998), Young (2016), the Student Union of SOAS campaign on Decolonizing the University at https://soasunion.org/news/article/6013/Statement-on-the-recent-Press-about-Decolonising-SOAS/, and David Cameron's claim that 'racism in the UK's leading institutions "should shame our nation"' in Shipman and Griffiths (2016).

[4] For a view on each side see John Piper, 'Why the Simple Right to Abortion is Unjust' at http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-the-simple-right-to-abortion-is-unjust, and Loretta Ross, 'Understanding Reproductive Justice' at https://www.trustblackwomen.org/our-work/what-is-reproductive-justice/9-what-is-reproductive-justice. There are also first-person accounts on both sides, from people who were nearly aborted and claim that they would have suffered a moral wrong (see Faith Noah, 'I Was Nearly Aborted' at http://lifeteen.com/blog/nearly-aborted/), and from women who were denied abortion and who claim that as an injustice (see BBC, 'Woman denied abortion in the Republic of Ireland speaks out' at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-28849058) .

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wrong' are accepted in some societies and not in others, but for ideology critique (not to mention justice) to have a chance, their truth or falsity must not depend on the culture in which they are asserted.

Once we accept that ideology critique requires theory, or access to normative claims that do not depend on a particular culture or ideology for their truth, it is then less clear who has access to such facts. It is in the nature of critique that claims are disputed: there are those who assert them and those who deny them. Haslanger's solution is to suggest 'epistemic humility: we should listen to those directly affected by the practices in question, because they are likely to have better access to morally relevant facts' (2017, p. 166). But it is not clear why this is true, or how it can be asserted without begging the question. Even if it is true, moral disagreement can occur between people who are directly affected by practices. Who has better access to morally relevant facts about affirmative action, the white man who did not obtain a place at university and blames it on unjust affirmative action, or the black man who did not obtain a place at university and blames it on unjust racism? There is no reliable way to determine who is correct from their subject-position alone. Perhaps neither of them has the best access to the morally relevant facts: perhaps we should turn to the admissions tutor who made the decision, or the statistician who can contextualize the decision in the university's general admissions figures, or the academic who can theorize about general patterns and structures of racism. To take another example, who has better access to the morally relevant facts about abortion, the woman who was denied an abortion and claims she suffered an injustice, or the adult who was nearly aborted as a child and claims she narrowly escaped injustice? Both are directly affected by the practice.

Of course, sometimes people make judgements on matters of morality or justice while clearly lacking morally relevant facts. For example, Ohio Republican Jim Buchy, who supports legislation to reduce or ban abortion, 'once admitted he had "never thought about" why women have terminations' (Fenton 2016). It seems obvious that this man does not have (and has not sought access to) vitally important morally relevant facts. But even this judgement relies on a moral or political theory. The facts of why women seek abortions are morally relevant only if abortion is, at least in part, an issue about women's

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rights and sex inequality. If abortion is only about unjust harm to the foetus, then women's motivations are not morally relevant. To take another example, the feelings and intentions of men who like to wolf-whistle are not morally relevant to the question of whether wolf-whistling is oppressive, even though those men are directly affected by the practice. But I can only make the claim that wolf-whistling men do not have superior epistemological access to the meaning of their practice via a feminist *theory* that gives a normative perspective on street harassment and its place in male supremacy.

There is no way of determining in advance of theory that some have better epistemological access to morally relevant facts merely by virtue of their subject-position. Instead, identifying the relevant subject-position is already the task of theory. This is not to say that theory can be developed without input from those who are directly affected by the practice: I agree with Haslanger that consciousness raising is a vital critical tool (Chambers and Parvin 2011). But the only way to adjudicate between competing assertions of facts as morally relevant is via a theory of the justice of practices. And if we have that then we have the basis for a moral rather than an epistemological critique of ideology.

Note that it is not a solution to this problem to say that we should listen to victims rather than perpetrators, the oppressed rather than the oppressor. Since the whole point of ideological oppression is that it is not recognized by people who are subject to it, including its victims, we cannot identify who counts as oppressor and who counts as oppressed without a theory of justice. There is no non-normative answer to the question of whether it is the black or the white university applicant who has been oppressed, or whether the foetus or the women denied an abortion, or whether the prosecuted wolf-whistler or the woman whistled at. In these examples, oppression is claimed on both sides. In other cases, such as the willing wearer of high heels, oppression is denied.

Haslanger writes convincingly about the epistemological limitations that can prevent the *dominant*, those on the *advantaged* side of oppression, from recognizing the oppression that they perpetuate. The idea that the dominant lack the tools to recognize their role in systems of oppression is currently in the cultural ascendant. It underpins the instruction to 'check your privilege'. It also informs concepts

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such as ‘mansplaining’, the slur ‘trans-exclusionary radical feminists’ or TERFs, and the critique of the All Lives Matter movement as racist. Some of these judgements are better than others,[5] but in general they share the idea that we must not be complacent in assuming that we are not perpetrators of injustice. Less in line with the Zeitgeist is the idea that people might claim to suffer oppression unjustifiably. But both are possible.

Also out of fashion is the idea that people might suffer from oppression without themselves knowing it. It is not that this idea is unfamiliar, but rather that it has been explored in terms that are no longer in vogue. False consciousness is one long-standing version of the idea. False consciousness implies that there can be an objective distinction between consciousnesses that are true and those that are false: it relies, that is, on the idea of a pre-social consciousness that the critic, and not the citizen, can access. This idea is unappealing not only because there is no such thing as a pre-social consciousness, but also because it seems to offer two unpalatable options. Either false consciousness is described as so pervasive and impermeable, as such an inevitable consequence of social situatedness, that the fact that some claim to identify and criticize it undermines its very existence, or the fact that the critic is able to exist and thus remain immune from its distorting effects suggests an aloofness, that those who do suffer from false consciousness are weak-minded, irrational dupes. On the first option the critic is impossible, on the second insufferable.

It seems clear that differently situated people have different epistemological access to practices. But it is not clear that we can say in principle or in advance which subject-positions are epistemologically superior. The key issue is not so much epistemology as *normativity*. We should be looking not for better *knowers*, but *better* knowers.

III

Sources of Value. Haslanger herself is not content with a mere epistemological critique. She writes:

[5] This is not the place for an analysis of each of these claims, but my view is that the concept of mansplaining and the critique of All Lives Matter are illuminating and politically important, whereas the critique of TERFs is neither.

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> In contexts of ideological oppression, the cultural resources are inadequate to recognize the injustice for what it is. The problem is not that the individuals who participate in the injustice, that is, who either suffer from, perform, or are complicit in it, are stupid or ignorant; even epistemic responsibility within the available cultural technē is insufficient to appreciate the wrongs in question. (Haslanger 2017, p. 160)

Her solution turns to critical theory and its embeddedness within a social movement. Epistemological critique is insufficient because it is not possible simply to describe ideological beliefs as false: 'in the social domain, shared beliefs can make themselves true' (2017, p. 150). As she puts it later in the paper, 'The point is not just that culture shapes what we *take to be value*, that is, our beliefs about value, but *what is valuable*' (2017, p. 162).

Beauty and appearance norms are an excellent example. As I have written elsewhere:

> High-heeled shoes aren't inherently, naturally sexy. On a man, even one with feminine, slender legs, the general consensus is that they look ridiculous. The distortions they produce in the male body are not seen as attractive—even though they are the same distortions that are revered in a woman. The fact that we find high heels attractive on a woman is entirely dependent on how our society constructs beauty, and this, in turn, is strongly affected by our social norms of gendered behaviour. Practices are contingent on the set of social norms (or power/knowledge regime) they support and from which they derive. (Chambers 2008, p. 29)

In other work, Haslanger uses the similar example of crop tops, imagining a discussion between a twelve-year-old girl and her parents as to whether or not crop tops are cute (Haslanger 2012, ch. 15). According to what Haslanger calls the daughter's 'milieu'—the community and beliefs of her schoolfriends—they do count as cute; according to the parents' milieu—the community and beliefs of adults with a certain outlook—they do not.

In the paper discussing this example, Haslanger considers two possible bases for critique. The first, which she ultimately rejects, is the idea that some *milieus* are superior, either epistemologically, politically or morally. This approach might say that the parents may justifiably critique the daughter because, as adults, they know more (including more about politics and morality), because their critique is based on a political analysis of the gender and clothing that the

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daughter lacks, and because their critique is based on a moral perspective on bullying and peer pressure that is absent from the daughter's analysis (Haslanger 2012, pp. 424–5).

Now, on the face of it this seems clearly sensible to me (and doubtless to parents everywhere). So what is wrong with the idea that critique is justified based on epistemological, political or moral superiority? There is what we might think of as a philosophical and a political answer to this question, and Haslanger focuses on the philosophical answer whereas my thoughts turn towards the political.

The philosophical answer looks again to the idea of epistemological superiority, and asks both how we can know that one perspective is superior to another and also whether truth conditions for practices such as fashion are necessarily relative. In other words, the truth of the question as to whether crop-tops are cute depends not just on the milieu but on differences as to which agents' views on cuteness truly do constitute the value of cuteness. As Haslanger puts it:

> [S]uppose in the seventh grade milieu there is a norm that everyone should agree with Hannah (e.g., about what's cute, dorky, fun, boring . . .). If this norm is followed, there will be a coordination of beliefs and responses that constitute social facts which can be effectively known by following the Hannah-agreement norm. However, the hope, on this quasi-objectivist approach, would be to establish conditions on epistemic (or moral) norms, for example, of universality, that downgrade milieus governed by norms like Hannah-agreement. But we must ask: what makes such conditions objective? (Haslanger 2012, p. 425)

The demand for objectivity in matters of social norms is misguided. The goal of undermining norms like Hannah-agreement should not be to approach more objective milieus. I have no sense of what it would mean for a milieu (or a social context, set of social norms, social structure, community, call it what you will) to be objective, or of why this should seem to be a good thing. There is no such thing as objective fashion, objective critieria of cuteness or beauty. The issue is that we should not agree with something merely because some authority states it, and the problem with such agreement is not epistemic (perhaps Hannah is an extremely skilled knower), but *political*.

The political answer points to the problem of inequality, power and dominance. What is at stake in asserting that one point of view is superior? How does that silence further disagreement? Even if we

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can identify the epistemologically, morally or politically superior view, how can we allow that view to prevail without engaging in further oppression? More pragmatically, *how* can the superior view (supposing there is one) overcome the morally, politically or epistemologically inferior yet dominant one? This is a particularly pressing issue in the current political climate of Trump and Brexit.

Haslanger's preferred basis for critique offers some guidance, but again its focus is philosophical rather than political. She suggests that we

> develop a notion of critique that requires more than just truth relative to the milieu of the assessor. For example, suppose the assessor's claim is a genuine critique of a speaker's only if there is some common ground (factual, epistemic, or social) between the speaker's milieu and assessors' milieus, and the assessors' claim is true relative to the common ground. To say that a critique is genuine, in this sense, is not to say that it is the final word, rather, it is to say that a response is called for. (Haslanger 2012, p. 425)

What is striking in this version of critique is Haslanger's assumption that what makes a response called for is the existence of shared assumptions, rather than, say, the need to live together or to seek compromise (what Rawls calls the circumstances of justice). She argues that if critique is based on shared assumptions then it can be transformative, for working through a critique becomes 'a matter of forming or finding a common milieu' (Haslanger 2012, p. 425). But whether a common milieu can be found depends on whether one thinks of a milieu as primarily a conceptual or ideological phenomenon, to do with the ideas, concepts and ways of thinking one has, or as an institutional or communal phenomenon, to do with one's social context and location within that context. In some cases, critique may succeed in shifting concepts but not community. Even if the daughter comes to agree with her parents' values, she cannot shift from her schoolchild milieu into their lefty adult milieu. Other times, a shared community just is not enough to overcome differences of ideological milieu, as with the unreasonable people that even Rawls is unable to assimilate.

Often, we find it easier to see what is wrong with a practice from outside of our own culture or ideology than one from inside it, even where the two practices share all salient moral features. This means that critique of other cultures can be a vitally important route to critique of one's own culture. If another culture contains a practice that

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we find abhorrent, it is illuminating to consider whether our own culture contains practices with the same features. If so, rather than abstain from all critique as the cultural relativist would have us do, we have the tools for solid critique of our own culture.[6]

IV

Agents of Change. Who are the agents of change? We might imagine a continuum of actors, ordered by size and strength. At one end stands the individual: solitary, vulnerable, noble, lauded. At the other end is the state: monolithic, awesome, power-laden, monstrous to some, benevolent to others. Between the two is culture. Close to individuals in terms of strength and reach are minority cultures: struggling against the tide, defending themselves from intrusion by the majority, but always including their own internal minorities. Closer to the state are majority cultures: sometimes merging almost seamlessly with it, other times drifting away. Majority culture spreads along the centre of the continuum and reaches everywhere: individual and state, majority and minority groups. Majority culture engulfs some individuals wholeheartedly, those who are situated firmly within it and who do not challenge its ideals, but its wispy tentacles infiltrate everyone. No one is immune.

Both Haslanger and I want to draw attention to the dimorphous inescapability of culture: its reach into individual and state, its creativity and constraint. We both want to critique those forms of political philosophy that focus attention on the ends of the continuum without adequately analysing the cultural mass in between. But while my work emphasizes the problems with focusing on the individual, 'Culture and Critique' focuses on problems with the state.

Haslanger paints a bleak picture in which the state is as often the cause of oppression as its cure. She points to the example of racial desegregation in the USA, and reminds us that legislation for equal civil rights was insufficient to overturn entrenched practices of racial inequality and oppression, many of them perpetuated by agents of the state in the form of police officers and courts. '[A]t this point in

[6] I have used this method, working from a generalized Western critique of the practice of female genital mutilation towards a critique of practices that are generally accepted in the West, such as breast implants, other forms of cosmetic surgery, including on the female genitals, and male circumcision. See Chambers (2008, MS).

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time', she concludes, 'the idea that racism is going to be dismantled by state action is no longer credible' (2017, p. 152).

I agree entirely that state action does not exhaust the possibilities for change, and I share Haslanger's scepticism that the state will dismantle racism any time soon. 'At this point in time', in particular, who could think otherwise? But it is instructive to question the scope of Haslanger's judgement of incredibility. Is the issue that state *won't* do what is needed to dismantle racism, or that it *can't*?

There are various levels of difficulty or impossibility here. Some relate to democratic and political processes. Can a political party standing on an anti-racism platform secure a democratic mandate? If it can, do the legislative processes and politics allow that party to pass a sufficiently radical legislative agenda? Once passed, does legislation come with adequate funds and provision for it to be upheld?

Other questions apply more directly to culture. Are police officers and judges adequately capturing and prosecuting offenders, or are their own cultural locations and views leading them to pursue lenience or even to facilitate lawlessness? Is the penalty of the law sufficient to deter ordinary citizens from acting illegally? Are other citizens inclined to report or tolerate the behaviour? Are victims empowered to resist? In some cases, we might even fear that state action has a counterproductive effect, if it creates backlash or if it encourages complacency.

Haslanger is undoubtedly right to suggest that state action is not sufficient to dismantle racism totally: the state does not exhaust the possibilities for change, and state intervention may not always be the best option. But the efficacy and desirability of state action will depend in large part on the particular political and historical context of any given struggle. In some cases, state action is the central focus and aim of emancipatory activism. Examples include the women's suffrage movement, the equal marriage movement, and the pro-choice movement. In Haslanger's example, the civil rights movement, she is right to note that *Brown v. Board of Education* was insufficient to combat the 'multiple factors—legal, economic, historical, cultural, psychological—relevant to explaining the phenomenon of racial segregation and the educational achievement gap in the United States' (2017, p. 152). But it does not follow that the solution does not at least include additional, more effective state action, such as a return to the court-enforced integration that ended in the late 1990s.

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Behind these practical concerns, however, lies a normative one. Haslanger directs our attention to the fact that state action can fail to end oppression because, to put it simply, the majority or the powerful don't *want* to end oppression. As she puts it, 'at the heart of these patterns is a structure of social relations that is ideologically sustained in spite of legislative, judicial and individual efforts to change it' (2017, p. 152). In other words, the citizenry, viewed as a whole, acts so as to maintain the oppression because it believes that the oppression is *right*.

The belief that oppression is right may take one of two forms. First, one could believe that oppressive acts are not, in fact, oppressive (for example, anti-abortion legislators who see women's decisions to have an abortion as frivolous or selfish, failing to understand the complex clinical, personal, social or economic reasons why women choose abortion). Second, one could believe that oppression is morally justified (for example, Trump supporters who believe that sanctions against American and immigrant Muslims are justified by the threat of terrorism). Depending on whether we conceptualize individual citizens and the citizenry in general as dupes/victims or as agents/aggressors, we might say that the citizenry is either in the grip of an oppressive ideology or is actively maintaining an oppressive ideology.

Either way, if social relations are 'ideologically sustained in spite of legislative, judicial and individual efforts', we can say that the would-be progressive state is out of sync with the ideological citizenry. The normative political question thus becomes not simply '*How* can we change things?', but also 'To what extent are we *justified* in trying to change things?' and, even more problematically in a democracy, 'To what extent may the *state* legitimately try to change things?' Plausibly the state should adapt to the views of its citizens, rather than the other way around.[7]

Resisting this conclusion, as Haslanger and I (and progressives everywhere) want to do, relies once again on a normative theory of justice, and on defending the emancipatory potential of the state. Scepticism about the emancipatory potential of the state can too easily result in a rebound towards the *individual* as the actor who is expected to emancipate herself and as the only legitimate source of emancipation. In my own work, I begin with a critique of the liberal

[7] Haslanger warns of the need to avoid 'normative overreach' (2017, p. 165).

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focus on the individual, and particularly the liberal focus on individual choice. Liberal political philosophy rests on twin foundations of liberty and equality, but ultimately places liberty before equality. Within liberalism generally, choice is used as what I call a 'normative transformer': it is something that transforms a morally bad outcome into a morally good or at least morally acceptable one. Most commonly, choice is used to normatively transform what would otherwise seem to be an unjust inequality into a just one. Inequality, with its oppressive ring, becomes mere difference.

Within liberal *political philosophy*, individuals who have chosen their own inequality are to be respected. Within liberal *societies*, individuals who have chosen their own inequality are just as likely to be blamed. In either case, there is no recourse for those who end up disadvantaged. The use of choice as a normative transformer leads to a number of fallacious conclusions. Women are to blame for the gender pay gap because they choose to prioritize children over career. Black men are to blame for their incarceration because they choose to commit crime. Muslims are to blame for prejudice against them because they choose to become terrorists. The poor are to blame for their disadvantage because they choose to live on benefits rather than to work. Women are to blame for being raped because they choose to go out at night, to drink alcohol, to wear clothes of some sort or another. The litany of victim-blaming is long.

The solution must be that individuals, state and culture all must be taken into account. Each has its role to play in maintaining structures of dominance, and each plays a vital role in resistance. But behind all resistance there must be normative principles: a political theory.

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